

## Psychology and Value

Steinert, S.

**DOI**

[10.1007/978-3-031-10733-7\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10733-7_2)

**Publication date**

2023

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Interdisciplinary Value Theory

**Citation (APA)**

Steinert, S. (2023). Psychology and Value. In *Interdisciplinary Value Theory* (pp. 7-31). Palgrave MacMillan Publishers. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10733-7\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-10733-7_2)

**Important note**

To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).  
Please check the document version above.

**Copyright**

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download, forward or distribute the text or part of it, without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license such as Creative Commons.

**Takedown policy**

Please contact us and provide details if you believe this document breaches copyrights.  
We will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

***Green Open Access added to TU Delft Institutional Repository***

***'You share, we take care!' - Taverne project***

**<https://www.openaccess.nl/en/you-share-we-take-care>**

Otherwise as indicated in the copyright section: the publisher is the copyright holder of this work and the author uses the Dutch legislation to make this work public.



# 2

## Psychology and Value

**Abstract** Most psychologists take value to be abstract motivational goals that transcend situations and that systematically relate to one another. First, this chapter introduces the ideas of historical precursors of the psychological investigation of value, like Windelband, Lotze, Scheler, and Brentano. Then, the chapter outlines influential psychological theories of value, specifically the theories of Vernon and Allport, Rokeach, and Shalom Schwartz. The chapter also considers the recent functional theory of value (Gouveia) and presents how psychologists distinguish values from other concepts, like attitudes and traits. The last part of the chapter focuses on psychological research concerning value change.

**Keywords** Psychology • Value change • Value theory • Value

Psychology has a long history of theorizing about people's values, and this chapter will present essential and influential psychological theories of value. In the chapter, we will also look at how psychologists distinguish different kinds of values and how they distinguish value from related concepts, like attitudes. The chapter ends with an overview of how psychologists approach value change.

It is crucial to note that most psychologists nowadays distinguish value (singular) from values (plural). Value (singular) is a quality attributed to an object or inherent in an object. Most psychologists are interested in values (plural), which are the broad motivational goals, guiding principles, or abstract ideals that people consider important. It would be more apt to talk about the psychology of values instead of the psychology of value.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.1 Introduction to Psychology

The psychological investigation of value picked up momentum in the middle of the twentieth century. That was when Gordon Allport and Philip Vernon proposed their psychological theory of value, which became one of the most influential accounts of value. Ever since Allport's and Vernon's proposal, the investigation of value has been a staple of psychological research. This does not mean there was no fluctuation in the interest of value. Between the 1970s and 1990s, values did not play a crucial role in mainstream psychology. However, there was some work on the periphery, e.g., by Milton Rokeach, which would later become influential.

Before we focus on psychological accounts of values, it is worthwhile to consider some of the historical precursors of the psychological study of value. During the phase when psychology consolidated as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century, philosophy had a considerable influence. Most psychologists at the time engaged with philosophy, and many scholars worked at the intersection of (early) psychology and philosophy. Although their ideas continue to shape philosophical and psychological theorizing, their contribution often goes unacknowledged in current research on value.

Two influential but almost forgotten scholars are Herman Lotze and Wilhelm Windelband. Both made many contributions to psychology and philosophy, and in what follows, we will briefly consider their contributions to value theory.

Let us start with Herman Lotze, a nineteenth-century German physician and philosopher. Lotze was an early pioneer of scientific psychology

---

<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Shalom Schwartz here. One of his remarks on the draft convinced me to address this distinction.

and inspired many philosophers, including John Dewey, whom we will encounter later. According to philosopher George Pierson (1988), Lotze was the first philosopher who used the term ‘value’ philosophically. Still, his concept of value is difficult to reconstruct because Lotze synthesized ideas of many previous philosophers, like Kant and Hegel, and his remarks on value are scattered throughout his work.

The general idea of Lotze is that value is a guiding principle that is both universal and objective. According to Lotze, values are objective because they do not depend on subjective attitudes we have in response to something. Although values are inherent in things, they can present themselves to the subject, and subjective states are crucial because objective values present themselves in our experiences of things and events through feelings of pleasure and pain. As Pierson puts it, according to Lotze, “[v]alues are made known to the mind through feelings” (Pierson, 1988, p. 117). Following Lotze, other philosophers also stressed the crucial role of feelings in the apprehension of value. One example is Max Scheler, whose ideas we will encounter later.

Another scholar who greatly influenced the psychological study of value is Wilhelm Windelband, who is considered the father of modern psychology. Windelband makes the crucial distinction between valuation and value. Value and valuation need not coincide, and the same thing, or state of affairs, can elicit different modes of valuation and value judgment. Windelband, like Lotze and many others, stresses the relationship between subject and object. Evaluations express the relationship between the evaluating subject and how the object is represented in feelings of approval or disapproval. He writes: “Value ... is never found in the object itself as a property. It consists in a relation to an appreciating mind [...] Take away will and feeling and there is no such thing as value” (Windelband, 1921, p. 215). With this statement, Windelband anticipates the link between feeling, emotion, and value, which most current psychological accounts of value stress.

Windelband is not the only scholar to point out the connection between value, emotions, and feelings. According to nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosopher Max Scheler (2014), our faculty of ‘Wertfühlen’ (value-feeling) gives us access to objective value. He takes feeling (German: Fühlen) to be an affective perception. Value-feeling has a cognitive

function because value-feeling immediately give us value relations, like the relation being-better-than.

Scheler also proposed a universal order of values and claimed that value categories could be ranked by importance. According to Scheler, this hierarchy of values is universal and does not change. There are four different kinds of values available to humans. At the lowest level of the hierarchy are the sensual values (whether something is agreeable or disagreeable), followed by vital values (whether something promotes life or not). Higher up are mental values only accessible to entities with a mind. Mental values include the sense of beauty and ugliness, the appreciation of something as right and wrong, the ability to distinguish true or false, and the ability to love and hate. Finally, at the top level, we find what Scheler calls the values of the holy (and the unholy).

We can distinguish the higher and lower levels of values. For instance, the higher mental values are more enduring. For example, the sensual pleasure of food is fleeting, but the beautiful painting endures. Also, the lower values are more dividable than the higher values. For example, splitting a beautiful painting in half will erase its value, whereas dividing delicious food into smaller portions will not erase its sensual value. Furthermore, the higher values facilitate a higher quality of pleasure that goes beyond mere sensual pleasure.

Values, so Scheler, are organized hierarchically, and there are specific feelings that correspond to each level of value. For the sensual value of agreeableness, the lowest level, there are feelings of pleasure and pain. Vital values are connected to feelings like liveliness, being glad, feeling disgusted, or feeling anxious. The mental values are linked to aesthetic feelings, like the experience of beauty or feelings of joy and sorrow. Lastly, the values of the holy are connected to feelings of bliss or hopelessness.

Before we turn to Vernon and Allport's first psychological account of value, let us consider Franz Brentano, who is arguably one of the most influential figures in psychology and philosophy. Brentano attempted to combine philosophy and psychology<sup>2</sup> systematically, and one of his

---

<sup>2</sup> Brentano distinguished between what he calls 'genetic psychology' and 'descriptive psychology'. The former is the empirical study of psychological phenomena by scientific means and the latter seeks to describe the mind from within, that is from the first-person perspective. Descriptive psychology and insights into human subjectivity, so Brentano should be established as part of empirical psychology. The study of the mind should use the methods of description and introspection.

greatest achievements is the popularization of the concept of ‘intentionality’.<sup>3</sup> Emotions play a crucial role in Brentano’s account of value. Brentano did not believe objective value properties exist (Montague, 2017). Goodness and badness are not properties of external objects, and terms like ‘good’ and ‘bad’ do not refer to anything. Individuals must arrive at the concept of goodness/ badness through some internal perception. An individual needs a specific kind of experience to know value. To represent something as good or bad, according to Brentano, requires an emotional experience because our concept of ‘good’ originates from emotional experience (Montague, 2017, p. 84).

There is no denying that philosophers like Brentano and Scheler greatly influenced the development of psychology and that they particularly influenced the development of psychological accounts of value. We can see this influence in the first genuine psychological theory of values, to which we will now turn.

## 2.2 Value in Psychology

Philip E. Vernon and Gordon Allport (1931) developed the first psychological value theory. Vernon and Allport took inspiration from the work of German philosopher and psychologist Eduard Spranger, who was working in the tradition of Franz Brentano. Spranger proposed that there are six so-called value orientations and that these value orientations help us to distinguish six primary personality types: the theoretical, the economic, the aesthetic, the social, the political, and the religious personality type. Persons with different personality types are motivated by different goals. For instance, a theoretical person is primarily interested in and motivated by the discovery of truth and knowledge creation. In contrast, somebody who is mainly a political person is predominantly interested in power. It needs to be emphasized that these personality types are

---

<sup>3</sup>In a nutshell, Brentano claimed that every mental state takes an object beyond itself. That is, a mental state is ‘about’ something. For instance, a belief is about some state of the world and a desire means to desire something. The intentional object of a mental state can be another mental state as well. For instance, we can have Beliefs about our beliefs.

ideal types and that people's personality is often a mix of different value orientations.

Drawing on Spranger's idea about the connection between values and personality, Allport and Vernon proposed that values are the key to a psychological investigation of personality. They suggested that we must focus on values if we want to grasp individual personality as a coherent system instead of a sum of isolated aspects. Their idea here is that how people evaluate things reflects their personality. According to Vernon and Allport, values are the fundamental convictions about what is and is not important in life, and people's evaluative attitudes reflect their values.<sup>4</sup> For Allport and Vernon, value is a combination of (1) an interest that motivates the initiation and maintenance of behavior, and (2) an evaluative attitude that influences the perception and evaluation of things.<sup>5</sup>

After Vernon and Allport introduced their psychological account of value, which links values to personality, other psychologists consolidated the link between personality and value. Two other very influential theories of value followed in the footsteps of Vernon and Allport because they consider value within the framework of personality theory and self-concept. The first is Milton Rokeach's theory of value, and the second is Shalom Schwartz's approach.

Rokeach bases his theory of value (Rokeach, 1973) on the idea that personality is a concentric system. In this system, beliefs about oneself and one's values are at the center. At the core are beliefs about oneself (self-conception), and values are the next layer of the system. As we move towards the periphery of the personality system, there are beliefs and attitudes about the world, people, and events. Finally, less important beliefs are farther away from the center. Values, then, are of utmost importance to the person.

---

<sup>4</sup>They use the terms 'value attitudes' and 'evaluative attitudes' interchangeably.

<sup>5</sup>Based on their notion of value, which was inspired by Spranger's idea of value orientation, Vernon and Allport developed one of the first psychological questionnaires for personal value. Their value questionnaire measures the preference for the above-mentioned six types of values and yields the relative strength of the six values.



Because he thinks that personality is a system of beliefs, it is not surprising that Rokeach thinks of value in terms of beliefs. According to him, values are “enduring beliefs that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence” (Rokeach, 1973, 5). Note that this definition proposes a connection between values to justifications for judgments and behavior.

For Rokeach, there are two main types of values: terminal values (or end-state values) and instrumental values. Terminal values are desirable end-states, and instrumental values are preferable modes of behavior or means to achieve terminal values. Examples of terminal values include self-respect and pleasure, and examples of instrumental values are politeness and courage.

For Rokeach, values are universal, and he proposed that all people have the same set of 36 values, which comprises 18 terminal and 18 instrumental values. However, although there are only 36 universal values, people can differ in their hierarchy of values. That means people vary in the relative importance they give to values. For instance, two people can believe that honesty is important, but for one, honesty is more important and carries more weight in decision-making. Rokeach thought that the hierarchy of values makes people who they are. In other words, the hierarchy of values is a crucial part of people’s identity.

Milton Rokeach’s value theory influenced the thinking of many psychologists, including Shalom Schwartz (1992), who adapted and refined Rokeach’s approach. Schwartz’s account of personal value is one of the most influential and widely used psychological theories of value today. The theory combines Rokeach’s idea of values as desirable goals with Allport’s and Vernon’s idea that values are interests and evaluative attitudes.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Shalom Schwartz pointed out to me that his account focuses on desirability. Although preference is implicit in Schwartz’s account of the hierarchical organization of value, the account allows that two, or more, values are equally important to a person.

Building on these previous psychological accounts of value, Schwartz proposes that values have seven features.<sup>7</sup> First, Schwartz retains Rokeach's idea to think about values in terms of beliefs, and he suggests that values are beliefs linked to emotions.

Second, these beliefs are about desirable goals or end-states, and they motivate action. There is widespread agreement in psychology that values are crucial for the motivation of behavior. People want to realize and preserve the goals that align with their values, and actions that contribute to these goals are more attractive to people. For instance, people vote for political parties they think will advance goals related to their personal values (Caprara et al., 2006).

The third feature of values as beliefs about desirable goals is that values transcend specific actions and situations. That means a value is stable in the sense that it will be important in all situations that have implications for that value.<sup>8</sup> A value can be more or less important in a situation, depending on whether the value is relevant. Values are not like a fixed point of importance but more like fundamental tendencies with a spectrum of variability.<sup>9</sup>

Fourth, values are standards for evaluating actions, people, and events. We evaluate our actions and the actions of others based on whether they promote or block the attainment of a desired goal or end-state. Also, when we think about the future, we evaluate events and actions according to their potential implications for our values.

Fifth, Schwartz proposes that people's values form a relatively stable hierarchical system ordered by relative importance. This proposal of a

---

<sup>7</sup> Some of these features are reflected in the definition of value that Schwartz sometimes includes in his publications. For instance, here is one definition: "I define values as desirable trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity" (Schwartz, 1994, 21). In another publication, Schwartz proposes this definition: "I define values as conceptions of the desirable that guide the way social actors (e.g., organizational leaders, policy-makers, individual persons) select actions, evaluate people and events, and explain their action and evaluations." (Schwartz, 1999, 24).

<sup>8</sup> I would like to thank Shalom Schwartz for urging me to be more precise here.

<sup>9</sup> I would like to thank Gregory Maio for bringing to my attention this interpretation about the stability and variability of value. For more on change in individual value priorities and the variability of value systems, please see Seligman and Katz (1996).

value hierarchy reflects the influence of Rokeach, who, as you will recall, also proposed a hierarchy of values.<sup>10</sup>

Sixth, the impact of values on everyday decisions and actions is rarely conscious and transparent to the acting person. Instead, values usually operate in the background but can be made explicit through reflection.

The seventh feature of values in Schwartz's value theory is that values can compete with one another. The relative importance of multiple, sometimes competing values guides the interpretation of a situation or action. When multiple values are essential to a person, they must make trade-offs between them. To take an everyday example, a person who values hedonistic activities and financial stability may have to make a trade-off because driving a car is enjoyable (hedonism) but it also has implications for financial stability. In a nutshell, Schwartz (1992) proposes that values are desirable trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles that can vary in importance, depending on their relevance to the situation.

Recall that Rokeach, Allport, and Vernon all proposed lists of values. Schwartz also presents a list of basic individual value categories. The idea behind basic value categories is that while there is a multitude of value terms, these value terms fall into basic categories. That is to say that all value terms have a specific location in a system of value categories. Schwartz uses the concept of '*basic values*' for these value categories. The fundamental values (value categories) include security, hedonism, power, and benevolence. Basic values can be distinguished by their goals. For instance, security is a basic value that aims to ensure the safety and stability of society, social relationships, and the self. The basic value of hedonism has as its goal excitement and novelty. The basic value of power has the goal of social status, prestige, and dominance over people, whereas the value of benevolence has as its goal the welfare of the group.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>The crucial difference between Rokeach and Schwartz is that Rokeach assumed that every value can be ranked as either more or less important than every other value.

<sup>11</sup>This list is subject to revision and recently Schwartz refined his model, which now distinguishes between 19 basic values (Schwartz et al., 2012).

When we move to a higher level of abstraction, so Schwartz, we can cluster the basic values into four higher-order values: openness to change, self-transcendence, self-enhancement, and conservation. These four higher-order values reflect fundamental conflicts between values. For example, the higher-order value of self-transcendence concerns basic values that express concern for other people (e.g., benevolence). In contrast, the higher-order value category of self-enhancement includes basic values focused on personal needs, like achievement.

One of Schwartz's innovative suggestions is that the internal structure of the value system (i.e., how values relate to each other) is universal and the same for all people. Values are related to one another based on how motivationally compatible or incompatible they are. Some values are motivationally compatible with one another, like security and tradition, whereas others, like tradition and hedonism, are motivationally opposed. For instance, the values security and tradition are motivationally compatible because both are characterized by order, self-restriction, and reluctance to change. The compatibility and incompatibility of values can be represented as a segmented circular structure. Compatible values are located next to each other, and incompatible values are further away or on opposite sides of the circle. A person's value system has an internal structure determined by the conflicts and compatibilities between values. Although basic and higher-order values are universal, people can differ in the importance of values. For instance, some people find achievement important, while others find benevolence more important.

Empirical studies support Schwartz's value theory. For example, plenty of cross-cultural studies could corroborate the claim that the meaning of values and the circular structure of values are consistent across cultures (Schwartz, 2011). So, it seems there is a set of universal values that all people share. Furthermore, researchers could repeatedly show that values are systematically related. So, when one value becomes important, compatible value(s) next to it in the circular structure also increases in importance.

In contrast, the incompatible value(s) on the opposite side of the circle decrease in importance (Bardi et al., 2009; Maio et al., 2009). For example, consider the motivationally compatible values of security and tradition, which sit next to each other in the circular value system. When the

importance of security increases for a person, then the importance of tradition increases simultaneously. When the importance of tradition increases, the importance of motivationally incompatible values, like hedonism, which sits across tradition in the circular structure, decreases in importance.

It is no understatement to say that the value theory of Schwartz is the most widely used account of value in psychology. Still, despite this dominance, there are other theories on the market. For instance, one of the most recent value theories is the so-called functional theory of value developed by Valdíney Gouveia and colleagues (Gouveia et al., 2014). This theory synthesizes elements from earlier value theories, including the accounts of Schwartz and Rokeach.

According to the functional theory, values have two kinds of functions. First, values guide our actions; second, values are cognitive expressions of needs. Regarding action guidance, the functional theory differentiates values based on the orientation of the pursued goal. There are personal goals, social goals, and central goals. Personal goals focus on the individual, whereas social goals focus on the individual as part of a social group. The central goals strike a middle ground between social and personal goals. Central goals can simultaneously support individual goals and social goals.

The functional theory proposes that values guide behavior and are expressions of needs. According to the functional theory, humans have two kinds of needs. First, people have so-called thriving needs, and second, people have survival needs. Survival needs are needs related to the survival of the individual or the survival of the group. For instance, survival needs are needs focused on physiological and psychological survival, like food and health. Thriving needs are needs concerning intellectual and emotional stimulation. According to the functional theory, values express survival or thriving needs.

To remind you, the functional theory distinguishes values by their action-guiding function, related to three goals (personal, social, and central), and whether they express thriving or survival needs. This distinction yields a matrix of six fundamental values. So, like previous value theories, the functional theory proposes that humans have a set of fundamental values. According to the functional theory, these basic values are the

following: (1) excitement values (the focus is on personal goals, and they express thriving needs like pleasure), (2) supra-personal values (with a focus on central goals, and they express thriving needs relating to abstract ideas like aesthetics, cognition, and self-actualization), (3) interactive values (focus is on social goals and they express thriving needs like belonging and affiliation), (4) promotion values (focus is on personal goals and they express survival needs), (5) existence values (here the focus is on central goals and survival needs like physiological needs and needs for security), and (6) normative values (where the focus is on social goals and they express survival needs like security and control). Because the functional theory of value is relatively new, the scientific jury is still out on whether this account of value has advantages over other, more established accounts.

Based on the value theories reviewed, most psychologists consider values *abstract* entities. For instance, Allport, Rokeach, and Schwartz think values are abstract ideals that guide behavior. Some psychologists, however, stress that we should also pay attention to the concrete dimension of value. Gregory Maio (2010), for instance, proposes that a satisfying understanding of value, and a complete account of their role in people's lives, requires that we consider how values are interpreted and applied in concrete situations. To put it poetically, we must focus on how people infuse values with life.

Furthermore, people often express values abstractly. For instance, just because two people endorse the values of loyalty or honesty, does not mean both interpret these values similarly. Also, even if people have the same abstract idea of a value, they can differ in how they think it should be realized and achieved. These differences is why Maio thinks "values are abstract ideals that are best understood concretely" (Maio, 2016, p. viii). Maio suggests that values are mental representations and that we can consider three levels of abstraction. There are systems of abstract values, specific abstract values, and, lastly, concretely instantiated values (Maio, 2010, p. 9). As we will see in the next section, this abstract-concrete distinction echoes Kurt Lewin's idea that values are more abstract than aims and that the former influences the latter. Also, in the chapter on sociology and values, we will encounter Talcott Parsons, who had some ideas about how abstract values relate to concrete goals.

## 2.3 Values and Related Concepts in Psychology

Psychologists focus on many mind-related phenomena closely linked to values, but should not be conflated with them. Therefore, It may be worthwhile to say a little more about how values can be distinguished from other psychological constructs, like goals and attitudes. Let us look first at the distinction between values and goals.

We pursue various goals throughout the day and during our life, and the values we endorse inform some of these goals. So what is the difference between values and goals, and why is it important to distinguish them? Kurt Lewin was among the first to distinguish between values and goals (Lewin, 1951).<sup>12</sup> According to Lewin, we can never realize our values because they are ideals. Instead, in our actions, we try to realize concrete goals based on our definition or perception of a situation. These perceptions and interpretations, in turn, are influenced by our values.

Here is an example of how values relate to goals and interpretations of situations: Let us assume that a person values loyalty. Because loyalty is one of their values, this person will notice when a situation has implications for loyalty, depending on whether the person interprets the situation as loyalty-relevant. The person will also interpret some actions as a realization of the value of loyalty (whereas they consider other actions as the realization of disloyalty). Based on interpreting a situation as loyalty-relevant and characterizing possible actions as loyalty realizing, the person will aim to act to realize the value of loyalty. Lewin's theory is a multi-layered account that links the abstract constructs of values to the immediate aims of actions.<sup>13</sup>

Many psychologists consider values a crucial part of personality and an essential part of the self-concept (Hitlin, 2003). However, we can

---

<sup>12</sup>Lewin's view on values is encapsulated in this quote: "Values influence behavior but have not the character of a goal (i.e., of a force field). For example, the individual does not try to "reach" the value of fairness, but fairness is "guiding" his behavior [...] In other words, values are not force fields, but they "induce" force fields" (Lewin, 1951, p. 41).

<sup>13</sup>Lewin's ideas about the relation between values and concrete goals still influences empirical research. For instance, Bas Verplanken and Rob Holland (Verplanken & Holland, 2002) used a framework inspired by Lewin to investigate the relation between value and behavior.

distinguish values from other constructs, like attitudes, that are relevant to the identity of people. Although attitudes can express values, we should not conflate the two. For instance, Milton Rokeach (1968), the psychologist who considered values to form the center of the self, stressed that both values and attitudes influence social behavior, but only values can influence attitudes. He defines attitude as an organized whole of multiple beliefs focused on a specific object (either a physical or social object or a concrete or abstract object) or a situation. Some beliefs that make up an attitude concern matters of fact (descriptive), whereas other beliefs are evaluative. Put differently, an attitude is a cluster of beliefs that includes claims that certain things are true/ false and claims that some things are desirable/ undesirable.

Rokeach was not the first psychologist to compare values and attitudes, and there are many studies on the interrelations, commonalities, and differences between attitudes and values. For instance, attitudes are specific judgments focused on an object, whereas values are abstract and trans-situational, as Schwartz would put it. Furthermore, values are more relevant to people's self-concept than attitudes (Hanel et al., 2021).

Besides goals and attitudes, we can distinguish values from traits, which are also crucial aspects of personality. Traits are enduring dispositions or tendencies to exhibit consistent patterns of thought, feeling, and action. Traits delineate how people are like, whereas values denote things that people find essential or desirable (see Roccas et al., 2014). Nevertheless, there are some commonalities between traits and values. For instance, traits and values are stable (Maio, 2010). Besides these commonalities, there are also significant differences. For example, people do not usually use traits to justify their actions (although they may use traits to explain them). Justifications require reasons, and people take values to be reasons.

## 2.4 Distinctions Between Values: Personal Values and Cultural Values

Psychologists often refer to the following features to characterize personal values (e.g., see Sagiv et al., 2017): Personal values are cognitive representations of broad and trans-situational motivational goals. At this point,



one may worry that this characterization is too limiting because values have an interpersonal and cultural dimension.

Although psychologists have mainly concentrated on personal values, this does not mean they have ignored cultural aspects. Some psychologists distinguish between personal and cultural values, and between personal value systems and the value system of groups, sometimes called the ‘ideological value system’ (Rohan, 2000, p. 265).

What are cultural values? Robin Williams (1970) claims that cultural values are implicit or explicit, abstract ideas about what is good, right, and desirable shared and pursued by group members.<sup>14</sup> Social institutions often reflect the values of a society. For instance, a collective’s norms, practices, rituals, and symbols are based on and express shared cultural values (Schwartz, 1999). For example, stressing the deeds of heroes in stories or rituals instills the importance of valor in group members (We will come back to rituals, culture, and value in the chapter on anthropology).

The Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede (2001; Orig. 1980) conducted one of the earliest studies of cultural value, and his work is considered a classic in cultural psychology. Using an analogy inspired by computer science, Hofstede suggests that culture is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 9). For Hofstede, the concept of mind is rather broad and includes feeling and action. The collective programming, or culture, manifests itself in people’s preferences and a group’s symbols and rituals. A value, according to Hofstede, is a “broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others” (p. 5). Values cannot be directly observed but must be inferred from people’s behavior and preferences. Note that Hofstede, like many other psychologists, thinks of value in the plural sense as the things that people or a social group find desirable or important.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>What it means for value to be ‘shared’ is controversial. There is empirical research that suggests that within societies there is more value variance at the individual level than variance between societies at the cultural level (Fischer & Schwartz, 2011).

<sup>15</sup>Hofstede believed that individuals and collectives can hold values. Similar to the value system of an individual, the values of a collective are organized hierarchical. Furthermore, societies, groups, and cultures can be distinguished based on which values many of their members endorse.

Psychologists are aware that the notion of culture is fraught with difficulties. For instance, there is disagreement among psychologists as to whether culture is external to the individual or whether culture is something that resides within individuals. Some cultural psychologists propose that we should think about culture as exclusively located in the mind of individuals (e.g., Wyer et al., 2009).<sup>16</sup> In contrast, Shalom Schwartz has argued that cultural value orientation is a hypothetical and latent feature of a society or group that is not located in individuals' minds. Schwartz proposes that culture is a "press" (Schwartz, 2011, 470f.) that affects attitudes and beliefs via practices, language, expectations, and social constraints. Cultural values, so Schwartz (2014), must be inferred from social institutions and manifestations, like beliefs, symbols, norms, and practices, that are prevalent in society.

## 2.5 Value Change

Psychology is concerned with how people think and behave. How people think and act, however, can change over time. People also change how they judge things. The 16th century French philosopher Montaigne expressed this eloquently: "Never did two men judge alike about the same thing, and it is impossible to find two opinions exactly alike, not only in different men, but in the same man at different times" (Montaigne, 1979, p. 816f.). If judgments and beliefs can change, it is sensible to ask whether values can change.

Although it is intuitive to think that people change their values, researchers find that people usually perceive their values to be stable and immutable (Roccas et al., 2014). As we have seen, many psychologists believe that values are a part of personality and people's self-concept. Challenging your values is uncomfortable and has implications for your sense of self. Therefore, Gregory Maio and James Olson (1998) suggest that values are like 'truisms' because they are rarely questioned or

---

<sup>16</sup> As we will see in the chapter on anthropology, the anthropologist Louis Dumont makes a similar claim. He proposed that culture resides in mental structures.

challenged. People are more inclined to change their beliefs about things that are not important to them and not linked to their personalities.

Although people perceive their values as stable and rarely challenge them, there is empirical evidence that personal value change occurs (Maio, 2010). For instance, with the help of experimental manipulations that rely on self-persuasion, psychologists could increase the importance of so-called benevolence values (Arieli et al., 2014). These values relate to concerns for the welfare of those with whom we identify and can be expressed in helping others. Moreover, the increase in the importance of benevolence values persisted up to a month after the experimental intervention.

Some value change involves cognitive effort, but sometimes value change happens automatically. For instance, Milton Rokeach's (1973) method of value self-confrontation is a voluntary and effortful attempt to change values. Rokeach believed that people tend to overestimate how competent and moral they are. When individuals are given feedback about a mismatch between their values, what they expect from themselves, and their behavior, they will be troubled. Some people will adapt their values to reduce this negative affective state and achieve consistency between their self-image and reality. There is some empirical evidence that using the method of value self-confrontation can change people's values (Grube et al., 1994).

Most value change likely happens involuntarily when people mature and have experiences, like when life's trajectory takes a turn. For instance, when people immigrate to another country, their value system adapts to the value system of their new home (Bardi et al., 2014).

It seems then that value change can happen via conscious processes, which are more reflective and effortful, and via non-conscious automatic processes. To reconcile the conscious and non-conscious modes of value change, Anat Bardi and Robin Goodwin (2011) proposed an integrative framework. They present five factors that can facilitate value change or change in the importance of values: priming, adaptation, identification, consistency maintenance, and direct persuasion. Let us consider priming, which involves no effort by the subject, and persuasion, which requires effort. Priming, when an alternative way of thinking about a situation is activated unbeknownst to the person, can contribute to short-term value

change (Gardner et al., 1999). It is important to note that priming activates a concept and will likely not lead to a long-lasting substantive value change. Activating a concept via priming leads a person to temporarily judge a value as more important in that situation.<sup>17</sup> Persuasion, in contrast, involves an effort by the subject because it invites individuals to reconsider and change their values. For instance, education and social campaigns, like animal rights activism, are attempts to persuade people to consider changing their values.<sup>18</sup>

Societal value change can happen within a couple of years. For example, investigating the value orientation of Turkish youth from 1989 to 1995, Meral Çileli (2000) discovered that the value orientation became more individualistic and competitive. We can explain this change as an adaptation to the changes in the socio-economic situation in Turkey. Values don't always change that quickly, however. For example, Central and Eastern Europe witnessed considerable and extensive political and social changes after the collapse of the communist regimes. If people adapt their values to changes in external circumstances, one expects to find a shift in values. However, Schwartz et al. (2000) could not find that these external social and political changes significantly affected people's values, even 5–6 years after the collapse.

The available psychological studies of short-term value change suggest that value change follows a predictable pattern: When a value increases in importance, the opposite values, which have opposite motivational goals, become less important. This pattern of change is in line with Schwartz's proposal that values are systematically related. For instance, when people perceive a threat, the self-protection values, like security and tradition, become more important, and values like openness to change decrease in importance. Researchers observed this type of change in Finnish students in 2011, after the terrorist attacks of September 11 (Verkasalo et al., 2006). This value change, however, was only brief. Besides threats to bodily security, economic insecurity is another threat related to self-protection and well-being. In a cross-national and comparative study of

---

<sup>17</sup>I am grateful to Gregory Maio for illuminating this issue for me.

<sup>18</sup>Of course, different factors, like how socially entrenched the old values are, influence how successful these attempts will be.

young Europeans' change in value priorities after the global financial crisis, Sortheix et al. (2019) found a shift from growth and self-expansion values, like hedonism, to self-protection values, like security and tradition. Again, the change in the importance of values reflects the pattern predicted by Schwartz's model.

Not all changes in values are short-lived. Psychologists could observe longer-lasting value changes after significant life transitions and changes because of education. For instance, in a longitudinal study, Bardi et al. (2014) looked at three major life transitions: the vocational training of police recruits, the education of psychology and business students, and the migration of people from Poland to Great Britain. They found that people's values adapt to fit the new life situation.<sup>19</sup> Most pronounced was the value change after immigration to another country. Bardi and collaborators speculate that the reason for this shift is that moving to another country affects many different aspects of life.

There is also evidence that values change continuously throughout life (Gouveia et al., 2015). This is because values reflect people's psycho-social dimension (e.g., a teenager has different psychological and social needs than a 50-year-old), and changes in this psycho-social dimension facilitate changes in values. For instance, when people get older and their sensory abilities and energy decline, values related to new stimuli and sensation-seeking also decline in importance (Gouveia et al., 2015). To reiterate, almost all the studies on value change throughout life show that the change is systematic. The increase in the importance of one value is accompanied by the rise in motivationally compatible values, whereas opposing values decrease in importance.

We have seen that education and changes in life's trajectory, or social circumstances, like immigration (Bardi et al., 2014), can influence people's values. Some of these changes in an individual's life are related to societal shifts and economic development. For instance, it seems that socioeconomic factors and living conditions influence the value structure of individuals (Fischer et al., 2011).

---

<sup>19</sup>Which does not mean that people change their values consciously. Although, as we have seen with self-persuasion, people can try to change their values.

If people's values are closely tied to their economic and social situation, one would expect that value change accompanies economic changes. Indeed, researchers could show that economic development and accompanying social changes, like urbanization, lead to a change in value because people adapt their value system to new circumstances. For instance, by using Google Books Ngram Viewer, a tool to chart the occurrence of words in a large corpus of texts, Patricia Greenfield (2013) found that between 1800 to 2000, word use related to individualistic and materialistic values increased in frequency. This increase in frequency reflects the growth in urban populations and the decline of rural populations. Community-focused values relating to obligation, duty, and welfare of others, are more conducive to life in rural communities. In contrast, materialist individualist values focusing on individuality and personal property are better suited for urban environments with less tightly knit social relations.

Besides the influence of economic development on values, psychologists have considered other potential factors that can facilitate value change. For instance, Patricia Greenfield (2009, 2016) presents an account that focuses on the implications of social change for values. Greenfield's theory includes multiple levels: On the top level are sociological variables, like sociodemographic factors, and the middle level is cultural variables, like collectivistic or individualistic values or hierarchical and egalitarian gender relations. Finally, the two bottom levels comprise psychological variables, like socialization practices and learning environments, which can lead to behavioral shifts.

According to Greenfield, the world has a dominant direction of social change. This change includes the shift from rural to urban, from less technology to more, and from less to more wealth. Greenfield links these dominant trends to changes in social values. Novel socialization practices and learning environments (the bottom levels, see above), which can lead to new behavior patterns and psychological changes, reflect these changing values.

The idea of a link between socio-economic development and value change is a key feature of modernization theory, which claims that value system changes accompany the economic development of societies. For instance, industrial societies transformed into postmodern societies over time, and the rise of humanitarian and emancipatory values accompanied

this shift (Inglehart, 1997). The relation between socio-economic development and values need not be a one-way street because values may also facilitate economic development. Some authors cautiously state that there is support for the idea that some cultural values promote economic development (Allen et al., 2007). The next chapter on sociology and values will introduce modernization theory in more detail.

## 2.6 Summary

This chapter introduced important historical precursors, like Herman Lotze, Wilhelm Windelband, Max Scheler, and Franz Brentano, who shaped psychological theories of value. Then, the chapter described influential psychological theories of value, specifically the theories of Philip E. Vernon and Gordon Allport, Milton Rokeach, and Shalom Schwartz. The chapter also considered the recent functional theory of value (Valdiney Gouveia). Most psychologists take value to be abstract motivational goals that transcend situations and that systematically relate to one another. Psychologists distinguish values from other concepts, like attitudes and traits. The last part of the chapter focused on psychological research concerning value change. People's values are not fixed, and studies show that people adapt their values to shifting social and economic circumstances.

Psychologists are aware that humans are social beings. They acknowledge that values are crucial for social interaction and cooperation. Psychologists are also mindful that culture influences individual values. Thinking about the relationship between society and the individual falls within the purview of sociology. As we will see in the next chapter, thinking about this relationship has always meant thinking about value.

## References

- Allen, M. W., Ng, S. H., Ikeda, K., Jawan, J. A., Sufi, A. H., Wilson, M., & Yang, K.-S. (2007). Two Decades of Change in Cultural Values and Economic Development in Eight East Asian and Pacific Island Nations. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 38(3), 247–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022107300273>

- Arieli, S., Grant, A. M., & Sagiv, L. (2014). Convincing Yourself to Care About Others: An Intervention for Enhancing Benevolence Values: Increasing Benevolence Values. *Journal of Personality*, 82(1), 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12029>
- Bardi, A., Buchanan, K. E., Goodwin, R., Slabu, L., & Robinson, M. (2014). Value Stability and Change During Self-chosen Life Transitions: Self-selection Versus Socialization Effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 106(1), 131–147. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034818>
- Bardi, A., & Goodwin, R. (2011). The Dual Route to Value Change: Individual Processes and Cultural Moderators. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 42(2), 271–287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022110396916>
- Bardi, A., Lee, J. A., Hofmann-Towfigh, N., & Soutar, G. (2009). The Structure of Intraindividual Value Change. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(5), 913–929. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016617>
- Caprara, G. V., Schwartz, S., Capanna, C., Vecchione, M., & Barbaranelli, C. (2006). Personality and Politics: Values, Traits, and Political Choice. *Political Psychology*, 27(1), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2006.00447.x>
- Çileli, M. (2000). Change in Value Orientations of Turkish Youth From 1989 to 1995. *The Journal of Psychology*, 134(3), 297–305. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980009600869>
- Fischer, R., Milfont, T. L., & Gouveia, V. V. (2011). Does Social Context Affect Value Structures? Testing the Within-Country Stability of Value Structures With a Functional Theory of Values. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 42(2), 253–270. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022110396888>
- Fischer, R., & Schwartz, S. (2011). Whence Differences in Value Priorities?: Individual, Cultural, or Artifactual Sources. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 42(7), 1127–1144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022110381429>
- Gardner, W. L., Gabriel, S., & Lee, A. Y. (1999). ‘I’ Value Freedom, But ‘We’ Value Relationships: Self-Construal Priming Mirrors Cultural Differences in Judgment. *Psychological Science*, 10(4), 321–326. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00162>
- Gouveia, V. V., Milfont, T. L., & Guerra, V. M. (2014). Functional Theory of Human Values: Testing Its Content and Structure Hypotheses. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 60, 41–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2013.12.012>
- Gouveia, V. V., Vione, K. C., Milfont, T. L., & Fischer, R. (2015). Patterns of Value Change During the Life Span: Some Evidence From a Functional



- Approach to Values. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 41(9), 1276–1290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167215594189>
- Greenfield, P. M. (2009). Linking Social Change and Developmental Change: Shifting Pathways of Human Development. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(2), 401–418. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014726>
- Greenfield, P. M. (2013). The Changing Psychology of Culture From 1800 Through 2000. *Psychological Science*, 24(9), 1722–1731. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613479387>
- Greenfield, P. M. (2016). Social Change, Cultural Evolution, and Human Development. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 8, 84–92. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2015.10.012>
- Grube, J. W., Mayton, D. M., & Ball-Rokeach, S. J. (1994). Inducing Change in Values, Attitudes, and Behaviors: Belief System Theory and the Method of Value Self-Confrontation. *Journal of Social Issues*, 50(4), 153–173. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1994.tb01202.x>
- Hanel, P. H. P., Foad, C., & Maio, G. R. (2021). *Attitudes and Values*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.248>
- Hitlin, S. (2003). Values as the Core of Personal Identity: Drawing Links between Two Theories of Self. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 66(2), 118. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1519843>
- Hofstede, G. H. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Inglehart, R. (1997). *Modernization and Post-modernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton University Press.
- Lewin, K. (1951). *Field Theory in Social Science: Selected Theoretical Papers*. .
- Maio, G. R. (2010). Mental Representations of Social Values. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 42, pp. 1–43). Elsevier. <https://linking-hub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0065260110420018>
- Maio, G. R. (2016). *The Psychology of Human Values*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315622545>
- Maio, G. R., & Olson, J. M. (1998). Values as Truisms: Evidence and Implications. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(2), 294–311. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.2.294>
- Maio, G. R., Pakizeh, A., Cheung, W.-Y., & Rees, K. J. (2009). Changing, Priming, and Acting on Values: Effects via Motivational Relations in a Circular Model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(4), 699–715. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016420>

- Montague, M. (2017). A Contemporary View of Brentano's Theory of Emotion. *The Monist*, 100(1), 64–87. <https://doi.org/10.1093/monist/onw019>
- de Montaigne, M. E. (1979). *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (D. M. Frame, Trans.). Stanford University Press.
- Pierson, G. N. (1988). Lotze's Concept of Value. *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 22(2), 115–125. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00135457>
- Roccas, S., Sagiv, L., Oppenheim, S., Elster, A., & Gal, A. (2014). Integrating Content and Structure Aspects of the Self: Traits, Values, and Self-Improvement: Traits, Values, and the Self-Concept. *Journal of Personality*, 82(2), 144–157. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12041>
- Rohan, M. J. (2000). A Rose by Any Name? The Values Construct. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4(3), 255–277. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0403\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327957PSPR0403_4)
- Rokeach, M. (1968). A Theory of Organization and Change Within Value-Attitude Systems. *Journal of Social Issues*, 24(1), 13–33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1968.tb01466.x>
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Nature of Human Values*. Free Press.
- Sagiv, L., Roccas, S., Cieciuch, J., & Schwartz, S. H. (2017). Personal Values in Human Life. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 1(9), 630–639. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0185-3>
- Scheler, M. (2014). *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik: Neuer Versuch der Grundlegung eines ethischen Personalismus*. Felix Meiner Verlag.
- Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 25, pp. 1–65). Elsevier. <https://linking-hub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0065260108602816>
- Schwartz, S. H. (1994). Are There Universal Aspects in the Structure and Contents of Human Values? *Journal of Social Issues*, 50(4), 19–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1994.tb01196.x>
- Schwartz, S. H. (1999). A Theory of Cultural Values and Some Implications for Work. *Applied Psychology*, 48(1), 23–47. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1999.tb00047.x>
- Schwartz, S. H. (2011). Values: Cultural and Individual. In F. J. R. van de Vijver, A. Chasiotis, & S. M. Breugelmans (Eds.), *Fundamental Questions in Cross-Cultural Psychology* (pp. 463–493). Cambridge University Press. [https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/CBO9780511974090A033/type/book\\_part](https://www.cambridge.org/core/product/identifier/CBO9780511974090A033/type/book_part)

- Schwartz, S. H. (2014). Societal Value Culture: Latent and Dynamic. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 45(1), 42–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022113513404>
- Schwartz, S. H., Bardi, A., & Bianchi, G. (2000). Value Adaptation to the Imposition and Collapse of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe. In S. A. Renshon & J. Duckitt (Eds.), *Political Psychology* (pp. 217–237). Palgrave Macmillan UK. [http://link.springer.com/10.1057/9780230598744\\_13](http://link.springer.com/10.1057/9780230598744_13)
- Schwartz, S. H., Cieciuch, J., Vecchione, M., Davidov, E., Fischer, R., Beierlein, C., Ramos, A., Verkasalo, M., Lönnqvist, J.-E., Demirutku, K., Dirilen-Gumus, O., & Konty, M. (2012). Refining the Theory of Basic Individual Values. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 103(4), 663–688. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029393>
- Seligman, C., & Katz, A. N. (1996). The Dynamics of Value Systems. In C. Seligman, J. M. Olson, & M. P. Zanna (Eds.), *The Psychology of Values: The Ontario Symposium*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Sortheix, F. M., Parker, P. D., Lechner, C. M., & Schwartz, S. H. (2019). Changes in Young Europeans' Values During the Global Financial Crisis. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 10(1), 15–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617732610>
- Verkasalo, M., Goodwin, R., & Bezmenova, I. (2006). Values Following a Major Terrorist Incident: Finnish Adolescent and Student Values Before and After September 11, 2001. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36(1), 144–160. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-9029.2006.00007.x>
- Vernon, P. E., & Allport, G. W. (1931). A Test for Personal Values. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 26(3), 231–248. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0073233>
- Verplanken, B., & Holland, R. W. (2002). Motivated Decision Making: Effects of Activation and Self-centrality of Values on Choices and Behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(3), 434–447. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.3.434>
- Williams, R. (1970). *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation*. Knopf.
- Windelband, W. (1921). *An Introduction to Philosophy*. T. Fisher Unwin.
- Wyer, R. S., Chiu, C., & Hong, Y. (Eds.). (2009). *Understanding Culture: Theory, Research, and Application*. Psychology Press.