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# 价值论与 伦理学研究

A X I O L O G Y   A N D   E T H I C S

中国社会科学出版社

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## 目 录

价值二分与价值母体 .....	G. John M. Abbarno ( 1 )
人类的善：情感和价值 .....	John Bryant ( 12 )
价值概念与同形异义词问题 .....	Hortensia Cuéllar ( 19 )
基因革命及其伦理冲突 .....	Karen Gloy ( 25 )
全球化与境遇伦理学 .....	Manjulika Ghosh ( 36 )
社会事实与三种价值类型之间的密切关系 .....	Gong Qun ( 41 )
功利友谊 .....	James O. Grunebaum ( 59 )
关注人类生存方式：国际价值探讨运动展望 .....	Jiang Chang ( 69 )
对一种新商业环境的价值阐明 .....	Brent Johnson ( 77 )
环境伦理学与政策 .....	Workineh Kelbessa ( 99 )
关于可持续发展的争论 .....	Minoru Kitamura ( 126 )
全球化进程中的价值冲突与价值选择 .....	Ouyang, Kang ( 132 )
公共场合的私人价值 .....	Thomas Magnell ( 140 )
全球化与人的价值：挑战 .....	David E. Schrader ( 148 )
功利主义与经济分析 .....	C. L. Sheng ( 155 )
面向世界问题的共同责任 .....	Corazon T. Toralba ( 176 )
当代中国价值论研究的几个问题 .....	马俊峰 ( 194 )
理论价值哲学的困境与实践价值哲学的生机 .....	王玉樑 ( 200 )
关于人文社会科学评价问题的思考 .....	刘大椿 ( 209 )
生态伦理学的价值观 .....	刘湘溶 ( 215 )
价值与人 .....	孙伟平 ( 223 )
呼唤美德伦理学 .....	孙君恒 ( 233 )
奴性批判录 .....	许全兴 ( 243 )
价值与文化界说 .....	何 萍 ( 267 )

## 2 价值论与伦理学研究 (2008 年卷)

价值与文化界说 .....	李德顺 (275)
从“无之以为用”到“无用之用乃为大用” .....	吴根友 (279)
民众评价活动论纲 .....	陈新汉 (288)
墨家“兼相爱、交相利”伦理原则的现代价值 .....	陈道德 (300)
科学的价值实现与科学的人文化	
——略论科学的价值实现途径问题 .....	杨耀坤 (307)
简论中国传统哲学的伦理价值 .....	罗 炽 (321)
《论语》关于“学”的哲学伦理学 .....	周海春 (324)
对于价值的形而上学根源的分析 .....	郝长墀 (331)
以人为本的价值审视 .....	唐志龙 (348)
简论道德价值 .....	唐凯麟 (354)
科学规范的内涵、类别、功能、结构和形式 .....	徐梦秋 (363)
现代性与认同问题的思考 .....	韩 震 (371)
论人权价值判断标准的普遍性 .....	曾丽洁 (376)
宗教价值论 .....	赖永海 (383)
人文精神与知识分子的使命 .....	熊在高 (391)
试论康德前近代西方伦理学的认识论倾向 .....	戴茂堂 (402)
第二届国际价值哲学大会闭幕辞 .....	托马斯·麦格内尔 (410)

## CONTENTS

Value Dichotomy and the Value Matrix .....	G. John M. Abbarno ( 1 )
The Human Good: Feelings and Value .....	John Bryant ( 12 )
The Notion of Value and the Problem of Homonymy .....	Hortensia Cuéllar ( 19 )
The Gene Revolution and Its Ethical Controversy .....	Karen Gloy ( 25 )
Globalisation and Situation Ethics .....	Manjulika Ghosh ( 36 )
On Intimate Relation Between Social Fact and Three Types of Values .....	Gong Qun ( 41 )
Utility Friendship .....	James O. Grunebaum ( 59 )
Focusing on Human Way of Existence; A Prospect for International Movement of Value Inquiry .....	Jiang Chang ( 69 )
Value Clarity for a New Commercial Environment .....	Brent Johnson ( 77 )
Environmental Ethics and Policy .....	Workineh Kelbessa ( 99 )
Controversies about Sustainable Developmnet .....	Minoru Kitamura ( 126 )
On the Values Choice of Constructive Postmodernism and its Enlightens .....	Ouyang, Kang ( 132 )
Private Values in a Public Arena .....	Thomas Magnell ( 140 )
Globalization and Human Values; Challenges .....	David E. Schrader ( 148 )
On Utilitarianism and Economic Analysis .....	C. L. Sheng ( 155 )
Solidarity in Facing World Problems .....	Corazon T. Toralba ( 176 )
Some Questions about Axiological Research of Contemporary China .....	Ma Junfeng ( 194 )
The Straits of Theoretical Philosophy and Vitality of Practical Philosophy of Value .....	Wang Yuliang ( 200 )
Reflections on Valuation Question of Humanized and	

#### 4 价值论与伦理学研究 (2008 年卷)

Social Sciences .....	Liu Dachun (209)
On the Value Outlook of Ecological Ethics .....	Liu Xiangrong (215)
Value and Persons .....	Sun Weiping (223)
Calling Ethics of Virtue .....	Sun Junheng (233)
Critique of Slavishness .....	Xu Quanzin (243)
Definitions on Value and Culture .....	He Ping (267)
On the Value Outlook Taking Persons as Foundation .....	Li Deshun (275)
From "Nothing can be useful" to "Thing that nothing be useful can be the most useful" .....	Wu Genyou (279)
On the Masses Evaluating Activities .....	Chen Xinhua (288)
The Modern Significance of Mohist Ethical Principle that "Loving Each Other, Benefiting Each Other" .....	Chen Daode (300)
Realization in Value of Science and Humanization of Science .....	Yang Yaokun (307)
On Ethical Value of Chinese Traditional Philosophy .....	Luo Chi (321)
Philosophical Ethics about "Learn" in Lun Yu .....	Zhou Haichun (324)
An Analysis of the Metaphysical Origin of Value .....	Hao Changchi (331)
An Examination of Value on Taking persons as Foundation .....	Tang Zhilong (348)
On ethical value .....	Tang kai - lin (354)
The Intention, Classification, function, Structure and Form of Scientific Norms .....	Xu Mengqiu (363)
A Reflection on Modernity and Question about Identification .....	Han Zhen (371)
The Universality of Judging Criterion of Human Rights .....	Zeng Lijie (376)
On Religious Value .....	Lai Yonghai (383)
Humanism and the special Duty that Intellectual must take on .....	Xiong Zaigao (391)
On the Epistemological Trend of Modern Times' Western Ethics before Kant .....	Dai Maotang (402)
Closing Speech for the Second International Conference on Axiology .....	Thomas Magnell (410)



# Dichotomous Value Theories & the Matrix

G. John M. Abbarno

President of Conference of Philosophical Society

**内容提要** 哲学史记录了各种各样看起来互不妥协的对立观点。其中包括分别支持主观主义和客观主义的价值理论。主观主义的判断是变动的并因主体观点的转变而重新设定作为决定因素的价值参量。客观主义提供一个固定的价值对象但在形式主义或抽象的领域内转变价值观，不把对客体进行评价的主体人作为评价的必要部分。这些理论的一般表述都将价值看作一维的，因而忽略了评价关系的丰富性。本文作者提出一种多维价值理论以应对评价活动的更为广泛的方面，其作用在于构想一个模式、一个交点，在此交点处主体的经验与其面对的客体是构成所做选择的各个方面。这包括态度、社会期望、对国家的忠诚和对未来的理性设计。这一模式理论为人类的广泛性解决本土与全球的价值二分提供了一个模型。

**关键词** 二分价值 母体 理论

Questions of value have become more familiar than any answers, but such is the nature of the philosophical enterprise. Wittgenstein's comment best characterized the inquiry when he said, "The question of what is value leads one to stammering." Advancement on value questions is varied. The inquiry into value generates among the more noted dichotomies as free - will determinism, idealism and materialism, mind and body dualism, and rationalism and empiricism, and like these it gives rise to compromising positions. A view of those of whom it perhaps can be said, "want their cake and eat it too"! I confess to be among them. After sketching out a brief history of the subjectivism and objectivism dichotomy, I present a value theory that encompasses the strengths of each while reflecting the complexity of human nature.

## 2 价值论与伦理学研究 (2008 年卷)

Apparent irreconcilable views between subjectivism and objectivism underlie questions regarding attribution of qualities: Are the values determined by conscious states or are they discoverable in the object? Do qualities of actions/events change or do values possess an ontic state such that they are ideals that have a “pull” in our lives? Today, I shall present a value theory that encompasses the strengths of both the subjectivism and objectivism dichotomy – one that reflects the complexity of human nature.

Objectivity is a method of understanding. The more we investigate what we know and what reality is, the more detached we become, the less reliant we are on our personal prejudices of the world. Objectivity of thought must be further removed from the specific likes and dislikes of any one person. The main difference between objectivity and subjectivity in knowledge and value is the ability to share and improve knowledge but not value.

Bernard Williams emphasizes that thought is objective if it can be expressed without parochial concepts.<sup>①</sup> Objectivity need not be apprehended in the present but in the future as the convergence of common investigations about knowledge and values. The attainment of this convergence can only be possible without appealing to personal interests that are supported by parochial concepts. Subjectivism, however, opposes any claim to value that is not a “lived and felt” aspect of a person’s experience. George Santayana claims “there can be no value apart from some appreciation of it, and no good apart from some preference of it before its absence or its opposite. We desire no thing because it is good but it is good because we desire it.”<sup>②</sup> He relegates the subject’s judgment of value to the time and place that gives rise to her valuation: There is no value object without also having a valuation of it. A more encompassing formulation was given by Ralph Barton Perry, one of the most celebrated subjectivist axiologists in the United States, who wrote extensively in the first half of the 20th century. He believed that “value” is the object of any interest. “A thing – anything – has value, or is valuable, in the original and generic sense when it is the object of an interest.

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① Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford university Press, 1986), p. 5.

② George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty* (New York: Scribner's Press, 1896), p. 87.

Or whatever is the object or interest is ipso facto valuable” .<sup>①</sup> This may be referred to as subjective minimalism since “interest” is the only relation that is required to confer value on an object. Interest is an expression of will, desire, or purpose so it includes the objects of pleasure as well as objects averted by displeasure forming a basis for our attitudes and actions. “……good springs from desire and not desire from good.”<sup>②</sup>

This brief account exhibits, albeit in a general way, the features of subjectivism, objectivism, and their relationship. At a minimum they each propose a monistic or, to use William James’s metaphor, “block universe” of how the components of the value world relate and derive value. Their explanatory power uses reason to either aspire to the realm of detached ideals of objectivity or to recognize anti – reason affections, attitudes, and beliefs for the groundwork of what is most sought or felt as real values. Both of these approaches create a one – dimensionality of value, insofar as they omit the role of the human agent valuing the object as a necessary part of the valuation providing an incomplete view of our life as valuers.

A theory of value should reflect the complexity of human nature, and this individual experience I propose is accommodated by a matrix value theory. The matrix theory of value is a multidimensional value theory, one that is integrative and responsive to value experiences. It takes into consideration the background conditions of the object valued and the agent valuing it. Matrix theory incorporates an understanding, not only the knowledge of “how valuable the object is, but knowing how to value it.” This is accounted for by the rational and nonrational modes of the valuational domain. These modes emphasize the role of expressed and nuanced dimension that the valuing agent brings to the experience of the object. The valued object may be engaged by appeal of habit, custom, authority, and affection. These, the nonrational modes, predispose a person to a situation. This situation contains sets of facts; the relevant ones we seek are encountered by nonrational feelings that become acknowledged in experience. The

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① George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty* (New York: Scribner’s Press, 1896), p. 87.

② *Ibid.*, p. 27.

rational mode does not function independently of the nonrational mode. There may be some attachments that are irrelevant to the value judgment, and discreteness of weighing the more stringent reason counts most heavily in the decisive act. Think about the circumstances of the parent struggling to make the “best” decision for the happiness and well being of his children. In such a case, it matters not only what the parent brings from their own experiences but how well they can determine the child’s future well being. The reasoning that renders a choice will no less become the background of the perspectives affecting the children in their own inevitable choices in life.

### **Dimensions of Value Intersections**

There are three dimensions of valuing that embrace the wider activity of our striving for human fulfillment required in the matrix theory of value. They integrate the rational and nonrational modes of valuing. Two of the three of these are lacking in one – dimensional theories of objectivism and subjectivism:

1. Value origin——are sources of what we come to value, from habits, belief, and role models. Their various sources are family, education, and religion. Consistency and attachment are their hallmarks for values such as God, community, and friendship. Value origins provide nonrational modes of dispositional attitudes toward other values such as loyalty, trust, and goodness.

2. Value assessment——is a capacity of comparative values held by the valuing person. This dimension attends to elements needed to improve one’s relationship with others. In this dimension, rational modes of values as knowledge, friendship, loyalty, beauty, and justice are considered. The agent weighs circumstances that can alter relational commitments.

3. Value enactment——the agent recognizes herself as the integration of experiences of value choices. There is a developed sensibility toward the role she has in the present value setting and those she projects to have in the future.

The matrix value theory shapes the character through these intersected dimensions. Each are linked as constitutive of the agent who embodies the value framework for further valuation and moral development. To underscore the real function of these value intersections, let’s consider a thought experiment, along

the lines of Jonathan Glover's "Experience Machine." For our purposes, let's adapt it to a room: the "Experience Room." In it there is every conceivable source of value disposition logically linked to value goals, such as knowledge, beauty, and pleasure. The obtaining of these values brings about a complete sense of fulfillment and happiness. All one needs to do is select the type of fulfillment listed among the computer disks, plug in the headset, and the room changes into the selected level of reality. The past is extinguished and the future, with all its anticipated hope and ideals, is "lived" out. Imagine that whatever one thinks is an act of choice; the end is attained. So, the struggles and risks that experience shapes about our ordinary lives is not a consideration. Failure is no longer conceivable since there is no effort to attain what one wants. Constraints against the agent's will, along with acquisition of knowledge and even God, should God be in the menu selected, are one within the agent's reality.

What sort of person is this? Can we say that this is the optimum life if one were able to choose it? The contrast seems fairly clear from what the intersectional values of the matrix provide. Does the "experience room" provide a life of value? Yes; it just isn't a life to be lived, well or ill. It is replete with value but empty of valuation. Awareness, although necessary to valuing, is not sufficient since I cannot consider the appropriate attitudes while in this room, to objects of my sensation. Indicators that separate me from you are not readily discernible. Although the feelings are electronically analogued, they are not the sort we learn from; there is no anxiety and struggle; near misses and judging "just right" from diligent work on a project. In other words, there is no self-reference in this experiment. It allows for everything but by omitting "opportunity" as something an agent can recognize as part of timing to choose, to gain or lose. Without experience of the past and present, the future is barren; indeed inconceivable.

In a lifetime we experience the nearness and remoteness of values, conflicts; all of this is lacking in this room. For example, if a businessman from the USA were conducting business in a foreign country, he is prohibited by the law to take bribes in order to close the contract. As moral agent he would struggle with the conflict of taking the bribe that would close the deal and increase his success rate or honor the law and bid the fairest cost his company would sup-

port. According to Kant's principle, "ought implies can,"<sup>①</sup> the businessman ought to acknowledge the law and act accordingly. If he does otherwise, he may close the deal but also compromises his credibility by violating the law and having the market consider him vulnerable to outside pressure. However he chooses, he will learn by the enhancement of his careful deliberation or careless rationalization that reflected his decision that remains a standard for his character. This character framework is not possible in this otherwise serene room to examine the self and this imperfect life through which humans learn. In the room there are no meaningful conflicts so there is no need to make assessments of the kind that will lose or recover one's self respect; nor will this room allow whether those around the agent, those whom are considered under their care, whether they are living happy and meaningful lives.

This experiment brings into focus, although in an admittedly artificial way, the extremes addressed in objectivity and subjectivity. However, the postulation of values whether as ideals detached from the contingent world to safeguard their importance, reverts to an isolation of unrelatedness to the human experience, much like the experience room. The difference is that in the room we can "have" the value objectivism aspires to hold as ideals. The subjectivist, however, reveals an ironic conclusion. Since the room provides satisfaction of any interest presently, it preempts the need of experience for sustained value choices, especially those that require assessment among other goods. For in the room, as in subjectivity, there is no sustained insight into the struggles of human experience, which also preempts moral development. So, the reason why the room appears unacceptable as an experiment is the same reason for not accepting subjectivism.

### Value Dimensions, Origins, Assessment, and Enactment

The source of attitudes, habits, and beliefs play an important role in the matrix theory since much of what initiates later interests, affections, and basic values begin at an early age. Family, education, and religion play a central role

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<sup>①</sup> See Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* in L. W. Beck's *Selections of Kant* (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1988).

in value orientation, as they comprise the first dimension. These are not the values we necessarily maintain throughout life, but they form the basis for assessing values we may adopt later. The shift in value acceptance to assessment does not occur with uniform preconditions except that a person's experience disrupts the usual perspective on life.

These instances that unsettle us initiates the rational mode or second dimension of value in terms of which a judgment is derived. Consider the experience of the poet, Wilfred Owens,<sup>①</sup> who transforms himself from being a "hawk" into a pacifist after being immersed in the horror that war entails. The result may be a predominant good or an acceptable configuration of mixed goods. So, how shall we understand the virtual reality room? This thought experiment demonstrated the inadequacy of subjectivism and objectivism primarily because they could not animate the role of experience, a role that is substantive in each of the three dimensions of the proposed value theory. It is experience as a rational corrective and embodiment of the formation of persona identity that form the scaffolding for further developing values. This development entails the critical assessment that embraces values but also determines which values to reject as not conducive to the person flourishing as a value agent. Strategies can be selected to intervene in a first dimensional value source that would have an impact on value agents and their relation to society. For example, education would be a likely source since it is a more uniform source of attitudes, beliefs, and practices.

A value origin influence endures so that whatever is infused should have some parallel to the enactment of these values. In other words, the first dimensions of value should provide the values for transition into assessment. In the ever-increasing geopolitical and global economic climate, we may inculcate values of tolerance, justice, cooperative problem solving, and beneficence. These can be integrated into a curriculum that complements the global attitude toward values; among the areas required would be global history, policy development in the United Nations, World Health Organization, and the International Red

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<sup>①</sup> J. Bennett, "Conscience of Huckleberry Finn," in *Vice and Virtue in Everyday Life*, eds C. Sommers and F. Sommers (Orlando FL: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), p. 37.

Cross, to name a few. Each institution would contribute to the contours of what is recognized as global goods and how these can be attained. Exposed to an array of such sources, the curriculum could be designed to resolve conflicts and conceptualize ways to sustain goods. So the matrix theory of value could provide a framework for a philosophy of education, one that honors the autonomy of the individual in character formation but also demonstrates that anyone's fulfillment is through enactment with the larger community good and more extensively as a global citizen. A more detailed philosophy of education is better left for another time, but we can see that the recasting of values through the matrix can also be instrumental in enacting reformation in other public institutions such as business, law, and health care.

### Matrix Value Theory

Unlike the previously considered value theories—those that are reason-based and affection-based—justification can work to a mutual good. Reason giving is one aspect of the justification, but there are nonrational justifications as well in the matrix theory of value, namely, the character who makes these choices. The character is formed through a discovery of what the person is becoming once cognizant of her relations to the sort of people, events, and places that fulfill her ideals. Glimpses are viewed through moments of value conflicts when we identify the touchstone value that directs our choices. The sort of person we want to be is poised within certain circumstances arousing in us an appropriate response. In this theory, the agent of value cannot be separated from the elements of his time and place. For these are as important as the agent's temperament as he identifies issues of greater or lesser weight in valuation. Character is the center through which all influences are screened, edited, and passing on through a sustained interpretation of the most fitting value for self-reference. "To the extent that we consciously aim to become the sort of person who values something rather than other things. It can be said that we choose our values."<sup>①</sup> So, the improve-

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<sup>①</sup> Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe Each Other* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 95.



ment of humanity may be either diminished or enhanced by the kind of characters a person chooses to be. It is possible under this notion that someone is free to not choose to live well even after considering the alternatives for being what is best.

Consider this example that involves competing goods. An African American doctor with a specialty in infectious diseases has been identified as a rising star in researching for a cure of AIDS. He is highly regarded among the NSF committee as he has been heavily awarded for the products of his research. While on a journey to Africa to learn more about the strain of AIDS afflicting this continent, especially in Botswana, Kenya, and Tanzania, he finds himself becoming attached to the people who desperately need immediate relief and care. He remains for an extended time, deliberating whether to return to the research center in the USA or continue the relief effort he is now providing for those now afflicted. The dilemma is more involved than shall he stay or leave. On the one hand, the doctor recognizes the long personal struggle to attain the rank of a premier scientist in this battle. But he is also aware of the role modeling he serves for young African Americans who continue to operate under the shadow of affirmative action. The works and the person are embodiments of goods effected by his choices. There are people yet uninfected who may be protected if he continues to have success in his research. Although this is difficult to calculate since it is projected with variables that cloud this probability. On the other hand, there are these people before him, of all ages; they do not know his scholarship but his knowing care and relief. It does not matter that it is temporary. The work of his hands brings goodness and hope to their otherwise hopeless lives. What should this young doctor choose? Which is the "best" decision?

There are two levels of reasoning about what is "best" in this example. The one level contains a self - satisfaction that is hard to distinguish from the good it renders incidentally. The continual funding and the reputation the young doctor is establishing will affect all those whom his work product helps and bring acclaim to himself and his race. This sense of "self - interest" is seriously distinguished from other senses by what the doctor focuses on as the object of his interest. Among other residual goods is the role modeling he forms for young Afri-