**Value and Virtue Theories**

**“Theory of Value”**

**Learning objectives**

Knowledge:

* Understand the definition of value: people, events and objects we call “good”
* Understand the subjective and objective characteristics of value
* Understand moral value and amoral value
* Understand intrinsic value and instrumental value

Skills:

* Critical thinking skills
* Communication skills

Values and Attitudes:

* Moral values
* Social core values
* Filial piety
* Responsibility

Important notes:

1. This learning resource is prepared for teachers of Senior Secondary Ethics and Religious Studies. Teachers are expected to make adaptation and enrichment according to the needs of their students. Moreover, after each learning activities, teachers should provide debriefing to students for their development of positive values and integrative application of generic skills.

2. The ERS curriculum is for S4-S6 SS students. This learning resource uses plain language as far as possible to explain theories of ethics, which, in some cases, are simplified to suit the learning needs of the students.

3. Cases, stories, movie plots, and classic moral dilemmas are included for the purpose of students’ reflection in the learning process. To illustrate moral dilemmas, some viewpoints in this material may seem exaggerated and critical. Teachers should always remind their students of the difference between these viewpoints and the reality in the present world. Judging the past with contemporary standard is not the intended perspective, rather, students should be guided to make contrast and holistic understanding of the relationship between these practices and their historic, cultural and social contexts.

4. The discussion questions, key points and knowledge content of the learning resource are suggestion in nature. Learning and teaching should not be limited to these suggestions. Teacher should use them flexibly for ongoing development of school-based resource according to the learning objectives of the curriculum.

**Suggested teaching period: 3 lessons**

**Teacher shall prepare:**

* Introductory Activity: The Benefits of Drinking Coffee
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (1): Theory of Value
* **Worksheet (1)**: **Classification of values**
* Case Study (1)**:** Instrumental value or intrinsic value?
* Case Study (2): The core values of Hong Kong

Teaching process:

1. Divide the students into groups and tell them to discuss “Introductory Activity: The Benefits of Drinking Coffee”

* Teachers **can guide students to understand that in our daily lives we regard people, events, objects, behaviors, and situations as good. These good people and things are values.**

**2. Teacher explains “**Knowledge Content of the Subject (1): Theory of Value”

Teacher may guide student to summarize the key points of value theory:

* The people, events or objects we call “good” carry values
* In ethics, the theory of value explores people, things, and objects that are good.
* Though everyone considers something valuable according to own preference, there are some common values that human beings commonly praise.
* Some values are purely personal preferences, while some are normative. Among those normative values, some are moral values.
* Value can be intrinsic or instrumental, depending on the context.

**3. Teachers shall invite students to complete “Worksheet (1)**: **Classification of values”, for the consolidation of their learning on intrinsic value / instrumental value, moral value / non-moral value.**

**4. Divide the students in groups of 4-5 and guide them to discuss “**Case Study (1): Instrumental value or intrinsic value?” to illustrate the difference between **intrinsic value and instrumental value.**

**5. Divide the students in groups of 4-5 and guide them to discuss “**Case Study (2): The core values of Hong Kong”. After discussion, a representative of each group shall present their answers and teacher should make a conclusion.

**Introductory Activity: The Benefits of Drinking Coffee**

Many people like coffee, but why? In the following dialogue, A and B are just finding out why they like drinking coffee. Develop the dialogue, with A continues questioning until B can no longer give a reason.

A: Do you like drinking coffee?

B: I really like it!

A: Why?

B: Because coffee is a refreshment.

A: Why do you need refreshment?

B:

A:

B:

(Fictitious dialogue)

From the answer given by B, can you identify the benefits of drinking coffee?

Students may give answers containing the following key points (other reasonable answers are also acceptable):

A: Do you like to drink coffee?

B: I really like it!

A: Why?

B: Because coffee is a refreshment.

A: Why do you need refreshment?

B: I need to refresh in order to work!

A: Why do you have to work?

B: Because work can give me satisfaction.

A: Why do you want to have satisfaction?

B: ...

Perhaps B can only answer again: “Satisfaction is satisfaction”, or “Satisfaction is what I want”, or “Satisfaction makes me feel happy”.

In B's opinion, coffee, refreshment, work, and satisfaction are all good things that are valuable, but their value lies in the ability to bring other good things. In other words, if they cannot bring other good things, they are valueless. If coffee does not refresh and is not delicious, it may be valueless. Therefore, coffee, refreshment, and work only have instrumental value. On the contrary, satisfaction or happiness is valuable not because they can lead to other things, but because of their intrinsic values.

Suggested teaching method: divide students in groups of two. Each group choose one own favorite thing or activity, and then follow the above forms of dialogue to explore the instrumental and intrinsic values involved.

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (1): Theory of Value**

In our daily life, we often give a positive account of some people, behaviours, objects or circumstances. We may say, at such time, we are ascribing value to them. In short, the people or things that we call “good” have values (and sometimes we also say they themselves are values). In ethics, the theory of value explores people, things, and objects that are good.

In discussing issues of value, philosophers put forward three questions for discussion:

(1) Is value subjective or objective?

(2) How to distinguish between moral and amoral values?

(3) How to distinguish between intrinsic value and instrumental value?

**Is value subjective or objective?**

Value subjectivists believe that values are the desired results of each person. For example, you like a pair of shoes, which you think are good and can bring you happiness. So, you desire to get them. In this way, you see the pair of shoes as valuable. The more you desire them, the larger value they have. Value subjectivists point out that things are valuable if we desire to get them or we believe they can bring us happiness. Moreover, since things that we desire have values and desires are subjective, all values are equal.

Value objectivists hold the opposite view. They think that there are things that are good in themselves, no matter we desire them or not. Examples of these objective values are: life, happiness, well-being, knowledge, freedom, love (including family love and friendship), health, honesty, etc. Even if we lose the ability to desire them, these things are good for us and valuable.

In a nutshell, even though everyone has something that they deem valuable, there are some common values that human beings commonly praise. Someone may say that they do not want friends and see friends as valueless. However, we can still say with certainty that friendship is a lofty value because according to human experience, friends can enrich and fulfill our lives.

**Moral values and amoral values**

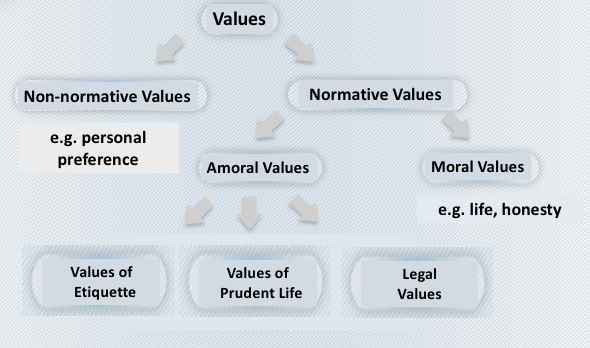
Some values are purely personal preferences and have no normative implication. That is to say, they do not have meaning of “right and wrong” or “ought and ought not”. For example, you think certain food is delicious and thus valuable. However, this is merely your personal preference, and you do not demand others to eat or like this food as you do.

As for normative values, they are concerned with good behaviour or good people. Normative values can be further divided into two types; moral and amoral.

Amoral normative values include etiquette, prudent life and legal values. Values of etiquette refers to socially accepted behaviour, such as saying “please” when we ask for help and queuing up when we wait for certain service. Values of prudent life refers to those habits or attitudes of life that benefit us. Examples are personal hygiene, diligence, caution, etc. Legal values are those considered good in law and citizens are required to comply with. All things that the law demands are examples of legal values.

All the above three kinds of amoral normative values are subject to their own historical and cultural background. Different cultures have different understandings of proper etiquette and prudent life. The same understanding can be applied on legal values. For example, in some countries, drivers are required by law to drive on the left-hand side, but in the other countries, the opposite is the case. Some laws are considered immoral when over taken by time, such as laws that supported slavery and apartheid.

Moral values are not the same. They must be universally applicable. Life, honesty, justice, freedom, love are normative values that transcend culture, time and space.



**Intrinsic values and instrumental values**

Intrinsic value refers to the built-in value of the thing itself. Things of intrinsic value are themselves good and desirous. Life, consciousness, health, happiness, well-being, knowledge, truth, wisdom, freedom, love (including family love and friendship), beauty, virtue, justice, peace and so on are usually regarded as intrinsic values. In general, religions advocate values that transcend the present world, such as salvation, nirvana, liberation, universal harmony, and so on.

Instrumental value refers to value desirably judged in terms of achievement of other ends. Things that have instrumental value can be used as a means of achieving other things that have intrinsic values, but they are not of ultimate values. For example, while many people love money and use it only to get other good thing, few see it as having intrinsic values. There are times when talent, courage, honesty, forgiveness, intelligence, obedience, cleanliness, courtesy, self-control, and responsibility are seen as instrumental values.

Some values can be both intrinsic and instrumental. For example, some people think that knowledge itself is valuable, but others think that we pursue knowledge not for knowledge itself, but for better material provisions. In the latter case, knowledge has only instrumental value. Health can also be considered as either intrinsic value or instrumental value.

We can use the following example to further illustrate the relationship between intrinsic value and instrumental value:

A: When you come across some people in need, will you help them?

B: Yes.

A: Why?

B: Because their needs are met.

A: Why do you want their needs to be met?

B: This is good, because it brings happiness to them.

A: What is good about their happiness?

B: I will be happy when I make others happy.

A: What is good about this?

B: What is good about my own happiness? Hmm ... Isn’t it good that I am happy?

If we continue to the above series of questions, we will finally reach a point where a thing is good because of its built-in value but not because of being a means to other good things.

To B, it is good and valuable to help others. It brings forth other good things. In other words, helping others loses its value if it no longer brings forth other value. If helping others bring no positive effects to both the helper and the one being helped, the act itself loses its value. Thus, helping others is an instrumental value. On the other hand, we do not seek happiness for the sake of other value. Thus, the value of happiness does not depend on its ability to bring forth other value, happiness is valuable intrinsically.

In B's view, helping people in need is good and valuable, but its value lies in its ability to bring other good things. In other words, if it cannot bring other good things, they have no value. It may be of no value if the act of offering help cannot bring happiness to those in need or to the helper. Thus, helping people in need only has instrumental value. On the contrary, happiness itself is valuable, not because it can lead to other good things, but because it has intrinsic value.

Reference:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/value-theory/>

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/value-intrinsic-extrinsic/>

**Worksheet (1)**: **Classification of values**

Refer to the following values.

(1) Which are intrinsic values, which are instrument values, which can be both?

(2) Which are moral values and what are amoral values?

(3) If you are to choose the three most important values, which three will you choose? Why?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Value** | **Intrinsic/Instrumental** | **Moral/Amoral** |
| Autonomy |  |  |
| Benevolence |  |  |
| Career |  |  |
| Care |  |  |
| Cleanliness |  |  |
| Cooperation |  |  |
| Education |  |  |
| Equality |  |  |
| Freedom |  |  |
| Friendship |  |  |
| Well-being |  |  |
| Health |  |  |
| Helping others |  |  |
| Honesty |  |  |
| Justice and fairness |  |  |
| Knowledge |  |  |
| Leisure |  |  |
| Loyalty |  |  |
| Love |  |  |
| Courtesy |  |  |
| Power |  |  |
| Responsibility |  |  |
| Respect |  |  |
| Trust |  |  |
| Truth |  |  |
| Wealth |  |  |

(Suggested answer)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Value** | Intrinsic/Instrumental | **Moral/Amoral** |
| Autonomy | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Benevolence | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Career | Instrumental | Amoral |
| Care | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Cleanliness | Instrumental | Amoral |
| Cooperation | Instrumental | Amoral |
| Education | Instrumental | Amoral |
| Equality | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Freedom | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Friendship | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Well-being | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Health | Intrinsic/Instrumental | Amoral |
| Helping others | Intrinsic/Instrumental | Moral |
| Honesty | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Justice and fairness | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Knowledge | Intrinsic/Instrumental | Amoral |
| Leisure | Instrumental | Amoral |
| Loyalty | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Love | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Courtesy | Instrumental | Amoral |
| Power | Instrumental | Amoral |
| Responsibility | Intrinsic/Instrumental | Moral |
| Respect | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Trust | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Truth | Intrinsic | Moral |
| Wealth | Instrumental | Amoral |

(Note: The suggested answers above are not rigid. The key emphasis is the explanation and justification provided.)

**Case Study (1): Instrumental value or intrinsic value?**

In most people’s views, the following four actions are all expressions of filial piety or responsibility, but do you consider them to be instrumental values or intrinsic values? Put a “✓” in the appropriate boxes and explain your reasons.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | Instrumental Value | Intrinsic Value | Reason |
| **Filial piety** | Mr Li was a rich man with two sons. He lived to 100 years old and died, leaving his possessions to his sons. The eldest son hoped he would receive the majority of the possessions, and was therefore very obedient and loyal to his father, putting his father’s wishes first in everything he did. Every evening he had dinner with his father. He spent all holidays taking his father on trips, and managing to organise celebrations for his father’s birthday. His behaviour was impeccable, and all his friends and family praised him for his loyalty to his father. Do you think his “filial piety” should be classified as an instrumental value or an intrinsic value? |  |  |  |
| Mr Chan is a car salesperson. He was taught since very young that everyone should respect and obey one’s parents. He always had to work overtime on festivals such as Chinese New Year and Christmas, and was therefore unable to spend such days with his parents. But he still insisted on eating at home with his parents every evening and spending time with his family. He believed that being able to take care of and accompany his parents was a pleasure in itself. His parents thought that he was a very good and loyal son. Do you think his “filial piety” should be classified as an instrumental value or an intrinsic value? |  |  |  |
| **Responsibility** | Mr Cheung’s work motto was “carry the burdens of the person who pays you”. Every time his boss assigned him a job, he would always throw himself selflessly into the work and complete it on time, no matter how difficult the task was. His colleagues and superiors all regarded him as a loyal employee. Do you think his sense of “responsibility” to his superiors should be classified as an instrumental value or an intrinsic value? |  |  |  |
| Mr Chiu liked to be praised by his boss. He would invariably strive to complete any job he was given ahead of time and above target. His superiors and colleagues often praised him as a responsible employee. Do you think his sense of “responsibility” should be classified as an instrumental value or an intrinsic value? |  |  |  |

(Suggested answer)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | Instrumental Value | Intrinsic Value | Reason |
| **Filial piety** | Mr Li was a rich man with two sons. He lived to 100 years old and died, leaving his possessions to his sons. The eldest son hoped he would receive the majority of the possessions, and was therefore very obedient and loyal to his father, putting his father’s wishes first in everything he did. Every evening he had dinner with his father. He spent all holidays taking his father on trips, and managing to organise celebrations for his father’s birthday. His behaviour was impeccable, and all his friends and family praised him for his loyalty to his father. Do you think his “filial piety” should be classified as an instrumental value or an intrinsic value? | ✓ |  | The eldest son regarded filial piety as a means to get the possessions, instead of an end in itself. |
| Mr Chan is a car salesperson. He was taught since very young that everyone should respect and obey one’s parents. He always had to work overtime on festivals such as Chinese New Year and Christmas, and was therefore unable to spend such days with his parents. But he still insisted on eating at home with his parents every evening and spending time with his family. He believed that being able to take care of and accompany his parents was a pleasure in itself. His parents thought that he was a very good and loyal son. Do you think his “filial piety” should be classified as an instrumental value or an intrinsic value? |  | ✓ | Mr Chan regarded filial piety as his duty. Filial piety was an end in itself, instead of a means. |
| **Responsibility** | Mr Cheung’s work motto was “carry the burdens of the person who pays you”. Every time his boss assigned him a job, he would always throw himself selflessly into the work and complete it on time, no matter how difficult the task was. His colleagues and superiors all regarded him as a loyal employee. Do you think his sense of “responsibility” to his superiors should be classified as an instrumental value or an intrinsic value? |  | ✓ | Mr Cheung responsibly completed his task, as he saw it as the responsibility of an employee. Thus, responsibility is an end to him, instead of a means. |
| Mr Chiu liked to be praised by his boss. He would invariably strive to complete any job he was given ahead of time and above target. His superiors and colleagues often praised him as a responsible employee. Do you think his sense of “responsibility” should be classified as an instrumental value or an intrinsic value? | ✓ |  | Mr Chiu regarded responsibility as a means to get the praise of his boss, instead of an end. |

**Case Study (2): The core values of Hong Kong**

On 30 October 2014, the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of The Chinese University of Hong Kong selected 11 core values which were popular in the society. The Institute conducted a telephone survey to ask citizens to report their views on these values. Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that the value is a core value.

Table 2 shows how Hong Kong people answer the question “which value is the most important” (core of the core value). The report stated that,

*“Generally speaking, not even one value scored over 50%, showing that Hong Kong people believe that the core values of Hong Kong are indeed diversified. It matches the historical and cultural background of Hong Kong: a city influenced by both Western and Chinese culture, emphasizing on diversity and inclusiveness.”*

Respondents were also requested to choose the most important one among the 11 Hong Kong’s core values. The results are shown in Table 2. According to the survey report,

*“In sum, no one of the core values represents more than half of the total. This further reflects the respondents' views that Hong Kong's core values are actually diverse rather than just a single overwhelming core value. This situation is consistent with Hong Kong’s historical and cultural background: integrating Chinese and Western cultures and emphasizing pluralism and tolerance.”*

Table 1: Do you agree that it is a core value?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Core Value | Strongly agree/ agree |
| Rule of law | 92.7% |
| Just and corruption-free | 92.3% |
| Social stability | 88.2% |
| Freedom | 88.1% |
| Peace and benevolence | 87.4% |
| Safeguarding of individual property | 86.5% |
| Fair competition | 85.2% |
| Family responsibility | 84.5% |
| Democracy | 83.2% |
| Diversity and inclusiveness | 79.8% |
| Market economy | 76.5% |

Table 2: The most important core value

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Core Value | Percentage |
| Rule of Law | 22.9% |
| Freedom | 20.8% |
| Just and corruption-free | 15.3% |
| Democracy | 11.1% |
| Social stability | 8.3% |
| Peace and benevolence | 5.5% |
| Market economy | 3.5% |
| Diversity and inclusiveness | 2.5% |
| Fair competition | 1.9% |
| Safeguarding of individual property | 1.9% |
| Family responsibility | 1.6% |

Source: “CUHK Releases Survey Findings on Views on Hong Kong’s Core Values”（30 Oct, 2014），<http://www.cpr.cuhk.edu.hk/en/press_detail.php?id=1915>; <http://www.hkiaps.cuhk.edu.hk/wd/ni/20170612-111811_1.pdf>

Questions for discussion:

* 1. In your opinion, what do the first five core values mean?
  2. Do you think they are intrinsic values or instrumental values? Please explain your reason.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Core Value | **Definition** | **Intrinsic Value /Instrumental Value** | **Reasons** |
| Rule of Law |  |  |  |
| Freedom |  |  |  |
| Just and corruption-free |  |  |  |
| Democracy |  |  |  |
| Social stability |  |  |  |

(Suggested answer)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Core Value | **Definition** | **Intrinsic value /Instrumental Value** | **Reasons** |
| Rule of Law | (To be provided by students). Eg,  Equality before the law; citizens and national security are protected by laws openly. | Intrinsic Value | It is itself a good life condition for everyone to act according to the law. |
| Instrumental Value | Protected by the law, we can pursue the life we desire. |
| Freedom | (To be provided by students) | Intrinsic Value | It is itself a good state of being if we can enjoy our rights of choice. |
| Instrumental Value | With freedom, we can pursue a better life |
| Just and corruption-free | (To be provided by students) | Intrinsic Value | The social state of fairness and corruption-free is good in itself. |
| Instrumental Value | A fair and corruption-free system allows us to exercise our own personal abilities. |
| Democracy | (To be provided by students) | Intrinsic Value | The exercise of the people's power to elect the government is itself a good element of life. |
| Instrumental Value | Democracy can allow the wishes of the people to be reflected, and society becomes more harmonious and stable. |
| Social stability | (To be provided by students) | Intrinsic Value | The stable and harmonious society is itself part of a good life. |
| Instrumental Value | Social stability increases the predictability of life, making life safer and easier to plan. |