

Values and Belief Systems

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Values are essential components of belief systems. They are the highly-perceptible ingredients that help bind members of social groups and cultures together in their common belief systems. Values are action-oriented, providing fast, simplified judgement calls for certain kinds of situation. They reduce the need for time-consuming consideration of alternative views and actions, and are often applied where factual information is not available.

Values Enable Fast Decisions

As a human organism learns and becomes educated by his family, schools, and social networks, he develops an understanding of which situations and actions are good or bad for himself, his family, community, and nation-state. In this learning process, his social interactions provide commonly-held, socially-prescribed sets of values, which he augments and modifies according to his personal experiences.

During early development, a newborn infant immediately begins to learn about the world in terms of what situations and actions produce physical pleasure (good) and pain (bad). As his awareness develops and he begins to undergo childhood training, he is taught that certain kinds of world situations and actions are "good" or "bad." Further education and development produces a more sophisticated set of evaluations that are assigned to specific kinds of events, such as degree of goodness/badness, short-term versus long term effects, and scope of impact (self, family, friends, community, nation-state).

Values Provide Quick Good/Bad Judgements for Certain Situations.

As a developing human organism is indoctrinated with these values, they become applied both to his ongoing detailed experiences and also to his higher-level abstraction hierarchies. This value-based abstraction allows him to quickly apply a more generalized evaluation to a current type of situation, rather than undergo the more time consuming process of finding a detailed comparison with past experiences. In cases where circumstances require a quick decision, this may be the best he can do. In less

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urgent cases values may provide an initial assessment that can be further analyzed as time allows. A person's values are closely tied to his beliefs about the world in general.

Development of Belief Systems

Belief relates to a person's internal model of his external world. It involves those aspects of the model where factual evidence is uncertain or subject to disagreement, but where decisions and actions are required. In these circumstances, the person must trust in his model's existing knowledge to assess the situation correctly and do the right thing.



In certain situations, the person may substitute the stronger views and beliefs of a leader or other authority for his own. This is most evident in autocratic organizations such as the military or fundamentalist religions. Adherence to such beliefs is usually supported by values that are often expressed in reinforcing vocal expressions, such as: Semper Fi; For God and Country; God is Great; You're Either For Us Or Against Us.

When a person talks about his values, he often refers to them as his "beliefs," as in "Based on my values, I believe that this is the right decision." These values in which he believes (or accepts) contribute greatly to the way he comprehends his external world.

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When making a quick but important decision where time does not permit a detailed analysis, a person must trust, or have faith in, and believe in his values. At that moment, his belief system embodies what he understands about the kind of event situation he is facing, the action he is taking, and the outcome he can expect from his action.

Belief Systems Include Unknowables

In constructing an internal model for dealing with his external world, the human organism has an innate drive toward completeness, where his internal model covers all possible conditions he may face. Striving for completeness is propelled by his requirement for homeostasis, and becomes manifested as a feeling about how well he is able to cope with the world, while sustaining his internal equilibrium in all situations. His homeostatic ability depends upon how well his internal model is working in a complex physical and social environment, where planning and follow-up are essential for remaining healthy and staying alive.

As a human organism matures, he becomes able to test many of his values and beliefs through personal experiences. In this process, he becomes aware that there are some life situations where knowledge derived from direct experience is unknowable, either to himself or others. Some questions such as What happens to me when I die? or Will God answer my prayers? are often unanswerable in a factual manner.

Values are Also Used to Judge Situations Where Factual Information is Unknown.

With no personal knowledge about unknowables available either from their own experiences, or from others in their community, people have historically looked to their leaders for guidance. Given this responsibility, leaders have felt compelled to come up with answers. Since early tribal days, leaders have invented stories to explain the unknowns in some plausible way that will bring comfort to, order, and allegiance from, members of their tribe. This has enabled the members to put trust in their leader to complete their internal models with concepts, values, and associated beliefs that can be applied to unknowable situations.

The availability of prescribed concepts and values relieves individuals from having to spend time attempting to figure out these aspects of their world for themselves. From

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the viewpoint of a nation-state superorganism, efforts by its citizens will be better spent performing the work that carries out its higher-level life functions.

Today, humans are facing an onslaught of more information input and faster decisions than human brains have been designed to process. This acceleration of technology-driven interactions is fostering an increasing need for the quick-decision capability that values and belief systems provide.

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