

Moral Thinking: An Introduction To Values And Ethics

Prof. Vineet Sahu

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Week - 02

Lecture -07

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Values

Hello everyone. So, today we come towards the close of the first module. And, we talk about, let me go through the details of the first module. The first module started by talking about, Value Theory. What is it to value. So we looked at it as, just one minute.

We looked at it as, to a human world event, and a natural world event. This is just to a quick recap of, what we did. So when we talk about, Value Theory. What is it to value.

We ascribe values to things, objects, people, and make preferences. So this is at an introductory level, for you to make sense of, how would you use, terms of moral philosophy of ethics, as conceptual tools, to describe the situation, to engage with others, and to work out solutions. So to make sense of that well, to that elementary allegation, that well, moral judgements are just opinions. Well they may be opinions, but they matter, because like law, like language, they are human world events. So law, language, now rarely can any of us say that well, language does not matter, or language is to each his own, because the whole point of communication is to have a shared language.

And in that sense, we can understand, what is the moral universe, or the moral domain. So this is a part of the human world. Then we talked about valuation, takes place in different disciplines. So we went through a host of disciplines, where valuation takes place. So valuation is something very fundamental to human perception, or human cognition, or making sense of the world.

In fact, we went ahead there to see how valuation, almost defines the character of an institution, or an individual, that what kind of value preferences take. And in that sense, values were foundational. Foundational in the sense that, they were the frame of reference, from which we look at the universe. So a country is founded on certain values, an institution, an individual holds certain values as sacred. So the foundational values actually define, what is fundamental, and how do we understand or give character

to an institution, or to a person, or an individual.

Now we have a smaller part left, is the Intrinsic and Extrinsic values. And then, followed by Universal and Situational values. And finally, it is Moral and Religious values. So here, the attention that you need to pay, or that is going to be paid, is on Intrinsic and Extrinsic values. So, for this a text or a helpful text that I would recommend, is for you to go through the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, that is freely available on the internet.

And look for the Intrinsic versus Extrinsic value entry, in that Encyclopedia. This is the link. You may not be able to copy it, from the image. But if it can be posted in the description, that would be great. But in any way, if you just search out for the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, and in that SEP, as it is generally abbreviated.

And you can look at it, and look at this particular entry. So now, coming to Intrinsic. Intrinsic is a term, Intrinsic and Extrinsic, that you use in a lot of vocabulary, lot of terms, lot of fields, disciplines, knowledge. We look at Intrinsic and Extrinsic. So in the domain of values, Intrinsic values are some things, which are valuable in itself, or valuable for its own sake.

So things that we do, which are valuable for its own sake. And Extrinsic, Extrinsic is something which is not Intrinsic, which is rather instrumental. Instrumental meaning, that it is used to achieve something. It is used as a means, to achieve something. It is valuable, for what it begets.

So, let us think of a few examples. And to my undergraduate students, I always start with the example of, the five days in a week. They are an example of, Extrinsic valuation generally. Because you tolerate those five days of a week, for the weekend that comes along. So, the weekend turns out to be of Intrinsic value.

So, the weekdays and the work and the classes in the weekdays are a part of the, are Extrinsicly valuable because, crossing them or going through them, it gets you to the weekend, which is Intrinsically valuable, because which is valuable in itself. So you love holidays because, things are, they are Intrinsically valuable. So this is simplifying in a jocular sense, for you to make sense of, what is Intrinsic valuation versus Extrinsic valuation. This is one example. Let me say, look at the example of say, political or governments or political domains.

When we look at governments, building infrastructure. Now, dams, roads, bridges, they are being built. So are they of any Intrinsic value. Well, in one line of argument, they are

not of Intrinsic value, but they are of Extrinsic value, because what they bring about. And what do they bring about? They bring about, a sense of comfort, flourishing and development, to the people at large.

So roads, dams, bridges are useful, not Intrinsically, but Extrinsically, because they help lead people, lead better lives. So roads, they can travel. Dams, they can have water around the year. Bridges, they can cross, they can reduce travel time. So it is quite simple, but it just needs an articulation, for you to understand this.

Another example, which is probably the easiest example, to connect to, is money. That is, Extrinsically valuable. But it can also be Intrinsically valuable. It can be Intrinsically valuable, for whom? Well, it can be Intrinsically valuable, for the miser. Because the miser takes joy, in accumulating money, looking at the hoards of money, that has been accumulated, and that itself is a source of joy.

So for most of us, money is a source of, money is important. Money is important, not because it is something valuable in itself, but for what it can get. Money can get you freedom, money can get you conveniences, money can get you time, money can get you assistance. So money is valuable, because it gets you many things. So in that sense, money is Extrinsically valuable.

It is instrumental. It is instrumental, to attain things that we value. And what are the things, the Extrinsic, instrumental values or Extrinsic values, are generally directed towards, Intrinsic values. So let me put that out, write that down here. So when we see, Extrinsic values are directed towards Intrinsic values. That means, so money as an Extrinsic value, is directed towards the Intrinsic value of comfort, good life, flourishing.

So it is that, that which gets along. So let me think of another example, that comes to elaborate this distinction between, Intrinsic and Extrinsic value. And here, there are generalisations being made. And there will surely be exceptions. But to look at it, to understand the drift of the difference, we are undertaking a generalisation.

So let us say, working in the gym, or lifting weights. Now, that is something many of us do. Is something, which is probably extrinsically valuable, because it brings about better health, or a better shape of one's body. Compare this with, playing games. Now, playing games is most, or often intrinsically valuable, because you enjoy the process.

So, lifting weights is not something, that one may enjoy. At least for most of us, one may not enjoy. But one does it, for the benefits that it yields. Whereas, playing games is something that, one enjoys the process, and the health, or the other goals are side effects,

that come along. So if we look at, Extrinsic values and Intrinsic values, exercise versus, or gymnasium versus, or a gym versus a sport, also brings about that difference.

Now, I would invite you to go ahead, and think of the many differences, that you can identify between Intrinsic values and Extrinsic values. Now, there may be people, who enjoy lifting weights. And then, for them, this particular activity becomes, intrinsically valuable. There may be many people, who just play a game, to become fit. And for them, that becomes extrinsically valuable.

But the whole point of sports or games is, an active involvement. And it is unlikely, that one can be involved in a game, without putting oneself, mentally into it. So, of course, there are exceptions. And one can argue from the exceptions. But the point of understanding this is, to understand that, what are the differences between Intrinsic values and Extrinsic values.

Now, goals and consequences, are generally intrinsically valuable. Intrinsic values are often considered as the core of moral thinking. It is foundational, and it answers the recursive why's. What is meant by here. We are talking about this particular entry here, that goals and consequences.

That means, the goals towards which extrinsic values are directed, towards activities for which extrinsic values are directed, are generally intrinsically valuable. So, intrinsic values have been given a lot of importance in, Moral Philosophy. And many Moral Philosophers, regard them as the core, or the foundation of Ethical Thinking. Now, if we go ahead and look at the recursive why question. Say, when one looks at, why one does something.

So, let us think of a classical question of, why does a painter paint, or why does a singer sing, or why does an sculptor sculpt. Now, these are all activities, which generally tend to an intrinsically valuable answer. So, a painter paints, or a singer sings, because it gives joy to that particular person. Now, look at it this way. A singer can sing, as a performance, or as an expression of oneself.

So, when one is singing as a performance, one would look at the response that one gets from their audience, as a crucial part, to assess the value in that particular activity. So, but whereas, when a singer sings for expression, and perhaps many of us would better understand it, or relate to it, as bathroom singers. Now, singers who sing to themselves, or sing for themselves, they are singing as in the mode of a expression. So, when we look as an artist, creating something for, as an expression, vis-a-vis something as a performance, we can see the difference.

An expression is generally intrinsic value. A performance is generally an extrinsic value. So, depending on, how much recognition one gets from the audience, one could relate the joy or the success of that particular act of art, it may be singing, or whichever form of art that one goes for. So, why have Moral Philosophers held intrinsic values as foundational. They have held intrinsic values as foundational, because it answers the recursive wise.

Now, what is the recursive wise. So, when we ask a question that well, why are you studying. You are studying to get a degree. Why do you want a degree. You want to get a degree, so that you get a better job.

Why do you want a better job. You want a better job, so that you have a comfortable life. So, why do you want a comfortable life. No, because the comfortable life is an end in itself. Because that is what, gives me peace and happiness. So here, when we are ultimately going down a value question domino, asking one question after the other, generally the foundational question, or the bedrock position, the foundational answer, or the bedrock answer, has been an intrinsic value, that we have been claiming.

Now, where does this lead us to. If we look at, what is the good life. This classical question is actually a question of identifying the intrinsic values. It can be pleasure, excellence, peace. The answer to this question, lays out a worldview of individual societies, constitutions, and civilisations. So, when we look at this question that, what is the good life.

Very often, we answer that question. So, parliaments have to decide, and what is the good life, is not a question, that is a classic theory question. But, it is a question that, we all answer to ourselves, our countries answer to themselves, in their constitutions, our religion answers, our societies answers, our family answers. So, we all thinkingly, unthinkingly, deliberately, or intuitively, have a picture of the good life. Now, the picture of the good life, what is that picture of the good life.

Or, what is the worldview, that we have. That is actually, the final intrinsic values, on which it is, the structure of our moral universe is founded upon. So, for the Hedonist, right. The Hedonist would look at, pleasure as the final value, as the instrumental value. So, we are looking at, whatever we do, we do, so that, we should be able to get the maximum pleasure, we can.

Excellence. Excellence, this is typically what, Aristotle would hold, eudaimonia as something, excellence as the final value of life, or the intrinsic value of life. So,

everything has to be directed towards excellence. And that is the intrinsic value of life. Peace, maybe you can have, the Upanishadic philosophy, looking for peace or salvation. So, or a way of looking, which looks that, peace should be the final thing, that one should be attaining, right.

So, how we answer this question, what is the good life, is actually, we are answering the question that, what are the core intrinsic values, that we are holding, both as a society, as an individual, as a country. So, let us say, as a constitution describes, fraternity as a core intrinsic value. That means, the society is probably, more communitarian, and greatly values, the fraternity amongst people. Whereas, a constitution can completely celebrate individualism, and thereby does not hold fraternity, as an intrinsically valuable goal. And just holds, individual liberty, as an intrinsically valuable goal.

As an individual, one would look at some things, or the pole. I would say, you can regard, the intrinsic values, as the pole star of your life. Because, the pole star is where, towards which, all your actions orient and direct towards. So, when we talk about, identifying the intrinsic value, we are actually identifying, the fundamental question of, what is the good life, that we can go ahead for. The same value can be intrinsic for one, and extrinsic for another. For example, knowledge is intrinsically valuable to the curious, and extrinsically valuable to the one, who wants to bring about, change in the world of lived experience.

So, here we look at the example, that we have just talked about, in the example of the gym, and the sports example. That, for some people, what is intrinsic, may be extrinsically valuable, and vice versa, for some. So, being intrinsically valuable, or extrinsically valuable, is not, IV or EV, is not a property of the act, but it is the ascription of the agent. Of the agent, meaning the person, the actor.

So, when we look at knowledge, per se. Now, many of us as students, we have been curious, and many classes, and probably philosophy classes are something, that one takes out of curiosity, for the desire to know. In fact, that is been a fundamental, Socratic motivation, to do philosophy. In fact, even for governance, that well, governance is something, which is, or philosophy is something, which is to be done, for its own sake. So, governance is also, given as an example, to be done, for its own sake, not for, what it yields. May be, it yields honour, it may be, it yields respect, may be, it yields a sense of power, may be, it yields downright wealth.

So, that is not the motivation. So, for Aristotle, he came about describing, well, the ideal ruler is one, who is not interested in the consequences of, or the fruits of governance, that comes to the governor. So, when we look at something, that is

intrinsically valuable, it can be extrinsically valuable, for somebody else. So, to the curious student, knowledge is intrinsically valuable. To the one, who is looking for a career, or an opportunity, and wanting to choose, the best means to arrive at it. Clearly, that stream of knowledge, is an extrinsically valuable stream.

And you can see this, I mean, we are in a world, where we have to make a lot of instrumental, or extrinsic choices. Because, we have the intrinsic goal, connected. I have made this error, but corrected of confusing the intrinsic, with the instrumental. So perhaps, I will stick only to intrinsic and extrinsic values.

And extrinsic values are to be understood, same as instrumental values. So, let me just write it down, in case there is a confusion for anybody. So, when there is intrinsic, and there is extrinsic. And extrinsic is the same thing as, instrumental. So now, and as we understand that, these values are not properties of the Act, but they are ascriptions of the agent. So as ascriptions of the agent, for somebody, a particular Act can be extrinsically valuable, for somebody, an Act can be intrinsically valuable.

Now, this idea of goodness. Okay. When we talk about technology, as the application of science. And the classical example here, I mentioned, because I frequently come across. Now, science and technology, although used simultaneously, are two distinct fields. Science is something, which is looking, or trying to understand the world.

Technology is trying to apply science, to affect the world out there. So, for science, maybe knowledge is intrinsically valuable, a very broad generalisation. Technology goes ahead, and tries to apply science, to change the world out there. So, when you have a strong sense of entrepreneurship, you want to apply a particular concept, to affect the world there. You can both be intrinsic, and extrinsically motivated. But when you want to make a change out there, then you are more likely looking at the source of information, as something which is extrinsically valuable.

In the same breath, let me also add that, one can also have both degrees of intrinsic and extrinsic value, attached to the same Act. As this is an introductory course, and for the purpose of clarity, we are making a forced binary in concepts, so that the clarity emerges between these two, between two concepts always. But, as in practice, as in lived experience, as in reality, as in the world out there, concepts are not watertight. They are having a thick buffer zone between them. So, just as a particular Act can be both, extrinsically motivated, and intrinsically motivated, to certain degrees, maybe sometimes more extrinsic, less intrinsic, sometimes less extrinsic, more extrinsic.

So, it can change along. So, just like a student can both be learning, for the sake of

curiosity, and also making one's career. It is not an exclusive sense, that well, if it is intrinsic, it is not extrinsic. Now, I would like to leave you with a little more on, intrinsic and extrinsic values, when we talk about, what is intrinsic value.

And, a lot of Philosophers, G.E. Moore, Peter Geach, Christian Korsgaard, have all talked about trying to do a Metaethical Analysis of this, concept of good. So, we will not go into that. But, I just want to leave you with, on the surface of that. So, when we mean, what is this notion of good.

How do we at all define, this concept of good. Well, G.E. Moore, as a Philosopher in a classical paper, tried to establish that, the intrinsic goodness as something irreducible, and probably indescribable. That something, which is good in itself. When you look at good.

The use of the term good. You can use a good knife, a good student, a good person. And yet, if one asks you to describe, what is good, you will find difficulty in describing it. Or, you will find different people answering it differently. For maybe, somebody who finds a person good. Because a good knife, or a good tool, is something that does its job well. A good person, in certain Greek schools, would be somebody who does the job of being a human being well.

And, what is the job of a human being, is to be a human person. Maybe somebody who values being helpful, would hold that a good person has to be helpful. But somebody, whose intrinsic value core sees excellence, would hold that as a good person. So, good is a problematic notion. It is not that simple. I want to leave you with a small example of Peter Geach, when he talks about the difficulty of good as a predicate.

So, when we say, X is a yellow bird. We can always break it down into, X is yellow, and X is a bird. But can we do the same thing, when we say, X is a good singer. So, X is good, and X is a singer. That would not make sense. Because here, good is predicating singer, and is saying that well, is good at the job of singing, but not good in general.

Now, let us come to two other forms of Ethics, that we are, Universal and Situational Ethics. Now, as the name implies, Universal Ethics are claims that are independent of the local frame of reference. Right. So, when it is independent of local frame of reference, it can be global in its application. Whereas, Situational Ethics has been described as something, that emerges from that particular property of the situation.

Right. So, when a philosopher talks about, my station and its duties. That means, by virtue of being in a particular position, these are the duties, that I have. Now, Moral and

Religious Ethics is again, in the same line, slightly similar. So, when one regards oneself as spiritual, but not religious, one is probably advocating certain claims, that one has certain moral values, but which are not founded by religion.

Right. So, there is no necessary contradiction between, morality and religion. But, religious values can very often be based on, religious books, religious traditions. And they need to have a justification, that is rooted in religion and religious literature. Whereas, moral values can also be religious, can also be sourced from religion, but can also be standing on their own, independent of religion. So, that is a small difference, that you should be aware of.

So, with this, we come to the end of the first module. And, we will begin the next module, in the next class. Thank you. .