Ethics and Human Values

Human values

Human values have been employed in so distinctively different ways in human discourse. It is often said that a person has a value or an object has a value.

Value is "a concept explicit of implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristics of a group of those desirable traits which influence the selection from available modes and ends of action."

value is an abstract term which is commonly regarded as an economic conception. In the words of John Dewey, "Value means primarily, to price, to esteem, to appraise, to estimate. It means the act of cherishing something holding it clear and also, the act of passing judgement upon the nature and amount of its value as compared with something else,"

According to Rokeach, "Value is an enduring belief, a specific mode of conduct or an end state of existence, along a continuum of relative importance."

Values are part and parcel of philosophy. Hence, aims of education are naturally concerned with values. Ail education is, in fact, very naturally value-oriented. Each educational goal, whether originating in a person, a family, a community, a school or an educational system, is believed to be good. 'Good' is intended to mean here 'avoidance of bad'

The guiding social aims and beliefs which are regarded as the important aspects of a culture, then, the different aspects of culture are also 'valued' by the people; and the ideas lying behind which they think worthwhile, are called as VALUES! A value is a preference as well as conception of the preferable. According to Kluckohn a value is a conception of the desirable and not something "merely desired". Values are defined as something which are desirable and worthy of esteem for their own sake. Human values are defined as those values which help man to live in harmony with the world. Values that may be included in the general definition of human values are love, brotherhood, respect for others — including plants and animals — honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, non-violence, gratitude, tolerance, a sense of responsibility, cooperation, self-reliance, secularism and internationalism.

Nature of Values

- Values are not feelings, but they are concepts.
- Values are express feelings but they are more than feelings.
- Values exist in the mind, and, are independent of Public affirmation.
- Values are absolute but they are dimensional. That is, values are a criteria for judging the degree of goodness of badness, Tightness or wrongness.
- Values are concepts heavily weighted with emotions and influence the child's selection from variable modes, means and ends of action.
- alues are primarily, ethical, social and subjective. Therefore, they are strong dispositions of human behaviour than concepts with less heavy emotional weightage.
- Values are based on respect for human dignity. They assume that personal integrity is the nucleus around which ethical community and global stewardship resolve.
- Values are the very essence of human life.
- Values are essential for a fair and equitable community which reflects our respect as well as responsibility for the global environment.
- Values are cross-cultural and are essential for the development of community and global citizenship.
- Values are that in which people are interested.
- Values are the things of worship.
- Value is the product of feeling, set and action.

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Basic human values and behavior

Value activation : Values affect behavior only if they are activated. Activation may or may not entail conscious thought about a value. Much information processing occurs outside of awareness. The more accessible a value, i.e., the more easily it comes to mind, the more likely it will be activated. Because more important values are more accessible, they relate more to behavior.

Values as a source of motivation: People's values, like their needs, induce valences on possible actions. That is, actions become more attractive, more valued subjectively, to the extent that they promote attainment of valued goals. People who value stimulation would likely be attracted to a challenging job offer whereas those who value security might find the same offer threatening and unattractive. High-priority values are central to the self-concept. Sensing an opportunity to attain them sets off an automatic, positive, affective response to actions that will serve them. Sensing a threat to value attainment sets off a negative affective response. This often occurs without our consciously weighing alternative actions and their consequences.

Influence of values on attention, perception, and interpretation in situations: High priority values are chronic goals that guide people to seek out and attend to value-relevant aspects of a situation. One woman may attend to the opportunities a job offers for self-direction, another to the constraints it imposes on her social life. Each defines the situation in light of her own important values. Each interpretation suggests that a different line of action is desirable. Value priorities also influence the weight people give to each value issue. Even if both women recognize the same value-relevant opportunities and constraints, the weight they give them will differ depending on their value priorities.

Influence of values on the planning of action: More important goals induce a stronger motivation to plan thoroughly . The higher the priority given to a value, the more likely people will form action plans that can lead to its expression in behavior. Planning focuses people on the pros of desired actions rather than the cons. It enhances their belief in their ability to reach the valued goal and increases persistence in the face of obstacles and distractions. By promoting planning, value importance increases value-consistent behavior.

Lesson from lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators.

Rabindranath Tagore

The centre of Tagore's philosophy was man of god. Even his concept of God was influenced by the humanism inherent in his outlook. The supreme reality thus according to Tagore, essentially human and could be realised only through love of man. Love of God was thus translated into love of human. Tagore in fact sought the origin of spiritual aspirations and the concept of god in the spirit of the unity expressed by the primitive man. In a discussion with Einstein, Tagore said, if there is any truth absolutely unrelated to humanity then for us it is absolutely non-existing. Tagore thus firmly believed that truth could be realised only in human society.

Politically Tagore believed that each nation and individual must have certain rights and through those rights he should be in a position to 'his personality. At the same time he stressed people should have power and strength enough to realise their rights as without that strength it was impossible to retain rights even if extended by the rulers. He also stood for the individuals saying that States existed for the individual and its activities should aim at giving maximum freedom for

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attaining that liberty. He couldn't reconcile himself with the then prevailing trend of british rule which was impersonal in character and which denied freedom, spiritual, economic and political, to the vast majority of the Indians. According to him freedom could be possible by adopting the policy of decentralisation of authority and giving, more powers to local self-government institutions.

Socially, Tagore believed that Indian society has very much degenerated mostly because of the policy of our social rulers who didn't care to preserve our social institutions and allowed them to degenerate. He felt that social and political institutions should go side by side. He had faith in social solidarity and belief in ancient Indian culture and civilization. According to him political life was only a specialised aspect of social life and both could not be separated from each other. He quoted from Indian history that India always represented the synthesis of various philosophies and was very much broad-based. Therefore he believed that constructive efforts should be made to revive our ancient Indian culture.

He was educationally a revolutionary and strongly believed that there should be a system of education suited to India. It should be the system in which the cultures of east and the west should unite and where there should be a platform for understanding each other. In the words of G. Ramchandran, "Gurudev never accepted that the object of education was simply the accumulation of knowledge. He unhesitatingly proclaimed that education should give alround human personality in which the physical, the intellectual, the aesthetic and spiritual growth would be harmonised into one integral process. He, therefore, emphasised freedom and joy as of basic importance in the education of boys and girls. This meant elimination of physical punishment, examination and therefore of fear and everything humiliating restriction from Shanti Niketan system rather pattern of education".

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was one of the very few people who impressed an idea upon a historical epoch. That idea was nonviolence. Gandhi's creed of non-violence insisted that people struggle for their rights should never violate their basic obligation to respect life.

Gandhi was both religious and open-minded, and saw all religions as paths to reach the same goal. He was inspired by the teachings of Jesus, in particular the emphasis on love for everyone, even one's enemies, and the need to strive for justice. He also took from Hinduism the importance of action in one's life, without concern for success.

Gandhi's God was an immanent and his general philosophy of Hinduism becomes an ethic of political action. Gandhi's approach to reality is religious rather than philosophical. He approached reality through non-violence. Non-violence is an integral part of every religion. He says that: "Non-violence is in Hinduism, it is in Christianity as well as in Islam. If non-violence disappears, Hindu Dharma disappears. Islam does not forbid its followers from following nonviolence as a policy.

After having studied the Bhagavad-Gita against the background of Indian culture and tradition, he has come to the conclusion that the central teaching of the Gītā is to follow truth and non-violence. When there is no desire for truth, there is no temptation for untruth of violence but it maybe freely admitted that the Gita was not written to establish non-violence. The central teaching of the Gita is not violence but nonviolence. Violence is impossible without anger, without attachment, without hatred, and the Gita strives to carry us to the state beyond sattva, rajas and tamas, a state that excludes anger, hatred, etc., to one who reads the spirit of Gita, it teaches the secret of non-violence, the secret of realizing the self through the physical body.

Gandhi was not a visionary but he claimed to be a practical idealist. He was a man of action. It was the idealist that made him function as a practical man. He was also an irrepressible optimist. His optimism was based on the belief that man is endowed with infinite possibilities of

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development. His belief in the law as the ideal is unquestionable. It matters whether individuals fall short of the ideal. Though he was aware of the reality, his striving was always to reach the idea.

It is a means of focusing his attention to the ultimate goal. He has to tread the right path without digression. This is the yardstick by which man's progress is measured. Gandhi's philosophy was the direct result of human relations and it was in the sphere of human interaction that his plan of action took concrete shape. His approach was liberal and human. The world is there for all practical purposes. It is the field of greatest activity. No turning ones back to, or running away from, the world is Gandhi's attitude. According to him:

"The world offers problems of man and he is made to solve them. This is what Gandhi thinks about man and the world. Thus, the world is an arena where man has to fight his battle for the conquest of life. The world is an active field. Man cannot remain inactive or static in it. His activity can be progressive as he is a progressive being pushed up by Nature which is never at a stand-still."

Gandhi has faith in the fallible man who can improve his condition by cultivating a perfectly innocent heart incapable of evil. Thus, the fallible man, being a hindrance to his own self-development, can be corrected to follow the path of progress in the right spirit. It can only happen through life-education. Gandhi observes that: "It is not literacy or learning which makes a man but education for real life."

Aristotle

Aristotle is one of the greatest thinkers in the history of western science and philosophy, making contributions to logic, metaphysics, mathematics, physics, biology, botany, ethics, politics, agriculture, medicine, dance and theatre. He was a student of Plato who in turn studied under Socrates. Although we do not actually possess any of Aristotle's own writings intended for publication, we have volumes of the lecture notes he delivered for his students; through these Aristotle was to exercise his profound influence through the ages. Indeed, the medieval outlook is sometimes considered to be the "Aristotelian worldview" and St. Thomas Aquinas simply refers to Aristotle as "The Philosopher" as though there were no other.

One of Aristotle's most influential works is the Nicomachean Ethics, where he presents a theory of happiness that is still relevant today, over 2,300 years later. The key question Aristotle seeks to answer in these lectures is "What is the ultimate purpose of human existence?" What is that end or goal for which we should direct all of our activities? Everywhere we see people seeking pleasure, wealth, and a good reputation. But while each of these has some value, none of them can occupy the place of the chief good for which humanity should aim. To be an ultimate end, an act must be self-sufficient and final, "that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else" (Nicomachean Ethics), and it must be attainable by man. Aristotle claims that nearly everyone would agree that happiness is the end which meets all these requirements. It is easy enough to see that we desire money, pleasure, and honor only because we believe that these goods will make us happy. It seems that all other goods are a means towards obtaining happiness, while happiness is always an end in itself.

According to Aristotle, happiness consists in achieving, through the course of a whole lifetime, all the goods — health, wealth, knowledge, friends, etc. — that lead to the perfection of human nature and to the enrichment of human life. This requires us to make choices, some of which may be very difficult. Often the lesser good promises immediate pleasure and is more tempting, while the greater good is painful and requires some sort of sacrifice. For example, it may be easier and more enjoyable to spend the night watching television, but you know that you will be better off if you spend it researching for your term paper. Developing a good character requires a strong effort of will to do the right thing, even in difficult situations.

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Another example is the taking of drugs, which is becoming more and more of a problem in our society today. For a fairly small price, one can immediately take one's mind off of one's troubles and experience deep euphoria by popping an oxycontin pill or snorting some cocaine. Yet, inevitably, this short-term pleasure will lead to longer term pain. A few hours later you may feel miserable and so need to take the drug again, which leads to a never-ending spiral of need and relief. Addiction inevitably drains your funds and provides a burden to your friends and family. All of those virtues — generosity, temperance, friendship, courage, etc. — that make up the good life appear to be conspicuously absent in a life of drug use.

Confucius

Confucius lived during the Spring and Autumn period (777 BC to 476 BC) of the Eastern or Later Zhou Dynasty (770 BC - 256 BC). It was a time in China's history when the great Zhou dynasty had broken down and the country was divided among rival factions. Confucius traveled from State to State to teach what he believed to be the best approach to government and civilization.

Wherever he went, he sought positions in government as an advisor or administrator, but only briefly held a few such posts. While he attracted a large number of students and followers, his views and advice were not popular among the kings nor were they considered practical. A number of his students were able to make successful careers in government; perhaps they were more flexible or more politic.

The writings of Confucius would seem to appeal to a feudal lord. Confucius taught that the subordinate owed obedience and honor to his superior. This began in the home where the father was held to be the absolute ruler. The family was to follow him in all decisions and look to him for guidance and wisdom. This principle, filial piety, was then applied to the organization of civilization and government. The individual household owed allegiance and obedience to the local ruler who in turn honored and obeyed those above him.

Confucius relished the idea of ceremony and promoted it as a means to serve as a visual and behavioral reminder of rank. The external signs or rituals of society were to regulate both day to day exchanges as well as the ceremonies of State. Rank was dignified by rituals as well as privilege. Each rank would have specific roles in religious and political ceremonies and would be limited to certain ceremonies they could conduct. Included in the idea of ceremony were the clothes that you were to wear, the insignias on the clothing or your carriage, the style of hat worn on special occasions, where you could and could not walk, and even the colors you were allowed to use in clothing and decoration. Only the Emperor was to use and wear certain colors of gold, crimson, and purple.

One would think that rulers would embrace such a militaristic organization of the population. However, Confucius also taught that rulers must be responsible to their subordinates. They earned their privilege through promoting the welfare of the populace. When a father or a ruler betrayed that trust, the children or the subjects had the right and duty to disobey, to overthrow the ruler. At heart he was a humanist. When Confucius did manage to secure a position in court in one of the kingdoms, he didn't last long. The kingdoms were preoccupied with war. Resources which Confucius thought should be spent on benevolence were channeled into either defense of territory or the acquisition of new territories.

Confucius seldom stayed in a place for a long time. Either the kings and dukes didn't have much patience with the idea of tempering their power and he was quickly dismissed or he would leave in disgust when prescribed rituals were violated. He despaired when he would witness minor nobles engage in the rituals of kings. He felt insulted when the proper courtesies due his rank were abridged or forgotten altogether. He left disciples and students behind who had been exposed to a radical form of thought. Perhaps, in part. because he traveled so extensively, Confucian thought spread widely following his death. His students carried it to all corners of China. It influenced

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