

THE PRIMARY AXIOM AND THE LIFE-VALUE COMPASS

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Summary

Given the long failure of philosophy to find any sustainable universal ground of value, the Primary Axiom of Value explains the missing set of principles and their deciding compass of value direction and measure. By regrounding in underlying fields of life themselves, *life-value onto-axiology* demonstrates unlimited validity in judging better and worse across domains, the explanatory power to resolve age-old impasses of philosophy and theory, and the self-evident capacity to meet the most ancient questions of humanity - what is the good, and how are we to live? This chapter maps the value field of consciousness, and explains how its open elective space and the mind's conceptual forms determine the world for good or ill.

6.1. The Primary Axiom of Value

X is value if and only if, and to the extent that, x consists in or enables a more coherently inclusive range of thought/feeling/action than without it

Where these three ultimate fields of value are defined as:

thought = internal image and concept (T)

feeling = the felt side of being (F)

/ senses, desires, emotions, moods

action = animate movement (A)

across species and organizations

Conversely:

x is disvalue if and only if, and to the extent that, x reduces/disables any range of thought/experience/action.

Symbolically expressed:

$+V = > LR +$ and $-V = < LR$ where $L = \text{Range of T-F-A}$ and $/ = \text{and/or}$

6.1.1. The Unlimited Validity and Applicability of the Primary Axiom

The value of all values (Vv) is distinguished from other principles of value by six features which demonstrate its ground as of *unlimited validity*. That is, it is:

- (1) *Self-evident* insofar as its denial is nonsensical;
- (2) *Universalizability* across all domains and issues of value judgment insofar as there is no domain of value to which it does not apply;
- (3) *Presupposed* in value judgments and conflicts across domains;
- (4) *Objective* insofar as its value is independent of anyone's recognition;
- (5) *Sovereign* in that it overrides any other value in cases of conflict;
- (6) *measurable in degrees of worth* insofar as greater/lesser ranges of thought, felt being and action can be decided from any given reference body of value;
- (7) *A contingent pattern* in long-term evolutionary and historical development.

These criteria together indicate a value ground of unlimited validity – what any ultimate, universal and applicable theory of value must show.

6.1.2. Sliding Scale of Good and Bad: An Introduction

All good and bad and their degrees are decidable by application of the Primary Axiom of Value. Anything qualifies as better/worse by the greater/lesser range of life value it

bears or enables in the fields of life value.

Choices are, in turn, better or worse as they enable or disable these fields of life through time, $T_1 \dots T_n$, as illustrated ahead.

All values/disvalues of all kinds - moral, aesthetic, technological, and in general whatever admits of better/worse predication - *and* their value choices are decidable by application of this sliding scale of measure (demonstrated from Section 6.6 onwards).

6.1.3. Reference Body of Value Judgment

Any such value judgment must, however, always relate to a *reference body of value* from which the judgment is made so as to move beyond *the free-standing absolutes* by which value understanding has long been bedeviled in every age and culture.

We now proceed to step-by-step explanation and testing application of this parametric of value across the fields of life by horizontal and vertical axes of measure of greater and lesser value, explaining transformative implications for value judgments and problems across domains.

6.1.4. Ultimate Value Test

All that is of worth consists in and enables life value *to the extent* of its experienced fields of thought, felt being and action (intrinsic value), *and* what underlies and enables these fields of life themselves, life support systems.

This is the generic frame of all values and evaluation by life-value onto-axiology. What does not take into account all of these parameters of value is *partial* to the extent that it does not.

6.2. The Fields of Life Value

The fields of life value - thought, felt side of being, action - include all that is of *intrinsic* value, or value in itself. It therefore follows that whatever does *not* bear thought, feeling or animate movement is not intrinsic value, although it may be of *instrumental* value.

6.2.1. Intrinsic and Ultimate Values

Life support systems - any natural or human-made system without which human beings cannot live or live well - may or may not have value in themselves, but have *ultimate* value so far as they are that without which human or other life cannot exist or flourish.

6.2.2. Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Life-Value

All life whatever has intrinsic value insofar as it itself moves, feels, or thinks. The measure of its value is, in turn, the extent to which it expresses or enables vertical-depth and horizontal-breadth of life range on these parameters. In short, the more life fields the better, and the more range on each and all together, the more value is borne.

6.3. The Unity of the Fields of Life

Although we can distinguish the cognitive and feeling capacities of any person, this does not mean dividing them into separate worlds as has occurred in the traditional divisions between mind and body, reason and the emotions. Life-value onto-axiology begins from *their unity as the nature of the human organism*. It thereby releases understanding from the fallacious metaphysical dualisms in which philosophy has been mired over millennia.

6.3.1. Life-Value Philosophy Supersedes Dualism

When the fields of mind and body are sundered into separate realms of existence, we confront the perennial *dualism* of the organic being. Descartes (1596-1650) is the modern Western father of this separation of thought and body, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, but such ontological splits have variously characterized philosophy and language East and West over 2500 years.

Ordinary language expresses this schizophrenic ontology when “mind” and “body” are perceived as two separate realms. In life-value philosophy, these dichotomies are recognized as concept reifications delinked from their life-ground. Any such dualism is ruled out from the beginning by understanding the unity of the human organism underneath metaphysical constructions.

6.3.2. Primary Axiom Applies Across Species as Organically Grounded Value Measure

The ultimate principle of value defined by the primary axiom holds across human *and* non-human bearers. The value fields of thought and felt being of any organism depend physically on nervous system inheritance, while image-concept and felt-being development from there is by learning and discovery. There are no ontological divisions beyond this.

Together these fields of life across species constitute the plenum of life-value in the terrestrial condition which is not comprehended by mind-body disjunctions nor by isolated partialities of understanding like moral intention, pleasure gained, pecuniary value, and so on.

6.3.2.1. Choice as Opening or Closing to Fields of Life Value

The unification of these value fields by their experiencers is, at bottom, a *value choice*: between opening to these fields of life value as organically one, and closing to them by reified divisions. Our lives as individuals and societies are decided *by* such choices. This choice space, however, is abstracted out by metaphysical reductions (e.g., that inner life is unreal).

6.3.2.2. We Decide What We Are By What We Identify With

However different the conditions and degrees of what we identify ourselves with, we decide how what this identity is. The opening or the closing to more inclusive life is the

inner logic of choice.

For example, the human individual or society connecting to the life needs of its members and the ecological host rather than ignoring them realizes a fuller life. This is a choice process not possible for a Turing machine, chimpanzee troop, or money-capital sequence. It decides the life reality we find or lose, but its elective space is normally erased or denied.

6.4. The Common Axiological Ground beneath Different Interpretations

Application of the primary axiom of value identifies every life value and disvalue that exists or can exist; but the evidence it is applied to admits of different interpretations.

For example, plants and trees have pervasive value as a means to all other life - instrumental value, as well as ultimate value insofar as no life value can exist without them. They are value for most animals as habitat and food, and for more connected beings a primary object of natural and cultivated beauty of fellow life as well.

Yet do the world of plants and trees also have *intrinsic* value to the extent that they themselves feel or think that which makes them lives of moral concern?

6.4.1. Do Plants and Trees Feel or Think?

Perhaps the most famous book presenting evidence for the internal life of plants is Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird, *The Secret Life of Plants* (1973). It attributes “mind” to plants, but the factual evidence presented indicates a felt side of being, not mind. That is, no evidence exists for the capacity for concept or image.

The same evidence can have different interpretations. Plants might be seen as having intrinsic value as life, and greater intrinsic value if alive in both thought and feeling. Yet in fact there is only evidence for a very primitive felt side of being – slight organic responses, for instance, to adjacent plants being cut down. Yet the axiom of life value is constant no matter what the interpretation is. There is only a disagreement here on the inferences from the evidence, *not* on what is of value.

6.4.1.1. Do Rocks Feel?

Some say even rocks feel, but they present no evidence of that in the rocks themselves, as distinguished from what they have projected onto them. *Valid* value judgment of other being depends on what is evident fact, not on what is projected.

It is true that people may experience more value if they imagine rocks as the bones of our larger cosmic body, but this does not mean the rocks themselves think, feel or act. There is a lot of confusion of these positions. There is no evidence whatever that rocks *themselves* either feel or think. Yet we may still extend our being to them as elements of our larger life - like toenails that do not feel or think, but belong to and enable our life body. In such a case, a wider bioregional or world body can be what the open consciousness extends to as life-value identity – as in some first-people cultures and, as we will see, advanced contemporary philosophies.

6.4.2. One Axiom of Value: Many Possibilities of Value Both Valid and Invalid

Some may believe in “the mind of plants” or “the feelings of rocks”, or reject any such belief as pure projection, or adopt a wider life body including them. World philosophies express examples of all these positions. *Yet what all of these opposing positions agree on is the intrinsic and ultimate value of thought and feeling themselves.*

6.4.2.1. Ultimate and Intrinsic Life Values

Life value does not entail being alive, however. Nor does being alive entail significant life value. Life support systems can be unthinking water and earth, but are ultimate values so far as life cannot exist without them. On the other hand a particular seed, even a fertilized human one, has little life-value *in itself*. Yet these ultimate value distinctions are so little thought of they are reversed without notice.

It is always important to distinguish *ultimate* from *intrinsic* values, or we may conflate them and believe, for example, that because only life is of intrinsic value, non-living systems are not of ultimate value. No error could be more fatal.

6.4.3. The Unseen Common Ground of Ethics Too

Underlying the most contentious and passionate disagreements is *the life-ground of value* which has been lost within this or that reified aspect of its meaning. Disagreements on what are thought to be value foundations are typically only partial perspectives on it.

6.4.3.1. Utilitarian and Kantian Standpoints as Partial

The utilitarian, for example, properly thinks that if animals or plants truly feel pain, this capacity for pain confers on them the right to moral consideration. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) first argued this in modern Western philosophy, and contemporary ethicist Peter Singer has pursued this line of argument with singular clarity over four decades. Yet only pain is considered here, not life capacity. Thus painless dismemberment or death is approved. If it maximizes pleasure at the same time, the utilitarian principle is fulfilled.

On the other hand, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) simply rules out feeling as morally irrelevant, and thus blocks out the entire value field of feeling in principle. He is concerned with universal principles of rational understanding and conduct as supreme values. Again a partial aspect of life value is absolutized into all that ultimately matters, and the rest is devalued or dissolved from view. Yet even the Kantian will have to concede that the felt side of being *does* have value. For it cannot be sensibly denied that it is better to have a feeling than not to - a regulating maxim of conduct Kant followed in not allowing his own sentient capacities to be impaired over 80 years.

6.4.4. The Primary Axiom of Value Remains True Through Competing Partial Grasps of It

The primary axiom of value, we may conclude, remains uncompromised through

competing partial grasps of it. Thought experiment assists understanding by two questions:

- (1) What value *contradicts* its ultimate principle? Value positions and theories may be unaware of it, but still express some dimension of it.
- (2) Can any value that *does* contradict it be valid? It is true that a desire to be free of life embodiment is often stated (including by Socrates at death), but such a value is incoherent with the long preservation of it by the speaker.

Most partisan strife is based on ignorance of this common ground of value underlying contesting doctrines and ways, the ultimate failure of human thought.

6.5. The Thought Field of Value: From the Infinite within to Impartial Value Standard

Heraclitus (6th-5th century BCE) long ago observed, “There is no limit to consciousness so deep and far in every direction does it extend”. No philosopher has since contradicted him, but most have ignored his ultimate and testable claim.

What is of supreme value in human thought is its boundless capacity of inclusion, whether or not it can be correlated to brain activities - a current preoccupation of world science and philosophy. There is no limit to *its* reach or depth of image and conception, a directly provable fact that is ignored. Mind-brain identity theory and cognitive science revealingly behave as if it did not exist. Property-dualists disagree with them, but not on this ground. They attend rather to brain-words and mind-words as different orders of language. Even phenomenologists who seek to recover the inner realm conceive mind as necessarily “intentional”, that is, directed to something.

6.5.1. The False Opposition of Spirituality and Science

In India-based wisdom traditions, in profound contrast, the onto-axiological base is that thought is infinite and without object to the enlightened who realize it. It is the “God within”.

Required material conditions of this inner infinite field do not diminish its reality. Yet scientific-philosophical materialism is structured against recognition by admitting only externally observable and repeatable data into conceptions of reality. This is a methodological partiality which is demonstrably fallacious, as we will see - not because such data and laws are false, but because the method falsely and circularly denies anything else as real.

6.5.2. Not Anthropocentrism, nor Supernaturalism

Recognition of the open elective space of human thought as of ultimate value, from the infinite within to scientific understanding without, is not anthropocentric - as philosophies prioritizing either side may well be. For it is quite consistent that non-humans are superior if they bear thought's powers to a greater reach and depth, as astronomical science suggests is possible. A superior thinking species in the universe is not excluded.

Nor is there any entailment of *supernaturalism* by recognition of the “infinite within”. It

is perfectly compatible with mindful materialism to recognize it. One can say that it is enabled by the infinite permutations and combinations of a 150-billion-neuron brain and its trillions of joining axons, combined with inherited linguistic capacities for generating unlimited meanings within complex human cultures evolved over thousands of years. Such a material basis of consciousness does not set bounds to its infinitude, but helps to explain it.

6.5.3. Degrees of Consciousness Value: From Retarded to Advanced Thought Systems

Although thought is the most inclusive field of value, it admits of vast differences of ranges of comprehension. If thought is confined to closed repertoires of self-seeking, for example, it is of correspondingly less value, falling back into instinctual program.

On the other hand, human thought may comprehend the entire terrestrial life-host as a connected life system with which it identifies - as with the EOLSS project itself.

6.5.4. The Impartiality of Life Value Measures across Species, Races and Genders

The value of all values is impartial across all divisions. It may recognize higher value in human beings so far as they bear more inclusive fields of thinking and feeling being; or lower if other life demonstrates they do not. The bearing of the fields of life value decides, *not* race nor gender nor species nor other dogmatic type.

Does this mean that if we discovered dolphins to have more complexly comprehensive symbolic and affective states than humans they are of greater life value? *Ceteris paribus*, the answer is yes.

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an accepted enemy or adversary of the community addressed (e.g., “communist”, “liberal”, “unbeliever”), a track-switch of thought argued to be a universal but defeasible form of fallacious thought and social life.]

McMurtry, J. (1988) “The Unspeakable: Understanding the System of Fallacy of the Media”, *Informal Logic*, 41:3,133-50. [This analysis sets out the general regulating framework of the “ruling value syntax” as a system of rules selecting against whatever invalidates the presupposed ruling order of control over society’s means of existence, and for whatever validates it - in correspondence to the degrees of each.]

McMurtry, J.(1998), *Unequal Freedoms: The Global Market As An Ethical System*, 372 pp. Toronto and Westport CT: Garamond and Kumarian [This systematic critique lays bare the unexamined ethical assumptions and assertions of classical, neoclassical and contemporary ethical and political theory and policy of the global market as a ruling value system.]

McMurtry, J. (2002), *Value Wars: The Global Market versus the Life Economy*, 262pp. London: Pluto Press [This volume explains and tracks the underlying principles of opposing value-systems - money value versus life value - in the global capitalist system world with universal, constitutional principles of resolution.]

Merchant, Carolyn (1980), *The Death of Nature*, 292pp. New York: Harper and Row.[This work provides a prototype eco-feminist analysis of the images of modern scientific mechanism since Bacon and their violent usurpation of the prior central metaphor of ‘earth as nurturing mother’.]

Mill, J.S. (1860/1996) *Utilitarianism*, 260pp. New York: Oxford University Press [This volume contains up-to-date commentary on Mill’s classic statement of utilitarianism as “the Greatest Happiness Principle” wherein “all actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce pain”.]

Miller, Peter and Westra, Laura, eds (2002). *Just Ecological Integrity: The Ethics of Planetary Life*, 326 pp. Boston: Rowman and Littlefield. [Representative text of original work in environmental ethics by philosophers, social scientists and ecologists for Earth Charter 2000.]

MacIntyre, A.(1981), *After Virtue*. 271 pp. London: Duckworth. [This is a definitive work of “virtue ethics featuring the distinction between “internal and external goods”.]

Mackie, J.L. (1977), *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 249 pp. New York: Penguin.[This text is representative of the dominant subjectivist view of Ethics arguing that any and all moral or ethical judgments of right and wrong, good or bad, are “false”.]

Mirowski, P. (2000), *Machine Dreams*, 540 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [This study tracks the machine model in models of applied cognitive science into the “automaton theater” of economic, military and decision-theory research.]

Moore, GE (1909), *Principia Ethica*, 272 pp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [This classic work of ethical theory includes the defining statement of “moral intuitionism”, the “open question argument”, and the prototype identification of the “naturalistic fallacy”.

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1964), *The Complete Works of Nietzsche* (ed. O. Levy). New York: Russell and Russell. [These works include *The Anti-Christ* and *Beyond Good and Evil* which spell out Nietzsche’s master idea that “values are constructs of domination” and that religion is a “slave morality” of *ressentiment* against the rule of “nature’s aristocracy”.]

Noonan, J. (2003), *Critical Humanism and the Politics of Difference*, 189 pp. Kingston-Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press. [This study exposes a deep-structural contradiction between postmodern denial of any universal human essence *and* the presupposition of just such a value essence for human life to self-determine differences.]

Nozick, R. (1974), *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, 367pp. New York: Basic Books. [A very influential work rejecting liberal arguments for equality of rights in favour of rights of private property to trump any kind of redistributive ethic, argument or policy.]

Nussbaum, M. (1999), *Sex and Social Justice*, 476pp. New York: Oxford University Press. [This work grounds in Aristotelian, liberal and feminist values of “the separate individual”.]

G. Outka and J.P. Reeder eds. (1993), *Prospectus for a Common Morality*. Princeton: Princeton

University Press. An outstanding collection of original articles by internationally recognized leaders with no common life interests defined.

Pareto, Vilfredo, (1971 [1906]).*Manual of Political Economy*, New York: A.M. Kelley [Classic of rational choice theory and economic reason whose principle of “opthematicity” - since called “Pareto optimality” or “Pareto efficiency” which identifies a logical state of affairs in which no-one can be made better off without making someone else worse, a standard ideal of rational choice theory, based on a pure-type dyadic exchange of assets with no relation to life value or conditions.]

Parfit, D. (1984), *Reasons and Persons*, 543pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. [The definitive work of this author and of contemporary discourse on “personal identity” exemplifying fine-grained argumentation and the conventional given assumption that “personal identity” means sameness through time rather than what the person identifies with.]

Plato (1961), *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns), Pantheon Books: New York. [The complete dialogues in which Socrates’ and Plato’s idealist “Theory of Forms” posits pure, transcendental and eternal ideas of which all material entities are but inferior, mutable copies.]

Radhakrishnan, S. and Moore, C. (1957), *Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, 683pp. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [This is a definitive and comprehensive collection of classical Indian philosophy featuring the limitless inner life space or ‘atman’ conceived as a mode of God.]

Rawls, J. (1967), *A Theory of Justice*. 542pp. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press. [This is the recognized definitive work of the twentieth century in philosophy of justice whose paradigmatic starting point of rational value-judgment is the principle of self-maximizing rationality “including wanting a larger share for oneself”: with a “veil of ignorance” over one’s own faculties and conditions of life the guarantor of impartiality decoupling agents from their conditions of life a-priori.]

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1984), *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (trans. M. Cranston), 182 pp. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books [Published in 1755 seven years prior to the Social Contract, a philosophical anthropology known best publicly for its vision of “the noble savage”, Rousseau conceives human beings in their natural state of human language, reason and species sympathy before private property, division of labor and vain desires corrupt them.]

Russell, Bertrand (1983-), *Bertrand Russell: Collected Papers*, 29 vols. London: Allen and Unwin. [Includes Russell’s prolific corpus of philosophical and public works, including his of ‘type theory’ of logically higher and lower order classes of properties (e.g., the color property of colored objects is a higher order property than the combination of all of the members of the class of colored objects). His works on denotation and description, the logical foundations of mathematics, sense data and logical atomism, neutral monism, and probability comprise a string of innovative technical solutions and theories to resolve paradoxes, with his theory of types being the most enduring contribution to logic and epistemology. An early leader of Anglo-American technical analytic philosophy, his most substantive contribution may be in his many irreverent popular essays and books which lucidly expose and rout well-entrenched beliefs and dogmatic assumptions on major social issues from sexual morality to nuclear-arms. He regretted twentieth-century philosophy’s wide abandonment of “understanding the world itself, that grave and important task which philosophy throughout has hitherto pursued”].

Ryle, G. (1976) *The concept of mind*, 334pp. London: Hutchinson. [Influential reductionist argument by Oxford analytic philosopher which argues against conceiving the mind as a “ghost in the machine” when behavioural dispositions are all that is at work’.]

Searle, J.R. (1997), *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, 512pp Boston: MIT Press. [In this work, analytic philosopher John Searle argues against the dominant computer model of the mind and of cognitive science in favor of the irreducibly qualitative and subjective experience of consciousness annulled by computational functionalism.]

Sen, Amartya (1977). “Rational Fools: A Critique of the Behavioral Foundations of Economic Theory”, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 6, 317-44 [This classic article exposes the reductionist economic understanding of rationality as self-maximization without life-value standard.]

Spinoza, Baruch (1985), *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (ed. E. Curley), 7 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press. [Spinoza’s most studied work, the *Ethics* is a deductive system modeled on Euclid’s definitions, axioms and theorems in which God or infinite substance is conceived as the rational system of

the universe in its thinking and extended modes and infinite attributes which can be better (more adequately) or worse (less adequately) comprehended;: from vague and emotional experience through general reasoning to scientific intuition (*scientia intuitiva*) of the logically determined whole from the comprehensively rational experience of it - ultimately the true “self interest” of the individual.]

Suzuki, D.T. (1956). *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D.T. Suzuki* (ed. W. Barrett). 294 pp. Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday [This is a selection of writings of the most widely recognized scholar of Zen, but without a principle of life value to rule against life-incapacitating practices.]

Taylor, Charles (1989), *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity*, 601pp. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. [This is Taylor’s magnum opus combining and phenomenological sensitivity grounding value in community relations and moral character in opposition to abstract liberal selves maximizing benefits in a value-neutral moral void.]

Tompkins, P. And Bird, C., *The Secret Life of Plants* (1973). 402 pp. New York: Harper & Row [This book provides extensive evidence for the sentience of plants.]

Thoreau, Henry (1965), *Walden, and other writings*. 732 pp. New York: Modern Library. [Thoreau’s classic writings affirming a life of harmonious simplicity and awakens in Nature.]

Vico, G. (1724/1984), *The New Science*, 445 pp. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press. [Vico argues that humanity can only know for certain that which it has created because it is directly our construction.]

Whitehead, A.N. (1938), *Modes of Thought*, 172 pp. New York: Macmillan [Whitehead’s most well known lectures on his “process philosophy” seeking movement of thought and imagination beyond “dead” and “inert ideas” in the Newtonian tradition.]

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1968), *Philosophical Investigations*. 260 pp. New York: Macmillan. [Perhaps the most celebrated work of twentieth-century philosophy, it leads what philosophers have come to call “the linguistic turn”, disconnecting philosophical problems from the life-ground in preoccupation with linguistic and logical muddles.]

Biographical Sketch

John McMurtry holds his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Toronto, Canada and his Ph.D from the University of London, England, and has been Professor of Philosophy at the University of Guelph for over 25 years and University Professor Emeritus since 2005. He is an elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and his many articles, chapters, books and interviews have been internationally published and translated.