**Value and Virtue Theories**

**“Priorities and Conflicts”**

**Learning objectives**

**Knowledge:**

* Understand Conflicts of values or virtues
* Understand the method of ranking values and virtues

**Skills:**

* Apply the method of ranking values and virtues
* Critical thinking skills
* Problem solving skills

**Values and Attitudes**

* Intrinsic values

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: 5 lessons**

**Teacher shall prepare:**

* Introductory Activity: “Bearing witness to father’s stealing”; “Return what you have borrowed”
* Knowledge Content of the Subject (1): Conflicts and priority of values
* **Worksheet (1)**: Conflict of values in decision making
* Case Study (1): Should the doctor stop transfusing blood?
* Case Study (2): Family planning policies
* Case Study (3): The Buddha Leaves His Home
* Case Study (4): Abraham’s sacrifice of Issac

Teaching process:

1. Teacher discusses with the students the two cases from “Introductory Activity”.

* **Teachers can guide students to understand that there are situations in life that lead to conflicts in our values or virtues. We then have to rank these values or virtues.**

**2. Teacher explains “**Knowledge Content of the Subject (1): Conflicts and priority of values”. Teacher may ask student to summarize the key points of conflicts and priority of values:

* There are conflicts of values in some situations that we are only allowed to choose one of the values.
* There are three types of conflict of values.
* We can rank virtues and values in three perspectives:
  + Intrinsic value first
  + Normative value first
  + Ranking by different ethical theories

**3. The teacher asks the students to complete “Worksheet (1): Value Conflicts in Choice” and to learn to** make judgment on conflicts of values **in life and to discuss whether the values involve morality.**

**4.** Teacher asks s**tudents to finish** “Case Study (1): Should the doctor stop transfusing blood?” **and to learn** to make judgment on conflicts of virtues and to make moral decision by ranking the virtues.

**5.** Teacher d**ivides students in groups of 4-5 and distributes one of the following cases to them:**

* Family planning policies
* The Buddha Leaves His Home
* Abraham’s sacrifice of Issac

**Teacher may ask students to discuss in groups. A representative of each group will then present the answer of their group. Teacher then discusses the answer with the students.**

**Introductory Activity**

**Bearing witness to father’s stealing**

A duke informed Confucius, saying, “Among us here there are those who may be styled upright in their conduct. If their father has stolen a sheep, they will bear witness to the fact.” Confucius said, “Among us, in our home town, those who are upright are different from this. The father conceals the misconduct of the son, and the son conceals the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this.” (“Zi Lu*,”Analects*)

Question for discussion:

Whose argument is more reasonable? Why?

**Return what you have borrowed**

The Greek philosopher Socrates has a discussion with the merchant Cephalus on justice. Cephalus’ point is that justice is manifested in paying one’s debts. Socrates objects to this and cites an example. A friend lent him an ax and later asked him to return it back. However, this friend is in crazed state at the moment, and the weapon will only do harm to him. Socrates believes that it is just in not returning the ax.

Reference: Plato, *Republic*

Question for discussion:

Whose argument is more reasonable? Why?

In the above story, Confucius believes that the son should not report to the authorities his father’s crime, because Confucius values filial piety very much. Filial piety is the core of Confucianism. Can we see Confucius put filial piety into practice in his life? His early life was rather difficult. His father passed away when Confucius was at the age of three. He was raised by his mother until he was seventeenth and his mother died then. Confucius hoped that his mother and father could be buried in the same place, but he did not know where his father had been buried, even after asking around for some time. He could not sleep all night, until finally he came up with an idea. He placed her mother’s coffin at the intersection of roads. He then set up a board, on which he wrote about his wish of finding out his father’s burial place so that he could buried his parents in the same grave. By doing his, he hoped he could arouse the compassion of others. After waiting for a few days, a woman told him where his father was buried. So he buried his mother in his father’s grave. From this we can see that Confucius tried hard to bury his parents in the same place and put filial piety into practice.

Reference:

饒遠，劉斯佳，新雅‧名人館－萬世師表‧孔子 (新雅文化事業有限公司，2015) 26-27。

《史记·孔子世家》司馬遷史記卷四十七·孔子世家第十七



Ma Yuan, *Confucius*, silk, 23.2 cm x 27.7 cm, Song Dynasty, Collections of the Palace Museum, Beijing.

**Knowledge Content of the Subject (1):   
Conflicts and priority of values**

**Conflicts of values**

We regard the “good” people, conducts, objects or circumstances as valuable things. However, sometimes one thing can contain multiple values, and sometimes there is a conflict of values that allows us to choose only one of them. Suppose we now have a conflict between two values and consider the following situations:

The first kind of conflict of values involves not normative values but only personal preferences. For example, you are bothering about whether you go to practice basketball or go to the movies. This is a conflict of value that does not involve moral issues. Relatively speaking, the choice to make is not a very important one.

In the second kind conflict of values, one of the values is obviously more important, especially when one of them is a moral value. For example, you plan to go to the movies. On your way, you meet someone who is injured in an accident and is waiting for help. While both seeing movies and assisting those in needs are valuable actions, the latter is a moral value and is obviously more important than the former.

The third kind of conflict of values involves two moral values and is therefore harder to deal with. For example, in the movie “Les Miserable”, the protagonist Jean Valjean steals bread for the sake of saving his hungry nephews, which leads him to imprisonment. Both life-saving and law-abiding are moral values. In the story, Jean Valjean was jailed for violating the law. However, when “respecting life” and “respecting the law” are in conflicts, which one should be given priority? It is ethically debatable.

Virtues are values related to the good qualities of people. In some cases, there will also be conflicts of virtues. For example, in the story of “bearing witness to father’s stealing” in the *Analects*, the two virtues of the son—integrity and filial piety—are in conflict. As in the story, both integrity and filial piety are the moral values/ virtues that involve right and wrong, so the case belongs to the third kind of value conflict.

**Ranking values**

As mentioned above, conflict of values (including virtues) are sometimes easy to handle, but sometimes we may find it difficult to choose among these values. Some ethicists even argue that, in some cases, regardless of how we choose, unfortunate results are inevitable. In the case of “bearing witness to father’s stealing”, if the son puts the integrity before filial piety, he will have to let his father punished by reporting his father’s offence. However, if he puts filial piety before integrity, then he will undermine the rule of law and cause the sheep owner to suffer a property loss. As each of the two rankings of values has its own good and bad results that the duke and Confucius disagree with each other on what is the right choice for the son.

Although we do not have a principle that can serve as an absolute guide for ranking values, we can still think with the following perspectives when we encounter conflict of values:

**1. Intrinsic value first**

Intrinsic values are good and desirable in themselves. In contrast, instrumental values are only means for us to obtain intrinsic values. If the two are in conflict, intrinsic values have a higher priority. For example, both money and life are values, but money is only a means for us to enrich life. If we earn money at the expense of our health or relationship, we damage the goodness of our lives. Between the two, life is more important than money.

For some religious believers, the values of religion are often the highest intrinsic values, which sometimes are more important than life. For example, some missionaries risked their lives by travelling months on ships to preach in areas with language barriers and served the people in need. Many young missionaries sacrificed their lives for faith.

**2. Normative values first**

In general, normative values take precedence over personal preference values. Taking the value of prudent living as an example, hardworking is often ranked higher than playfulness. Legal values also often overrides personal preferences.

Among normative values, moral values usually enjoy the highest priority. There are extreme cases that sometimes moral values may be ranked above legal values. For example, the revolutionaries who overthrew the corrupt monarchy obviously placed the value of their country and race above the legal value of the then Manchurian Qing government.

**3. Ways of ranking by different ethical theories**

Different ethical theories have different ways in ranking values:

* Utilitarianism is concerned with the consequences of actions. It also takes “happiness” as the ultimate intrinsic value. In other words, the value of “maximizing happiness for all affected people” overrides all other values.
* Deontology is concerned with the duty behind an action. Each duty takes rationality, human autonomy and freedom as the highest values. Kant contends that as long as we make judgements in accordance with reason, there will be no conflict between different values. Yet in practice, there are still conflict between duties (which are also values). Some deontologists agree that duties are not absolute. Thus, when we come across conflicts of duties, we can still employ rationality to rank their order. For example, you have promised your classmate to help her finishing her homework. Yet on your way to her home, you meet an unaccompanied crying child who is obviously in need of help. In front of you, there are two conflicting duties (values): (1) keeping promise and (2) assisting those in needs. After careful consideration, you may conclude that it is more important to help the child to find her parents than keeping your promise.
* Virtue theory is concerned with the character of actors themselves. It also takes their particular situation into consideration. Therefore, when we encounter the conflict of virtues, we do not have absolute answers of prioritization. We can only consider, in such a particular situation, the importance of each of the virtues and then make a judgment between them.

**Worksheet (1)**: **Conflict of values in decision making**

The following choices involve two conflicting values. Can you identify these conflicting values? Are they moral values or not?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Event | Conflicting values | Are they moral values? |
| 1. Cheng Wang has decided to go running every day to upkeep his health. Today, just before he is about to go out for running, he was invited by friends to join him in the restaurant for afternoon tea. This invitation really arouses his interest, but he also wants to keep his running program. What should he choose? |  |  |
| 1. Tin Hang ordered a product online and chose cash payment on delivery. Surprisingly, when the good arrives, the receipt shows that payment has already been settled. Tin Hang thinks, “Should I notify the company of that mistake and pay back the money? |  |  |
| 1. You and your good friend Tsz Ching are shopping in a department store. You accidentally find that, without being seen by the shop assistants, she secretly puts an accessory into her school bag. Surprisingly, a security staff discovers Tsz Ching’s shoplifting and asks you to be the witness to the police. Will you tell the police the truth? |  |  |
| 1. When Yan Ho does not know how to do his homework, he usually gets help from Wing Chun. Today, Wing Chun tells Yan Ho that he has joined the singing contest organized by the student union. Yan Ho happens to be one of the judges in the preliminary round. Wing Chun hints to Yan Ho that he shall give him higher score. Yan Ho feels that he is in a difficult position. |  |  |
| 1. During World War II, there was a young man whose brother was killed when he resisted the invasion of the Germans. He wanted to go to the battlefield to avenge the death of his brother. At the same time he also missed his mother, as he was her only hope. He was hesitant on joining the war. |  |  |

(Suggested answer)

The following choices involve two conflicting values. Can you identify these conflicting values? Are they moral values or not?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Event | Conflicting values | Are they moral values? |
| 1. Cheng Wang has decided to go running every day to upkeep his health. Today, just before he is about to go out for running, he was invited by friends to join him in the restaurant for afternoon tea. This invitation really arouses his interest, but he also wants to keep his running program. What should he choose? | * Health (running) * Enjoying food/ friendship | * no * no |
| 1. Tin Hang ordered a product online and chose cash payment on delivery. Surprisingly, when the good arrives, the receipt shows that payment has already been settled. Tin Hang thinks, “Should I notify the company of that mistake and pay back the money? | * Money * Honesty | * no * yes |
| 1. You and your good friend Tsz Ching are shopping in a department store. You accidentally find that, without being seen by the shop assistants, she secretly puts an accessory into her school bag. Surprisingly, a security staff discovers Tsz Ching’s shoplifting and asks you to be the witness to the police. Will you tell the police the truth? | * Friendship/Loyalty * Honesty | * yes * yes |
| 1. When Yan Ho does not know how to do his homework, he usually gets help from Wing Chun. Today, Wing Chun tells Yan Ho that he has joined the singing contest organized by the student union. Yan Ho happens to be one of the judges in the preliminary round. Wing Chun hints to Yan Ho that he shall give him higher score. Yan Ho feels that he is in a difficult position. | * Gratitude * Integrity/ honesty | * yes * yes |
| 1. During World War II, there was a young man whose brother was killed when he resisted the invasion of the Germans. He wanted to go to the battlefield to avenge the death of his brother. At the same time he also missed his mother, as he was her only hope. He was hesitant on joining the war. | * Justice * Family relationship /filial Piety | * yes * yes |

**Case Study (1): Should the doctor stop blood transfusion?**

A patient with acute duodenal ulcer is suffering severe blood loss, which is life-threatening. Dr Ho thinks that he must immediately arrange a blood transfusion and a surgery for this patient to stop the bleeding. However, due to religious beliefs, the patient refuses to receive blood transfusion and requests Dr Ho to treat him with other methods without blood transfusion. The patient also accepts that he will be exposed to danger, without blood transfusion.

Dr Ho is now facing a difficult decision. She will consider in detail this specific situation and the feeling and needs of the patient, before deciding whether to follow the patient's wishes.

(A fictitious case)

1. Below are a few key points that Dr Ho considers. Each of them expresses her personal virtue. Can you point out these virtues?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key points of consideration | Virtue |
| 1. “I am a doctor. I should have my own professional judgment. Of course. I should listen to the needs of my patient and understand his beliefs and feelings. However, shouldn't I maintain my judgment and perform my professional work?” |  |
| 1. “I can feel the patient's sincerity and piety in upholding his religious faith to such a point that he is willing to risk his life. I understand how difficult he feels. Frankly speaking, I can see his courage and I have a heartfelt respect and appreciation on it.” |  |
| 1. “Moreover, this patient has frankly explained to me his concerns and difficulties, as well as his worries and wishes. I can say, he trusts me very much. In this case, should I still continue to ignore his concerns and wishes, and convince him to follow our standard methods of treatment?” |  |

2. If you were Dr Ho, how would you decide?

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(Suggested answer)

1. Below are a few key points that Dr Ho considers. Each of them expresses her personal virtue. Can you point out these virtues?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key points of consideration | Virtue |
| 1. “I am a doctor. I should have my own professional judgment. Of course. I should listen to the needs of my patient and understand his beliefs and feelings. However, shouldn't I maintain my judgment and perform my professional work?” | Professionalism |
| 1. “I can feel the patient's sincerity and piety in upholding his religious faith to such a point that he is willing to risk his life. I understand how difficult he feels. Frankly speaking, I can see his courage and I have a heartfelt respect and appreciation on it.” | Empathy/ Sympathy |
| 1. “Moreover, this patient has frankly explained to me his concerns and difficulties, as well as his worries and wishes. I can say, he trusts me very much. In this case, should I still continue to ignore his concerns and wishes, and convince him to follow our standard methods of treatment?” | Trustworthiness |

2. If you were Dr Ho, how would you decide?

Answer 1: Although professionalism is an important quality of me as a doctor, empathy urges me to consider the special situation of the patient instead of treating him as a general case. His trusts in me and my understanding of his sincerity and piety also make me genuinely respect his wishes. Based on my understanding of this special situation and the feelings of my patient, I decide to follow the patient's wishes, even if it may bring some risks.

Answer 2: I understand that the patient is willing to give up blood transfusions due to his religious faith. I am also grateful for his trust in me. It is this trust and my professionalism that drive me. I still think that I should talk to the patient again to see if there is any room for him to accept blood transfusions. However, I will eventually respect the wishes of the patient.

**Case Study (2): Family planning policies**

Since the 1950s, our country has implemented various family planning policies.

“Citizens have the right to reproduction as well as the obligation to practise family planning according to law. Both husband and wife bear equal responsibility for family planning.”

Early policies encouraged people to marry late and have two children only. Since 1979, our country has enforced an one-child policy. Except for rural areas, ethnic minorities, or couples who are both single children, all couples can only have one child. The following is a speech by leader Deng Xiaoping in 1980, which explained the reasons for the implementation of the one-child policy:

From Deng Xiaoping’s speech at the CCP’s 1980 Theoretical Conference:

“If we want to make China achieve the Four Modernisations, there are at least two key characteristics that must be seen. One relates to China’s poor foundations. The second is that China has a large population and little arable land. China now has a population of over 900 million, of which 80% live in the rural area. There are both advantages and disadvantages to having so many people. In a situation where production is not yet developed enough, food, education and employment are all serious problems. We must strengthen our work on family planning, but even if the population ceases to grow after so many years, the problem of the large population will continue to exist for a certain period of time. This situation of little arable land and a large population, particularly a large rural population, cannot easily be changed. This is a characteristic which China’s modernisation and construction must take into account.”

From a speech given by Deng Xiaoping in 1986 upon meeting the Japanese prime minister:

“China’s implementation of strict population growth controls is in our own vital interests. It is a major strategic policy of China. Some people outside the country want China not to implement family planning – they want China to remain an impoverished state forever.”

In 2015, our country amended the *Population and Family Planning Law of the People's Republic of China* and implemented it in 2016. The new policy allows couples to have two children and ended the 35-year-old one-child policy. The following is a description of the two-child policy:

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*Communiqué of the Fifth Plenary Meeting of the 18th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party* (2015):

“Stimulate the balanced development of the population, persist in developing and producing basic government policies, perfect population development strategies, comprehensively implement the policy that one pair of man and wife can raise two children, and vigorously launch activities to respond to the problem of population ageing.”

(Ref: <https://chinacopyrightandmedia.wordpress.com/2015/10/29/communique-of-the-fifth-plenary-meeting-of-the-18th-central-committee-of-the-chinese-communist-party/>)

Some people who oppose family planning believe that family planning should be freely decided by families and individuals, and the government should not intervene. For example, in 2015, 50 law scholars from all over the country submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and the State Council the joint proposal of “Abolition of birth approvals and realizing the autonomy of reproduction”, which mentioned:

“The reform of the family planning system is the trend of the times... Improve the working mechanism of the family planning policy, replace the simple ideas of conflicts and either-or choices with the ideas of integration, systematicity, and coordination; fully guarantee the citizens’ right of reproduction. Family planning should be transformed from the result of state intervention to that free decisions of individual citizens. Citizens have the right to decide whether to give births to children or not and to determine the number of births, the time of birth, and the intervals between birth.”

Reference: <http://news.qq.com/a/20150322/036597.htm>

1. Supporters and opponents of family planning have different positions on the family planning policies. These positions reflect the conflicting values held by both sides. Can you point out these conflicting values? Please name a major value of each side.

* Value held by those supporting family planning: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Value held by those opposing family planning: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Which of the above values should be ranked first? Try to explain your views in the following three perspectives.

Perspective 1: Intrinsic value first

Perspective 2: Normative value first

Perspective 3: Ranking by different ethical theories:

(Suggested answer)

1. Supporters and opponents of family planning have different positions on the family planning policies. These positions reflect the conflicting values held by both sides. Can you point out these conflicting values? Please name a major value of each side.

* Value held by those supporting family planning: collected interests/ living standard of citizens/ state development
* Value held by those opposing family planning: Individual rights/ Individual freedom

1. Which of the above values should be ranked first? Try to explain your views from the following three directions.

**Perspective 1: Intrinsic value first**

Answer 1: “Individual right” is an intrinsic value and one of the important elements of a happy life. The maintenance of “collective interest” is of course a good thing if it can improve the quality of life of individuals. However, it is only a means for individuals to obtain a better life. It is only an instrumental value. Therefore, individual rights have priority over collective interests.

Answer 2: “Collective interest” is an intrinsic value because collective interest is higher than personal interest. Therefore, each individual should aim at maintaining collective interests. “Individual right” is only an instrumental value and is a means for individuals to maintain collective interests. Therefore, collective interests have priority over individual rights.

**Perspective 2: Normative value first**

Answer 1: In the modern world, “individual right” is a moral value that most people agree with. Individualists advocate that individuals have priority over the collective and the collective exists merely to assist individuals in getting happiness. Therefore, it is the right conduct to maintain and allow individuals to exercise their rights.

Answer 2: In general, most countries have constitutions or laws to protect “collective interests.” Therefore, collective interest is a normative value. However, whether collective interest is a moral value is debatable. Collectivists believe that collective interests should have priority over individual interests. Anything that is beneficial to the collective is right; otherwise, it is wrong. Therefore, “collective interest” is a moral value.

**Perspective 3: Ranking by different ethical theories:**

Answer 1: According to utilitarianism, anything that maximizes the happiness of affected people is moral. The restriction of the reproductive rights of a limited number of people can lead to the greater happiness of the whole nation because of the development of the country. If the latter's happiness is greater than the former’s pain, the “collective interests” have priority over “personal rights”.

Answer 2: According to Kantian deontology, without the consent of the people involved, it is immoral to regard them as means rather than ends. It is immoral to advocate the “collective interest” because this violates individual wishes. It takes individual reproduction as a means to achieve national development. On the contrary, it is moral to respect individual rights and allow individuals to freely choose or abandon reproduction.

**Case Study (3): The Buddha Leaves His Home**

**Yasodharā and Siddhārtha leave home**

After Prince Siddhārtha married at age 19, he lived in the palace for another ten years. He began to think deeply about the physical world, and his inquiries led him to become aware of the illusions and suffering of life, and issues such as the plight of the weak at the mercy of the strong, the selfishness and conflicts between people, and each person’s aging, sickness and death. He felt that if he did not personally leave home to cultivate himself, he would not be able achieve his objective of helping people to depart from suffering and obtain happiness.

At this time, his wife Yasodharā was already pregnant with his child, and was about to give birth. The prince waited until soon after she gave birth, before leaving in the middle of the night, fleeing the city, determined to cultivate himself.

For the court at Kapilavastu, this was an earth-shattering event. When the prince’s driver returned to the palace with the prince’s empty carriage in tow, he reported to the king that the prince had shaved his head, put on common clothes and left his home. When Yasodharā, Siddhārtha’s wife, heard the news, she was so stricken with grief that she nearly went mad. She rebuked the driver viciously, saying that he should not have taken the prince out into the forest without telling her. Then she cursed the prince’s horse, saying it should not have secretly carried her husband out of the palace without a sound. Yasodharā then laid down on the ground and wailed for a while, before pouring out her feelings, thoughts and opinions on the prince’s departure:

“Oh, my husband! I have done my best to do all that a wife should do. Why did you still abandon me and leave without even saying a word? I have to follow the man I marry, however he may be. Oh, my husband! When the kings of the past went into the mountains to cultivate themselves, they took their wives with them. Those kings did not find their path to enlightenment obstructed by their wives! My husband, some people shave their heads together with their wives. They leave home to cultivate themselves, living an ascetic life and giving their best horses, jewels and wealth to charity, facing the future and obtaining enlightenment and karmic rewards together. Why are you so mean that you suddenly abandon me and leave alone to lead a religious life? Can it be that you hope to practice the ascetic life to thirty-third heaven, cultivating yourself so that you can experience the joy of living together with Lakshmi, the Goddess of Heaven?”

Yasodharā was a chaste, determined and an understanding woman. In fact, Siddhārtha had married her precisely because she was not the kind of woman whom he needed to worry about, and he had then secretly left her.

Once Yasodharā had vented her frustrations, the shock of the sudden news dissipated, and in a rational state, she made this vow:

“From this day forward, until I see the prince again, I will never again sleep on my old bed. I will not bathe with scented water, bejewel myself, beautify my body, put on makeup or wear beautiful clothes; I will not use precious stones, perfume, scented oils, hair adornments or necklaces. I will give up tasteful flavours, and will not eat delicious foods or alcoholic drinks. I will not arrange or decorate my hair. Although my body will still live in the palace, I also want to live an ascetic life as in the forests.” From this time, Siddhārtha practiced asceticism in the mountains for six years, and Yasodharā did the same in the palace.

Adapted from Ven Sheng Yan, *Stories of the Sages*

The decision of Prince Siddhartha to leave home to for spiritual pursuit involves conflicts of values. His decision to leave home shows that he has chosen some values while giving up some other values.

1. Can you identify the values? Write down a major value for each of the followings.

• Value chosen by Prince Siddhārtha: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

• Value given up by Prince Siddhārtha: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you agree with Prince Siddhartha's decision? Try to explain your views in the following three perspectives.

Perspective 1: Intrinsic value first

Perspective 2: Normative value first

Perspective 3: Ranking by different ethical theories:

Before Śākyamuni became a Buddha and liberated, he experienced many hardships and went through a lot of spiritual practices. However, only at the age of 29 when he witnessed old age, illness and death for the first time. Shakyamuni was the prince of Kapilavastu. He was protected since his birth and enjoyed his wealth and prosperity in the palace. It was a trip he took ten years after getting married that made him think of renouncing the world. He met in turn an elderly who was in bad physical conditions at the east gate of the city, a seriously ill person at the south gate, and the dead person lying at west gate. He was very puzzled about these sights that he had never been seen before. He then learned from his guards that old age, sickness, and death were life stages that everyone has to go through. This made him perplexed and upset. He began to search hardly for the way that can get people out of suffering. In the end, he met at the north gate a monk, whose face was full of calmness and ease. He then decided to renounce his profane life and pursue the path of liberation.

Reference:

http://www.buddhismmiufa.org.hk/buddhism/people/buddha1.htm

Nivedita, Sister, Coomaraswamy, Ananda Kentish, Myths of the Hindus & Buddhists (London Harrap, 1914), 264.



The moment when Śākyamuni left his palace.

“Departure of Prince Siddhartha” by Abanindranath Tagore, found in *Myths of the Hindus & Buddhists*

(Suggested answer)

1. Can you identify the values? Write down a major value for each of the followings.

* Value chosen by Prince Siddhārtha: Searching for liberation/ searching for the truth
* Value given up by Prince Siddhārtha: Loving one’s family/ responsibility

1. Do you agree with Prince Siddhartha's decision? Try to explain your views in the following three perspectives.

**Perspective 1: Intrinsic value first**

Answer 1: “Searching for liberation” is an intrinsic value. The ultimate goal of life is to be free from the state of suffering and attaining happiness. The value of other things is nothing more than helping people find and practice liberation. Because other things and activities actually causes suffering, no matter how beautiful they appear to be. Relatively speaking, even “loving one’s family” is only an instrumental value. It only establishes a good relationship for us and supports us in our search for liberation. Therefore, we cannot give up seeking for liberation in order to protect our family.

Answer 2: “Happiness” is the only intrinsic value. “Searching for liberation “ and “Loving one’s family” are just instrumental values. If we search for the way of liberation by destroying family relationships and causing our family to suffer, we will only reduce happiness and the loss outweighs the gain.

**Perspective 2: Normative value first**

Answer: “Searching for liberation” contains the search for truth and happiness and is a moral value itself. “Loving one’s family” so as to protect them from harm is a universal moral value. Both can enjoy the same priority.

**Perspective 3: Ranking by different ethical theories:**

Answer 1: According to utilitarianism, Prince Siddhartha left home for spiritual pursuit. While this action caused his family to suffer (and possibly short-lived), it might lead numerous living beings (including the family of Prince Siddhartha) to great happiness. Therefore, Prince Siddhartha’s action of leaving home for searching liberation is a moral act.

Answer 2: Virtue theory will take into consideration Prince Siddhārtha’s inner qualities and the specific context he was in. His search for liberation showed that he possesses the virtues of wisdom and bravery. In the past, he had always loved his family and showed his virtue of care. He was awakened to see the illusion and pain of life, and also felt the suffering of all beings. This showed his compassion. In this particular situation, he chose to search for the truth and the way to assist all beings to liberate themselves. This choice was based on his own personal qualities and was an appropriate decision.

**Case Study (4): Abraham’s Sacrifice of Issac**

**Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac**

God wanted to test Abraham, and so he called to him, “Abraham.” Abraham answered, “I am here.” God said, “Bring your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and sacrifice him to me on the mountaintop I have shown you.”

Thus, Abraham woke up early in the morning, and taking with him a donkey, two servants, his son Isaac, and chopped firewood for sacrificial use, he set out for the place that God had indicated to him. They travelled for three days until Abraham lifted his head and saw the place in the distance. Abraham said to his servants, “Wait here with the donkey, and I will return here after my son and I have made the sacrifices.” Abraham gave the firewood to his son Isaac to carry, and carried the fire and the knife himself. Thus, the two climbed the mountain together.

Isaac said to Abraham, “Look, father. There is firewood, a knife and fire, but where is the lamb for burnt offering?” Abraham replied, “My beloved son, God has already prepared the lamb for the sacrifice”. The two continued to climb the mountain together, until they reached the place that God had indicated. Abraham then set up an altar, laid the firewood, bound up his son Isaac and placed him on the firewood of the altar. Abraham then took the knife and prepared to kill his son as a sacrifice.

Suddenly, an angel called to him from heaven. “Abraham. You would never harm Isaac, and so now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” Abraham looked up to his surprise, saw a ram with its horns caught in a thicket. He then took the ram and offered it in place of his son.

The decision of Abraham to sacrifice Issac involves conflicts of values. His decision to sacrifice his son shows that he has chosen some values while giving up some others.

1. Can you identify the values? Write down a major value for each of the following;

* Value chosen by Abraham: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Value given up by Abraham: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you agree with Abraham’s decision? Try to explain your views in the following three perspectives.

Perspective 1: Intrinsic value first

Perspective 2: Normative value first

Perspective 3: Ranking by different ethical theories:

(Suggested answer)

1. Can you identify the values? Write down a major value for each of the followings;

* Value chosen by Abraham: \_ Obeying God’s will/ Faith in God
* Value given up by Abraham: Treasuring life/ No harming of life/ Protecting one’s family member

1. Do you agree with Abraham’s decision? Try to explain your views in the following three perspectives.

**Perspective 1: Intrinsic value first**

Answer 1: “Treasuring life” is an intrinsic value because life itself is sacred and cannot be taken away by others. Even religious beliefs must distinguish between right and wrong and stop superstition. A true religion of love does not encourage people to blindly take away other people’s lives. “Obeying God’s will” aims to help people understand God’s intention to love the world and make people live better. It has only an instrumental value.

Answer 2: For Abraham who believes in God, “Obeying God’s will” is an intrinsic value. In the eyes of believers of God, keeping a proper relationship with God is one of the purposes of life, and the obedience to God's will is one of the essences of the God-human relationship. In contrast, life and death are God's arrangements and cannot be determined by humans. “Treasuring life” aims to help people to live. It allows them to live together peacefully and have the opportunity to establish relationship with God. It itself is only an instrumental value.

**Perspective 2: Normative value first**

Answer: “Treasuring life” is universal moral value. As for the religious believers, “obeying God’s will is also a moral value that involves right and wrong. Some religious believers will see “obeying God's will” as more important than “treasuring life.” However, in most modern societies, “treasuring life” has priority over “obeying God's will.” Killing other people out of religious beliefs is a violation of law and morality.

**Perspective 3: Ranking by different ethical theories:**

Answer 1: Abraham decided to kill his son because of his obedience to God's will. According to utilitarianism, if this decision allows his people and future generations to establish a better religious belief and thus gain greater happiness, his action is moral.

Answer 2: Abraham decided to kill his son because of his obedience to God's will. According to Kantian deontology, he took his son as a means rather than an end without the consent of his son. In contrast, if Abraham decided to cherish the life of his son, this decision would not violate the the formula of humanity or the formula of universal law and would therefore be moral. Of the two values, only treasuring life is a rational duty.