Among the personal and social pursuits of humans, clarifying one's identity (Who am I?) and one's own or group's values (What is important to me individually? To us collectively?) have been among the central themes of intellectual, social, and communicative development. The questions of right action, civic morality, and meaningful relational standards certainly figured prominently in the recorded writings of the early philosophers. Values played a central role in the classical thought and rhetoric of many traditions, whether that of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, or Augustine around the Mediterranean; Confucius, Mencius, or Lao Tzu in China; the Brahman Vedas, the Upanishads, Lord Mahavira and the Jains, or Siddhartha Buddha in the Indian peninsula; or Zoroaster in Persia. Clarifying human behavior by elucidating the value of certain preferred character or moral traits is a common theme interwoven in the history of human development, a dialogue later continued by political and religious figures from Moses to Jesus to Muhammad to Mahatma Gandhi to Martin Luther King, Jr.

Values are not only espoused by great teachers, but also have often been one of the early starting points for the study of humans and society in many fields. Nearly every branch of the humanities or social science has produced seminal articles discussing the concept of value or approaches to values study as it is applied in that area of research, from economics to environmental science, sociology to semantics, metaphysics to management, cognition to communication. What others believe and hold as important is considered to be a primary influence on their personal behavior and social functioning.

At the same time, each set of social mores-values develop in a specific geographic, economic, historical, political, ethnic and/or religious context, and those local conditions lead localized groupings of people to affirm degrees of divergent values. Though one might ask, “Who am I?” in sorting out one’s place within one’s respective social schema, questions of “What do I or we find most important?” often only arise when the citizens of one social group are confronted with the striking differences of another social unit. Paraphrasing Blaise Pascal in his *Pensees*—what truth is on one side of the Pyrenees is error on the other side. Early contact with others is often first mitigated by noting perceived areas of distinct otherness and assigning these to the realm of
enduring stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination—judgments based often on value differentiations.

Early Studies to Identify Cultural Values

Thus an early step in the development of modern cultural anthropology, social psychology, communication studies, and related fields has been to identify the predominant value or value sets of particular peoples. This social-cultural mapping has taken various forms, much of it impressionistic and unsystematic in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, often in the form of foreign observers writing up anecdotal explanations of the differences between various cultures, with titles like a missionary’s *Chinese Characteristics*, a Belgian-Dutch scholar’s *The English: Are They Human?* and a Russian philologist’s *The National Mind: English, French, German*. A variety of synonymous terms such as ethics, spirit, traits, characteristics, social mind, and mores were used until the multivolume ethnographic work of William Issac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, was published between 1918 and 1920.

One of the early attempts to systematize values research was by Gordon Allport, the renowned psychologist who studied prejudice and put forward the contact hypothesis. He and his associates devised a values test in 1931. However, the Allport-Vernon Study of Values was based on Eduard Spranger’s 1914 *Lebensformen*, which postulated that there were various types of men who could be identified by their dominant interests. Though it sought to analyze the values of and assign people to six basic areas (the theoretical, economic, aesthetic, social, political, and religious type of person), it suffered from the lack of clarity between preferences, attitudes, interests, beliefs, personality motives, choices, and behavioral intentions that are still conflated in many scales. But it has been widely used for differentiating different occupations or vocational interests and has documented some gender differences and values changes over the life span.

Much of the early academic work on culture was generated by students and colleagues inspired by Franz Boas at Columbia University who applied rigorous field work methods to do historical, anthropological, ethnographic area studies. Among these were classics
such as *Coming of Age in Samoa* by Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* and *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, which profiled the Japanese.

These typified a generation of pre- and post-World War II studies of national character—extensions of personality psychology, represented by Goeffrey Gorer's book on the American people and proposals of cultural dimensions by Alex Inkeles and Daniel Levinson. A dominant tradition of equating culture to nation was begun, and the main trend of cross-cultural communication and psychology studies generally treat geopolitical nations as units of measurement—the culture variable. Typical of these studies was the bicultural political analysis done by Seymour Martin Lipset in the 1960s, using values as a means of showing core cultural differences between Canada and the United States and eventually other nations.

A similar social behaviorist approach (George Herbert Mead's pragmatics) led Charles Morris to devise his “13 Ways to Live” survey; the results were published as *Varieties of Human Value* in 1956. Though later revised by Paul Dempsey and William Dukes, these studies are mainly known for their early attempts at simplifying the variety of values into general categories.

**Conceptualizing Cultural Patterns**

Cultural determinism was a key component of early studies, suggesting that child-rearing practices and socialization processes wrote in a cultural code that guided appropriate cultural behavior. Sociologists affiliated with Talcott Parsons and proponents of structuralism put forward five contrasting pairs of cultural value patterns (later known as Parsons pattern variables) as part of their social action theory in 1951. This posited that each cultural group had to make choices between opposing pairs in their ordering of social behavior, such as deciding between the affective need for gratification versus neutral restraint, or a self- versus collectivity orientation.

Of this group, Clyde Kluckhohn wrote extensively toward clarifying the concepts of culture, values, and universal patterns. His ideas and definitions still guide research, primarily the notion that a value is an explicit or implicit conception of the desirable,
that it can typify an individual or a group and that it guides the selection from available modes, means, and ends to action.

A review conducted by sociologist Inkeles and psychologist Levinson in 1954 found overlap of dimensions, subjective choices, inconsistent levels of analysis (individual, group or culture), and methodological weakness in studies conducted thus far. Arguing that national character best represented a modal standard (common national personality) and that a set of standard analytic issues were needed, they put forward three issues: (1) relation to authority, (2) conception of self (including masculinity and femininity), and (3) primary dilemmas and ways of dealing with them (including control of aggression as well as expression versus inhibition of affect). The manner by which each of these is handled in a cultural system was thought to have functional significance both for the individual personality and for the social system (suggesting a dual-level of analysis).

Others sought to show that cultural differences were not only national, but also ethnic, religious, or socioeconomical. C. Kluckhohn and Florence Rockwood (later to become his wife) also worked under Boas at Columbia and in their field work sought to identify universals of culture based on her concept of general life situations—some of life's universally experienced circumstances toward which different groups might have different values or belief orientations (“What is just, right, and true?”) manifest in different outward behaviors.

The study was conducted in five communities within a 40-mile radius of an area called Rimrock: Texan homesteaders, a Mormon settlement, a Mexican American village, a loosely bound Navaho band, and an integrated Zuni Pueblo tribe. Florence Kluckhohn joined a team of Harvard social scientists, which she later headed up as The Harvard Values Project, and produced the seminal Variations of Value Orientations in 1961. This book offered one of the first dimensional models of values with a range of alternatives, including orientations toward (a) human nature, (b) humans' relation with their natural environment, (c) time, (d) activity, and (e) social relationships.
Etic and Emic Approaches

Kenneth Pike, applying the linguistic designations of phonetics and phonemics, suggested that there are also etic (universal comprehensive inventories) and emic (localized expressions) domains of culture. The social sciences, committed to the positivist, empirical paradigm, tend to aim toward the development of universal theories of culture, where the emic variations of one culture can be compared to etic measures derived from large multination studies. But throughout its history, a split in the field is noted between the qualitative, critical discussion of values in their unique contexts (such as the early work of Melvin Kohn on parenting values across culture), in contrast to the more broadly comparative, often empirical attempts to establish a universal framework for values studies (such as more recent work by Cigdem Kaghitçibasi, John Berry, and others on family value patterns).

Milton Rokeach is credited with bringing about workable conceptions and testable measures of values in his *The Nature of Human Values*. His work clarified distinctions between cultural norms, beliefs, attitudes, opinions, and values, as well as positing two types—terminal (ideal, end-state) values and instrumental (functional, daily decision) values—in the Rokeach Values Survey. He also contributed significantly to methodology with his [p. 987 ↓] ranking, or values-list approach. He posited that as few as 18 terminal values are the key internal motivators that people use to formulate attitudes and opinions and that by measuring their relative ranking, one could predict a wide range of behavior from political preferences to religious beliefs. Rokeach's work had limitations due to its development in a specific American context, yet there have been many international applications, such as those working with Sik Hung Ng in 1982 that looked at values in nine countries. Norman Feather extended the work of Rokeach with his 1975 book, *Values in Education and Society*, which considered how values related to educational choice, adjustment, and school impact, to generations, cultures, special groups, and migrant assimilation. Feather's work has continued to seek to link values to the appraisal and outcome of actions in specific situations, applying motivation psychology to his expectancy-value theory.
Multination Studies of Cultural Values

Geert Hofstede is credited with the first complex statistical and large-scale multination analysis of human resource data from the Hermes corporation (IBM) in more than 40 countries and regions. From this he derived four dimensions (a 4-D model) of work-related values in 1980. Scholars around the world went to work testing and extending them to almost all areas of human culture. Michael Bond and the Chinese Cultural Connection formulated a distinctly emic questionnaire (the Chinese Value Survey) that confirmed three of Hofstede’s dimensions and identified a new dimension called Confucian dynamism that Hofstede and Bond later renamed long/short-term orientation. Hofstede’s second edition extensively documented the distinct features of this 5 dimensional values study model and increased the sample to 50 countries and three regions; his 1980 *Culture Consequences* has become one of the most cited works of all time in the Social Science Citation Index. Recently, he has added two more dimensions from the work of Michael Minkov that factor-analyzed the extensive data bank of the World Values Survey. Hofstede and his team also identified six dimensions for the analysis of specific organizational cultures; these are explained in *Cultures and Organizations: The Software of the Mind*.

Since the start of the 21st century, Robert House, Monsour Javidian, and their associates have led a 62-nation probe into leadership worldwide called the GLOBE project. Professing to extend Hofstede’s work to nine organizational value dimensions, they sought to study these at “actual” and “ideal” levels across cultures. Though this is a rigorous, well-networked, multinational project, scholars have clashed as to whether the work actually extends Hofstede or measures something different—social norms and expectations—but it is increasingly used in management studies.

Ronald Inglehart, a political scientist, started gathering data for what became the World Values Survey (WVS) in 1970 and worked closely with the European Social Survey (ESS) to conduct repeated multination studies. His work particularly addresses the issue of how values shift as societies change. Based on multiple rounds of the WVS with time-series data now accounting for about 85% of the world population, Inglehart and his associates claim that economic development and cultural and political change happen together in coherent, somewhat predictable and foreseeable patterns,
suggesting that some trajectories of socioeconomic change are more likely or preferred than others.

Their data analysis suggests, for example, that once a society starts industrializing, a related set of changes, from mass increases in mobility to diminishing differences in gender roles, is likely to appear. Ingelhart’s team further identified two main country-level value dimensions affecting development, one termed well-being versus survival and the other secular-rational versus traditional authority. These can be coaxially mapped to locate the past and present development trajectory of each country in the world for which data has been gathered. These significant and avowedly predictable shifts advance modernization theory, however controversial, to suggest a clear relationship between economic development and intergenerational changes in cultural values (specifically increased individual autonomy, gender equality, sexual freedom), democracy, and capitalism.

**Toward an Integrated Theory of Values**

Although Hofstede’s work was based on post-hoc analysis, Shalom Schwartz is often credited with developing the most carefully constructed a priori study of values. Since putting his integrated theory of values forward in 1992, he and his associates have collected extensive and carefully controlled data sets primarily from teachers, high school students, and workers in over 77 national cultures and regions (using both his more conceptual Schwartz Values Survey as well as a simplified Portrait Values Questionnaire for less educated or more implicit societies) to analyze values both at the individual and cultural level. Both sets of data are presented in circumplex models showing the relation of closely related value domains. Ten value types have been confirmed at the individual level (to which the nine types of consumer values in Lynn Kahle’s list of values seem similar).

At the culture level, from 58 value items tested so far, 45 seem to have some level of shared meaning universally. These items cluster into seven domains that lie along three axial dimensions: embeddedness versus autonomy (intellectual and affective), hierarchy versus egalitarianism, and mastery versus harmony. They meet the basic requirements of human existence: (a) individual needs as biological organisms, (b)
requisites of coordinated social interaction, and (c) survival and welfare needs of groups. Toward confirming a universal structure, Schwartz and his team have shown the correspondence to Hofstede dimensions, tested them with the ESS and Inglehart’s WVS data, and shown their influence on a wide range of psychological situations (work, gender, political choices, religious orientation, and so on).

**Future and Contexts**

Though some argue against grand theories, the comparison of values, either at universal framework or socially situated contextual levels, continues to be a fertile and dynamic area of research. What has not been satisfactorily settled is the specific influence of values on certain behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, or opinions, and in many research designs, the conflation of these related core-culture dispositions or syndromes continues to be problematic, values either being attributed with too much or not differentiated carefully enough. The interaction of values with identity construals and social axioms is only starting to be researched. Work on specific value-application domains such as organizational behavior is promising, and other specific application areas need to be more clearly charted.

As this review has shown, the study of values seems to have historically come to the fore of humanities, social science, and communication theorizing especially under certain conditions, namely (a) suspected pre- or early contact cultural distance; (b) intense cultural contact that accentuated perceived differentiation; (c) assumed imbalances of values, where one’s group is considered superior or imposing, or the other’s is considered weak or threatened; (d) ethnocentric projection or propagation of assumed good or successful values orientations; and (e) defense or concern over cultural erosion in periods of cultural transformation when cherished values or taboos are potentially breached. Any of these might motivate careful observers to seek to understand the salient reasons for why different social systems operate differently or have varied social emphases. Such motives keep reviving interest in values studies as an important focus in social analysis and theorizing and continue to guide this line of inquiry in our increasingly global, communicating, integrated yet still differentiated world.

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See also

- Attitude Theory
- Attribution Theory
- Axiology
- Contextual Theory of Interethnic Communication
- Cultural Identity Theory
- Cultural Types Theories
- Values Theory: Sociocultural Dimensions and Frameworks

Further Readings


