

Dunman High School
H1 General Paper, Year 6
Value & Importance, Part I: Value – types, influences, perceptions [2025 T1W3]
Lecture Notes

Name		Class	
-------------	--	--------------	--

Organisation of these notes

- A. What may the word 'value' mean?**
1. Values as a **moral compass**
 2. Value as the **worth** or **desirability** of a thing, action or experience
- B. Which types of value are there?**
1. Value in terms of **hedonistic** benefits
 2. **Practical** value
 3. **Economic** value
 4. **Aesthetic** value
 5. **Social** and **cultural** value
 6. Value in terms of **health** and **safety**
 7. **Political** value
 8. **Epistemic/Intellectual** value
 9. **Ethical/Moral** value
- C. Where do values come from? What shapes them?**
1. Feelings/Emotions
 2. Rationality / Logical reasoning
 3. Norms/Conventions
 4. Roles/Duties
 5. Identity
 6. Lifestyle / Way of life
 7. History / Past experiences
 8. Universal human nature
 9. The qualities of the things/actions themselves
- D. Why do people have different perceptions of value?**
1. Value to one stakeholder vs Value to another stakeholder
 2. Tangible values vs Intangible values
 3. Realism/Pragmatism vs Idealism
- E. How may we use these concepts for essays and AQ?**
1. Evaluation
 2. Explanation
 3. Balance
 4. Rebuttal
 5. Resolution and Stand
- F. Some past-year A-level questions related to value**

A. What may the word 'value' mean in the context of discussions about life and society?

1. Values as a **moral compass** *in people*. These refer to morally ideal behaviour and attitudes, such as honesty and discipline, that people aspire to live up to. They serve as guiding principles in people, organisations or communities.
2. **Worth** or **desirability** *of a thing, action or experience*. These are qualities in things, actions or experiences, that make us see those things as worth pursuing or attractive and appealing. We want to acquire certain things because those things seem valuable. We want to do certain actions or have certain experiences because we see value in them. Value is often based on benefits to oneself or others. It may not always be moral.

This lecture is about the second meaning, though the first meaning is related to the next section's item 9 (Ethical/Moral value).

B. Which types of value are there?

1. Value in terms of **hedonistic** benefits
Something is valuable from a hedonistic perspective if we value it for giving us pleasure or comfort, usually through our senses in a superficial manner.
2. **Practical** value
Something has practical value if it is useful for practical purposes. Practical means it involves not just internal feelings or thoughts, but instead involves outward actions that aim at tangible, concrete, observable impacts. Practical value includes helping us achieve practical aims with greater efficiency, efficacy or ease.
3. **Economic** value
Something is economically valuable if it can help us to make money (this is also known as being financially valuable) or boosts business success.
4. **Aesthetic** value
Something has aesthetic value if we value its beauty, artistic creativity, or artistically created symbolic meaning.
5. **Social** and **cultural** value
Something is *socially* valuable if it contributes to collective identity or bonds between people. Something is *culturally* valuable if it contributes to culture. Culture is a community's beliefs, customs, creative works and heritage, all of which contribute to its collective identity and vibrancy.
6. Value in terms of **health** and **safety**
Something is valuable in terms of health if it contributes to people's physical or mental well-being. Something is valuable in terms of safety if it protects people.
7. **Political** value
Something is politically valuable to governments or political figures if it contributes to their power, or boosts people's loyalty to them.
8. **Epistemic/Intellectual** value
Something has *epistemic* value if it contributes to knowledge or truth.
Something has *intellectual* value if it contributes to advanced thinking abilities, especially abstract thinking and deep understanding.
Something has *educational* value if it contributes to students' learning.
9. **Ethical/Moral** value
We see an action as ethical/moral if it follows ethical/moral principles or feelings about what is good or right. This can be influenced by a variety of belief systems, including

religious ethics, environmental ethics, social justice, and egalitarianism. Such moral principles and feelings roughly correspond to the first meaning of 'value' in section A. 'Ethics' and 'morality' mean almost the same thing, but ethics is slightly broader: usually morality is about being good towards others, while ethics can also include being good towards oneself.

This list, though wide-ranging, is not exhaustive.

These types of value can overlap with each other. For instance, economic success and health benefits are often also considered practical benefits.

C. Where does value come from? What shapes value?

1. **Feelings/Emotions:** We are emotionally drawn towards certain things. Our feelings of empathy often guide our sense of morality towards others. Our feelings of craving for sensory pleasure motivates our hedonistic pursuits.
2. **Rationality / Logical reasoning:** We reason that certain things or actions will likely lead to certain valuable outcomes, and we value them based on such reasoning.
3. **Norms/Conventions:** We look at the common behaviour and attitudes of the people around us, this tells us what our community or society normally sees as valuable, and we follow them.
4. **Roles/Duties:** A stakeholder's role in society may include the duty of pursuing certain outcomes that society deems valuable, such as parents' duty of raising children, or governments' duty of protecting the public's safety. Stakeholders thus see value in actions that fulfil their duties.
5. **Identity:** We may identify with certain groups, worldviews or idols that value certain things. Individuals who identify as devout members of a religion are likely to find value in religious culture and religious morality. Followers of influencers may value the commodities and lifestyles the influencers promote, as a way to feel closer to their idols.
6. **Lifestyle / Way of life:** If you live a lifestyle that requires certain things, then you will see value in those things and find it hard to let go of them. If you live a materialistic lifestyle, you are more likely to seek hedonistic experiences and economically valuable things. If you were to transition to a more modest or austere lifestyle, material things may lose their value in your eyes, since you no longer need them to sustain your way of life.
7. **History / Past experiences:** Our negative past experiences make us more likely to value things that can help us avoid such negative experiences. If a person or society has experienced economic hardship, they are more likely to value economic gains. Our history also guides us continue seeking or doing things that have benefitted us in the past. If a society has a successful history of egalitarian policies, it is likely to continue to value egalitarianism.
8. **Human nature:** Based on our biological and psychological make-up, humans universally have certain fundamental needs, such as the need for belonging and the need for health and safety, which make us see value in things that fulfil those needs.
9. **The qualities of the things/actions/experiences themselves:** The above items listed above are qualities of people or stakeholders, but value also comes from things themselves and their characteristics. An artwork's intricate harmony between its elements gives it beauty, and thus aesthetic value. Food's flavouring gives it a pleasurable taste, thus making it appealing from a hedonistic perspective.

D. Why do people have different perceptions of value?

1. Value to one stakeholder vs Value to another stakeholder

Different stakeholders may be shaped by different backgrounds, norms, roles, identities, lifestyles and/or histories. These differences may give them diverging perspectives on which type of value to pursue. One stakeholder may prize certain types of value that are unimportant to another stakeholder.

- A broad-minded stand should empathise with and understand the perspectives of different stakeholders, but still take into account their respective limitations, and aim to integrate and synthesise them if possible.

2. Tangible value vs Intangible value

If something is **tangible**, it is not limited to internal feelings or ideas; instead, we can clearly observe it through our senses or through distinct, concrete, material evidence of it. If something is **intangible**, that usually means it takes the form of interior feelings or ideas, which cannot be easily observed by others and which may also be fuzzy and indistinct.

Largely tangible:

- **Hedonistic** benefits: Pleasure and comfort are often strong sensory experiences, making them largely tangible since they can be easily observed through the senses. However, some aspects of hedonistic experiences, such as the dopamine hit we get from scrolling social media, may be less tangible.
- **Practical** value: Being practical valuable means something serves a practical purpose, which implies tangible, concrete, observable impacts.
- **Economic** value: Money and financial records are tangible evidence of economic value.
- **Political** value: Election votes, political survey results and a political office's official powers of all provide tangible evidence of political power. However, feelings of political loyalty are intangible.

Partially tangible, partially intangible:

- **Aesthetic** value: Beauty experienced through the senses is largely tangible (though it may be subjective). But other aesthetic qualities such as creativity and symbolic meaning are often intangible.
- **Socio-cultural** value: Material culture (food, fashion) is tangible. But social and cultural value also involves intangible things such as feelings of social togetherness and belonging, and feelings of attachment to and pride in one's culture and heritage.
- **Health and safety**: Physical health has tangible indicators in terms of absence of illness or recovery from illness. But mental health is often intangible. Long-term physical health conditions, such as a person's weakened immune system increasing the likelihood of illness in the future, may also be intangible in the present. Physical safety is tangible (though it may be taken for granted when ever-present and hence overlooked).
- **Epistemic/Intellectual** value: Knowledge, truth and intellectual growth are largely based in our minds, rather than in the physically observable world, and so they are largely intangible. Although educational value can be made tangible through test scores and educational qualifications, intellectual value also involves more intangible goals such as the satisfaction of curiosity and the joy of learning.

Largely intangible:

- **Ethical/Moral** value: This is largely based on intangible feelings and abstract ideas about what is good and right. They can be communicated and discussed, but they cannot be seen or touched the way that money can be. (Moral principles are sometimes codified in the tangible form of religious texts and a society's laws, but these do not cover all moral ideas.)

- A broad-minded stand should take into account both the tangible and intangible, but also understand why some people naturally tend to prioritise or pay more attention to what is tangible, and overlook the intangible.

3. Realism/Pragmatism vs Idealism

In an ideal world, we would have everything that we value.

But in reality, we cannot have everything that we value. We have limited resources and abilities. Some things that we value may be incompatible with other things we value. And some things we value for their benefits may be harmful in other ways.

We can respond to this tension between ideals and reality by either being idealists, or by being realists and pragmatists.

Idealist believe that our thoughts and actions should be guided by our vision of an ideal world. Even if that ideal world seems unrealistic, we should still believe in this ideal vision, and work to make the real world closer to that ideal world. Idealists tend to find value in things that follow their ideal vision.

Realists believe that we should accept that the real world is far from ideal, and our thoughts and actions should be based on our non-ideal reality, not an ideal vision.

Pragmatists, who are usually allied with realists, believe that we should sacrifice some unrealistic ideals so as to be more practical and achieve more realistic goals.

Realists and pragmatists may see less value in unrealistic goals.

- A broad-minded stand may aim to synthesise both pragmatism and idealism. One way to do this is by proposing to be pragmatic in the short run when current conditions do not yet allow us to achieve everything we value, but still aim for idealistic outcomes in the long run and work to gradually improve existing conditions in an ideal direction.

E. How may we use these ideas for essays and AQ?

1. **Evaluation:** We can point out the *type of value* that a thing or action possesses – this helps us evaluate it. By pointing out that something is valuable in multiple ways, we can point out its wide-ranging value. By pointing out that something which lacks one type of value nevertheless has great value of a different type, we can thereby evaluate it as being more valuable than it initially appears.
2. **Explanation:** We can explain *why and how* people see value in something, and we can *why and how* people overlook the value of something, thus giving our arguments deep explanation.
3. **Balance:** Such explanations can compare and contrast a *broad range of perspectives*, thus giving our arguments balance.
4. **Rebuttal:** By understanding the *limitations* of each perspective, we can critique it, thus giving our arguments a strong rebuttal.
5. **Stand:** By *addressing their limitations* or by *synthesising perspectives* to make them complement one another, we can come to a resolution and arrive at a stronger stand.

F. Some past-year A-level questions related to value

(Not an exhaustive list)

Can mathematics be seen as anything more than a useful tool in everyday life? (2010)

Is there any value in preserving minority languages in the world? (2012)

'Education should only be concerned with what is useful in life.' Discuss. (2013)

Evaluate the claim that equality of opportunity for females is a desirable, but unrealistic, goal. (2016)

Is regulation of the press desirable? (2017)

Do handicrafts still have value when machine-produced goods are so readily available? (2018)

Is globalisation to be welcomed or feared today? (2019)

'There is a lack of appreciation for the value of music.' How far is this true in your society? (2024)