

## THE NEED FOR UNCONDITIONAL VALUES IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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**Purpose:** The goal of the paper is to analyze the axiological framework of the concept of sustainable development.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Critical literature analysis. Analysis of international literature from main databases and Polish literature connecting with researched topic.

**Findings:** The paper focus on the axiological assumptions of the concept of sustainable development. It describes the problems regarding the definitions of the sustainable development and shows that the main axiological difficulties concerning this discourse focus on the tension between intrinsic and instrumental value distinction. Definitions and understanding of sustainable development are tied with this difference. Next, author shows that the solution to this problem is the introduction of the axiological category of the unconditional values as defined by Polish philosopher Ryszard Wiśniewski. In the summary part, the author exemplifies how application of this axiological category might foster the ethical debate about the sustainable development. The concept of unconditional value not only allows us to elucidate the instrumental facets of SD but also provides an assurance that we will not veer away from the foundational principles established by critical final values.

**Social implications:** The introduced solution may put forward discussion about implementation policies for Sustainable Development.

**Originality/value:** The article presents a framework for the analysis of the problems related to the axiological aspects of sustainable development. Presented frameworks may be used in future formulations of sustainable development policies.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, instrumental, intrinsic and unconditional value.

**Category of the paper:** Conceptual paper, Literature review.

### 1. Introduction – the axiological problems regarding sustainable development definitions

The most commonly used definition of the term "sustainable development" (SD) is ascribed to its formulation in the 1987 Brundtland Report by the World Commission on Environment

and Development, titled "Our Common Future". The frequently quoted definition states: "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987, p. 16). It is peculiar how commenters and theorists of SD pick that line forgetting all contest of social justice that is present in the totality of the Report. As Andrzej Papauziński stated: "[...] justice is the foremost norm in the philosophical discourse of the Report on Sustainable Development. It is a cardinal condition of this development and a fundamental assumption underlying many implementation proposals put forth by the Commission. No adequate description of the philosophy of the SD in the Report can abstract from this issue. Considering various concepts and theories of SD, it must be acknowledged that the issue of justice serves as a demarcation line between appropriate attempts to develop the idea of sustainable development and attempts that misuse this term" (Papuziński, 2017). Most of the commenters omit that aspect and use a broad definition, stated in point 27 of the Report. This has allowed for various interpretations of SD from the very moment of its introduction. The definition is so broad and highly general, that had led to numerous attempts to its reformulation and adding to it the elements of direct and practical operability.

This process resulted in a growing number of diverse definitions of SD over the last forty years. It was problematic even before Brundtland's definition. In the eighties, there were already more than 60 different definitions (Pezzey, 1992). Since then the number of definitions was growing rapidly to over 300 at the beginning of the new millennium (Johnston et al. 2007), now this number is probably much higher, by rough approximation we might have reached more than 1000 (Ramsey, 2015). Those definitions may be divided into many different categories, two of which I will introduce in the second chapter. Analysis of those categories will allow us to discuss at length the crucial axiological problem associated with defining SD. The problem may be stated shortly as falling into a trap of thinking of the axiologies of SD in the dyadic distinction of intrinsic and instrumental values. This way of setting the framework for the discussion about axiological aspects of SD results in two main problems: unresolvable discussions between different absolutists from one side and seemingly amoral practical, instrumental and technical stances from the other.

The author will not discuss different values that are crucial elements of the substantive axiology of SD. The article will focus on how frameworks for articulating specific values are outlined and what are the axiological outcomes. How that frameworks might be identified in SD formulations. There is a significant body of literature on the topic of the substantive axiology of SD, considering the general context (Becker, 2011; Dołęga, 2006; Dzwonkowska, 2022; Hull, 2008; Kuzior, 2014) and specific values such as responsibility (Ciążela, 2006; Filek, 2004; Kuzior, 2008; Rosół, 2017). The aim of the article is not to discuss any of these specific values; rather, its goal is to present how more general frameworks for articulating values influence how SD is formulated. The scope of the text might be considered meta-axiological in relation to substantive axiology, analogous to the relation that metaethics has to ethics.

After introducing the axiological tension that might be fine in the different SD definition author will put it in the more general context of the axiological discussion concerning intrinsic and instrumental value, and explain why the introduction of other categories like absolute and unconditioned values might be a suitable solution for some of the important problems outlined earlier.

As a closing remark author will present a proposition of particular definition of unconditional value that is best suited to resolve ongoing problems in axiological debates around SD. I will provide general definition and exhibit few examples of how rephrasing values as unconditional rather than intrinsic might help in putting forward the discussion and implementation of SD process.

## 2. Intrinsic and instrumental values in SD

From the very beginning of the modern usage, the idea of the sustainable development was a multifaceted concept, encapsulating three core elements, later on called the pillars or dimensions of sustainability: environmental, economic and social (Purvis et al., 2019). Each of these aspects foregrounds distinct aspects, priorities, and refer to certain set of values. They interlink and overlap among distinct approaches that are emphasizing one of the dimensions. Concerning mainstream approach, regarding economical sustainable development we might look at three examples.

**Ecological Integrity and Resource Management** are rooted in ecological science. This narrative of SD underlines the critical importance of safeguarding natural ecosystems and resources. It aligns with the principles of ecosystem-based management, where biodiversity conservation, habitat restoration, and sustainable resource utilization are vital for long-term ecological resilience (Daily, Ellison, 2002; Kareiva et al., 2007).

**Equitable Societal Progress** are driven by social sciences, this narrative underscores that sustainable development entails inclusivity and fairness. It echoes findings in social equity studies, advocating for just access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities for marginalized populations (Sen, 1999; Wilkinson, Pickett, 2010).

**Economic Resilience and Green Growth** are established by findings of economic studies, which stress that sustainable economies can flourish by embracing green practices. It aligns with research demonstrating that investments in renewable energy, circular economies, and sustainable technologies can drive economic growth while reducing environmental impacts (IPCC 2014; Rockström et al., 2009).

These positions are intertwined and interdependent within all three pillars, echoing the holistic perspective fundamental to sustainable development. Nevertheless, we can see that the perspective, and the background science, influence the formulation of the goals and differentiate

how the aims are formulated. We can clearly see that even within a holistic approach one aspect is put in front of the others. This is inevitable in conditions that require making decisions, we need to implement evaluative processes we cannot realize all values, and all competing ends to the same extent.

From the axiological perspective, we can assert that those decisions are exhibited on two levels of evaluation. On the higher level, there are deliberations about which value should be declared the final value of SD. In most cases, this deliberation refers to ascribing intrinsic value to some natural entities like ecosystems, biodiversity, or survivability of human species. On the other level, there is a vigorous debate concerning instrumental values, namely the ways of implementation of the SD, policies, laws, and regulations that are, generally speaking, aimed at achieving SD goals. The discussion of the second phenomenon is more crucial and important because it seems to dominate the debate, and from an axiological perspective, the route that debate went, is far more destructive for the ethical elements of SD than the debate about the final values.

### **2.1. Reduction of SD to instrumental value**

Reduction of the axiological debate concerning SD to mere instrumental dimensions might be considered as an element of a broader tendency of assuming axiological neutrality of different aspects of our intellectual inquiries such as technology (Rosół, 2017) or economics (Kucz, 2019). Proponents of this strain of reasoning tend to assert that the expertise they are providing possesses an intrinsic, nonethical value therefore it does not need to be teleologically or axiologically examined. They believe that it is self-evident what is the goal of technological advancement or the outcome of positive economics.

I will focus on just one crucial exemplification of how the reduction of the debate about values, only to its instrumental element is problematic. The example, I would like to use, is the distinction between positive and normative economics. There are two main concerns with that kind of attitude that I would like to outline. Firstly if we agree, for the sake of argument, that there is the possibility of value-free description of the social phenomena, then those depictions of reality shall not include any kind of recommendations or advice. As William Nassau Senior famously argues, since an economist's analysis is limited to wealth, "it does not authorize him in adding one syllable of advice" (Senior, 1938).

Secondly, if we take a closer look at the works of proponents of that approach they are full of bits of advice that are labeled "expertise" or "sharing economical knowledge". Many examples may be found in the texts by neoclassical (neoliberal) authors, who had been the main proponents of the positive and normative distinction in the second half of the XX century. The example might come from Milton's Friedman response to the criticism he received for his advisory role to the Chilean junta of General Pinochet. He stated that he "[...] do not consider it as evil for an economist to render technical economic advice to the Chilean Government, any more than I would regard it as evil for a physician to give technical

medical advice to the Chilean Government to help end a medical plague" (Friedman, 1976). "I do not regard giving advice on economic policy as immoral if the conditions seem to me to be such that economic improvement would contribute both to the well-being of the ordinary people and to the chance of movement toward a political free society" (Friedman, Friedman, 1998). We see here clearly that Friedman as other Chicago economists do not restrain themselves from giving advice, it is no secret that "Chicago Boys program" was designed to influence the economy in Latin America (Valdez, 1995).

This situation might be considered as an example of "axiological deception" (Kucz, 2019). It is a situation when representants of one of the social sciences claim ethical neutrality of their inquiry and then impose evaluative judgments based on their silent evaluative assumptions. In this particular case, neoliberals from Chicago School implemented their agenda presenting it as merely technical advice in financial and fiscal policy. Implementation of free market reforms is not value-free. It is heavily value-laden. Believe in the free market as a solution to all socioeconomic challenges is a very strong evaluative judgment. It might have been camouflaged as value-free because the free market has not been traditionally recognized as a means for formulating evaluative norms. To answer the question of whether the law or reform in question is good or bad neoliberals ask themselves a question whether the change meant to be implemented creates a greater space for the free market or restrains it. If it is in favor of the free market it is evaluated as good. We can now see that what neoliberals end up doing is creating an evaluative system for socioeconomic reforms based on a free market as a final value and primary norm of validation of social actions. It is not value-free positive economics.

The problem of "the axiological deception" or "the axiological blind spot" is of course not limited to the neoliberals. Every line of reasoning that puts too much emphasis on the instrumental goals and aspects of actions is in danger of falling into the trap of losing sight of broader ethical considerations. Proponents of this perspective tend to explicitly or implicitly imply that the subject matter in consideration is so important that we cannot waste time on philosophical debates. What they do not see is that philosophical ineptitude or in some cases, ignorance will lead them to unintended and unpredicted outcomes. In this case enforcement of strong, evaluative claims.

This process influenced SD because one line of articulating SD definition overemphasizes its economic dimension and then tune down the eco-philosophical aspect to one of the facets of economic development. Just to give an example of few wordings of that kind of definition:

"[Sustainable growth] means economic growth that can be supported by physical and social environments in the foreseeable future" (Pirages, 1977).

"Sustainable development involves maximising the net benefits of economic development, subject to maintaining the services and quality of natural resources over time" (Turner, 1988).

"[...] sustainable development is an economic programme along which average well-being of present and future generations, taken together, does not decline over time" (Dasgupta, 2007).

As we can see the stress between ecological and economic perspectives was apparent from the very beginning of the discussion about SD. It is also visible that some authors convey the narrative in which ecological and social sustainability is just an aspect of economic development. This might be considered as an example of a broader problem of economic imperialism (Mäki, 2009; Kucz, 2016). This results in silent implementation of the set of moral values embedded in neoclassical economics as the dominant framework in the debate concerning SD (Johnston et al. 2007).

We can name this particular set of values an anthropocentric-utilitarianism. This approach simply values non-human beings just as instruments of economic interests. This means that nature and ecosystems are valuable only as they serve as a means for ends designed by homo economicus.

But the influence goes further than only theory. “A final flaw in modern environmental laws is their anthropocentric-utilitarian approach to the environment. Most legal definitions emphasize the utility value of the environment. Typically, this includes natural resources and amenity values such as recreation and beauty” (Bosselmann, 2010). The legal landscape just shows us that this way of setting the means and ends is happily welcomed by the decision-makers because they might be measured and compared. Another unintended and unconscious, strong axiological assumption is introduced here. If we can compare all measures of SD then we need to believe that there is a single order of values and of preferences that can provide such measures. I presented here how overreliance on economic rationality focused on goals, results, and measurements leads to, the very strong, unintended axiological claims and declaring the SD as one of the means of economic development.

## 2.2. Intrinsic values in SD

Discussion concerning the intrinsic value of nature is, probably, the most important debate on environmental ethics. It was a revolutionary move to ascribe intrinsic moral value to entities other than human beings. The first argument was the anthropocentric attribution of value to beings that are capable of experiencing pain. The next move was finding non-anthropocentric modes of valuation of other elements of the environment and ecosystem as a whole. Different proponents of environmental ethics approach the concept of the intrinsic value of nature in nuanced ways.

Proponents of **deep ecology**, like Arne Naess, argue for the intrinsic value of nature. They propose that all living beings have inherent worth, and nature should be respected for its own sake, irrespective of human needs (Naess, 1984). This view often extends to ecosystems and the Earth as a whole.

**Ecocentrism** emphasizes the importance of the entire ecological system rather than focusing solely on individual organisms. Proponents, such as Aldo Leopold and Holmes Rolston III, argue that ecosystems and biotic communities have intrinsic value. They propose

that these entities should be treated as subjects of ethical consideration (Leopold, 1949; Rolston, 1988).

**Biocentrism** extends intrinsic value to individual living entities, including animals, plants, and ecosystems. Paul Taylor, a proponent of biocentrism, argues that all life forms have inherent worth (Taylor, 1986).

These are just a few examples of the various ways proponents of environmental ethics discuss nature's value. It's important to note that these perspectives often intersect, and philosophers within each category might have different nuances views in their interpretations. The central premise among these perspectives, however, is the recognition that nature has value beyond its utility to humans and that ethical considerations should extend to the environment.

It is worth mentioning here, that the intrinsic value is not exclusively discussed as opposing the instrumental value. Deep ecologists might also assert that nature has unconditional value, advocating for the preservation of ecosystems even when there's no immediate benefit to humans. From an ecocentric standpoint, nature's value is absolute in the sense that it's universally applicable and not subject to human whims or desires. Taylor suggests that nature's value is unconditional because it doesn't depend on human preferences or benefits. Biocentrism aligns with the idea that nature's value is absolute, transcending cultural, social, and economic contexts. To make progress, we need to engage in a more detailed axiological examination of intrinsic, absolute, and unconditional values.

### 3. Unconditional, Absolute, and Intrinsic Values

The terms absolute, unconditional, and intrinsic all may be considered as referring to what is often called in value theory the final value. In this regard, the absolute value might be the value that might be described as whole, total, full, or perfect. Unconditional value is a value that is valuable without any regard to conditions that might be imposed on it. Intrinsic value is the value of something "in itself" or "for its own sake". The main problem, in my opinion, is that in Anglo-Saxon axiological tradition arose a very strong tendency to neglect all those nuances and recognize all final values as intrinsic values.

An example of that viewpoint might be a statement by Michael Zimmerman and Ben Bradley in their entry in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* on "Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Value" (2019); they open with this sentence: "Intrinsic value has traditionally been thought to lie at the heart of ethics". This statement is not entirely accurate. Many philosophical inquiries, such as questions about how to live a good life, what virtue is, and our obligations to one another, are often considered central to ethics. What I mean here is that even when the topic of final value was an element of philosophical inquiry, its intrinsic aspect was rarely the primary

focus. In Western ethical tradition, dating back to ancient Greece, questions related to the good life and moral virtues have often taken precedence. This perspective undeniably began to dominate with the publication of Moore's *Principia Ethica*.

Undoubtedly the axiological discourse has changed drastically after Moore famously opposed instrumental value with intrinsic value. From that point, the term intrinsic has dominated the axiological debate about final value in the English-speaking world. The usage of the term intrinsic imposed the tone of axiological debates. The main focus moved to ontological and epistemological questions. There is a great body of literature concerning questions like: What Is Intrinsic Value? Is There Such a Thing As Intrinsic Value At All? What Sort of Thing Can Have Intrinsic Value? How Is Intrinsic Value to Be Computed? Many of these works are interesting, valuable, and enlightening but what I consider a problem is the fact that discourse about intrinsic value imperialistically colonized English discourse about final values.

The common reference to the Kantian concept of goodwill and human dignity might be a good example of the problematic overuse of the term intrinsic (Rønnow-Rasmussen, Zimmerman, 2006). The description of those Kantian notions as an example of intrinsic value is simplifying and clearly an inaccurate depiction of his ethical thought. The conclusions drawn from the fact that Kant uses the phrase "end in itself" which is also commonly used by intrinsic value theorists is not a sufficient argument. In most instances, Kant uses the terms: unqualified, unconditional, and absolute value. Those expressions are not random or irrelevant. Kant is known for his precision and thoughtful use of language. We should respect that, and create a space to appreciate nuanced meanings that emerge from his narration. If we conflate those differentiated words into one perspective of intrinsic value we deprive ourselves of opportunities of reach and diverse axiological debate about final values (Kant, 2012).

I agree with many critics of that situation. I would like to focus on the distinction formulated by Christine Korsgaard (1983). She correctly points out that, ways things have value might be labeled intrinsic and extrinsic, and ways we value things might be considered as an end (final values) and as an instrument (instrumental values). These are two distinct modes of stating our relation to values and mixing those levels is simply a confusion, that leads to oversimplification in the discussion of the final values. "The fact that philosophers nowadays often oppose intrinsic to instrumental value and equate intrinsic value with the value of ends may just be taken to be sloppiness, of course. But it may also mean that these philosophers are working with some theory of the sort I have described – a theory of the equivalence of the two distinctions. As the Kantian option shows, such a theory is a substantive philosophical position and restricts the possibilities open to us in serious ways. It should not, in any case, be taken for granted". (Korsgaard, 1983). This is just one of many examples (Rønnow-Rasmussen, Zimmerman, 2006) of how inflation of the term intrinsic reduces the possibility of fruitful axiological inquiry, exchange, and discussion.



This problem was also visible in the axiological debate concerning SD. One of the examples might be Tom Regan's article "Does Environmental Ethics Rest On A Mistake". In this article, his main difficulty is that none of the known theories of intrinsic value (mental-state, state of affairs, end-in-itself, hierarchical end-in-themselves theories) are able to ascribe intrinsic value to the subjects of environmental ethics. He concludes that: "If I am right there is no theory of intrinsic value that, in a parsimonious fashion, can possibly meet the demands this conception of an environmental ethic imposes on it. Thus, if I am right it would be the better part of wisdom to abandon this way of thinking about and doing environmental ethical theory" (Regan, 1992). Other authors also begin to doubt in adequacy of the term intrinsic value in SD discussions. Batavia and Nelson wrote: "But at this juncture it no longer suffices to say "nature has intrinsic value", or "we should protect nature for nature's sake", Instead, we suggest conservationists need to turn this generalized sentiment into a clearer statement about what is good, what is worth protecting, and what this means about how humans ought to interact with the world around them" (Batavia, Nelson, 2017). In the next chapter, I will describe an interesting proposition of such supplementation, derived from Polish philosophy.

#### **4. Absolut, Unconditional and Instrumental Values by Ryszard Wiśniewski**

There are many descriptions concerning different meanings ascribed to the final values among axiological traditions. I believe that reaching out to the traditions and richness of expressions that different languages provide can only put forward axiological inquiry. Here I would like to give an example taken from Polish philosophy, that as I believe, will be an interesting addition to the deliberation on the final values. In the article "Axiological Nonsense in Interpersonal Communication" Ryszard Wiśniewski (2009), provides a structure of his distinction between conditional, unconditional, and absolute values<sup>i</sup>.

In the presented viewpoint, conditional values are a complex and multilayered space that encompasses means, conditions, symbols, and reservoirs of values. While they may initially appear to be final ends, upon closer examination, they are revealed to be exclusively means and conditions for the realization of other values.

On the other hand, unconditional values are intrinsically valuable in themselves; their worth surpasses their instrumental value. They hold value beyond their utility and can be used instrumentally without diminishing their inherent worth. This stems from the fact that they are not only useful and beneficial for certain purposes but also possess an intrinsic goodness that remains unaffected by their use.

In this description, Wiśniewski refers to his concept of Kantian unconditional value, exemplified in the humanity formula of the Categorical Imperative. He later draws from Scheler's axiology and asserts that if we follow this line of reasoning, we can conclude that if

values are subject to grading, there exists the highest grade, which represents an absolute value. The distinguishing characteristic of absolute values is that, if they were to be used instrumentally, they would forfeit their axiological status (Wiśniewski, 2009).

We have briefly outlined Wiśniewski's axiological proposition, which categorizes values into absolute, unconditional, and conditional categories. Now, let's explore how this proposition relates to intrinsic value. It is widely agreed that, by definition, all absolute values are intrinsic values. However, it's important to note that while all absolute values possess intrinsic value, not all intrinsic values are necessarily absolute.

For instance, within anthropocentric environmental ethics, the life of an antelope may be ascribed intrinsic value, but it's typically not regarded as absolute. This distinction hinges on our acknowledgment of varying degrees of intrinsic value. We might posit that the antelope's life holds value purely for its existence. However, in an anthropocentric ethical framework, it may be accepted that, if compelled to make a choice, harming the antelope is a lesser moral transgression than harming a human. In contrast, biocentrists would likely contest this perspective.

The central challenge in contemporary environmental ethics revolves around determining which entities should be endowed with absolute moral value, and, as a consequence, which should never be instrumentalized in any circumstance. Regrettably, the discussion regarding intrinsic value sometimes veers away from this critical issue in need of resolution. Bestowing such value is indeed a complex endeavor, and moral theories grounded in such assumptions carry significant ethical weight. Ultimately, it's worth noting that many individuals admire moral exemplars who regard themselves as ends in pursuit of a 'greater good.'

If we examine conditional values as defined earlier, it becomes evident that they are, by nature, extrinsic values. However, Wiśniewski astutely points out that conditional values can sometimes masquerade as final values or semi-final values. This observation is exceptionally crucial.

Focusing solely on the intrinsic-extrinsic distinction might cause us to overlook profoundly significant processes. If we allow ourselves to lose our axiological focus and permit hollow and pompous ethical neutrality to permeate academia, we risk falling into the trap of what I've termed 'the axiological deception' described earlier. There should be no axiological vacuum. If we disengage from the debate surrounding moral principles, values, which serve as the telos of our actions, will not cease to exist. Instead, we'll find ourselves guided toward potential disaster by other misguided authorities, much like the blind leading the blind in Peter Bruegel the Elder's famous painting. Once more, it's worth noting that an excessive preoccupation with intrinsic values alone can divert our attention from vital observations and reflections that can be gleaned from considering conditional values.

Unconditional values possess intrinsic value, yet they can also be employed as ends, which means they might be valued extrinsically. This concept aligns closely with the famous Kantian humanity formula of the Categorical Imperative, which asserts that we should treat humanity

'whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means' (Kant, 2012). Wiśniewski's notion of unconditional value closely resembles this statement, albeit with some nuanced differences.

We have the capacity to utilize unconditional values instrumentally, and in most cases, doing so does not diminish their axiological significance. Additionally, we might use them without always keeping their intrinsic value at the forefront of our minds. Nevertheless, it is imperative that we refrain from misusing them. This means that we cannot assign absolute value solely to their instrumental utility, even though they may possess such utility.

Engaging in discussions about unconditional values offers a valuable platform for meaningful debate without delving into heated arguments about absolute values. While we may differ in our perspectives on the realm of absolute values, finding a reasonable consensus on the realm of unconditional values is often attainable. Defining our interactions with nature and natural resources in terms of unconditional values can pave the way for agreements on the responsible usage of these resources. Unconditionality provides the necessary space to deliberate on essential measures and quotas vital for the economic aspects of sustainable development (SD). Simultaneously, it safeguards our ethical focus on intrinsic values that hold a crucial place in the discourse. In essence, focusing on unconditional values creates an avenue for constructive dialogue and pragmatic solutions within the framework of SD, allowing us to navigate the complex interplay of ethics and economics

## 5. Conclusion

In this text, I have elucidated how current definitions of sustainable development are susceptible to change due to two fundamental axiological issues. In many approaches, various facets of sustainable development are treated as means to an end, functioning as instrumental values. This predicament of instrumentalization in the concept of SD often stems from a misunderstanding of its core principles, leading to the misdirection of political and social actions down alternative paths than originally intended. When we sidestep discussions about fundamental aspects like the ultimate value within the context of SD, those instrumental values can inadvertently assume the role of final values. This transition can significantly alter the essence and trajectory of sustainable development efforts, emphasizing the critical importance of addressing these axiological concerns.

The first concern revolves around the pervasive influence of economic narratives, which tend to establish anthropocentric-utilitarianism as the dominant set of values. The issue at hand is that when we cease to engage in discussions about the values and objectives of our actions, these values and evaluative aspects do not vanish; they persist in the background. Consequently, proponents of the economic rationality approach employ what can be termed 'the axiological

deception' in the debate. They subtly introduce a set of values that underpins the prevailing theory or narrative, effectively framing it as neutral. In this scenario, the axiology of the free market, as proposed by neoclassical economics, often takes center stage. As a consequence, we inadvertently overlook a crucial dimension—the sustainability of the outcomes achieved—when we focus solely on economic models built upon idealized assumptions of perfect free markets with all *ceteris paribus* conditions intact.

The second issue pertains to debates about the ultimate value of SD, which can become entangled in the excessive use of the concept of intrinsic value. Some proponents of absolutist models seek to enhance the current situation by addressing the root causes of the crisis, thereby contributing to the realization of absolute values. These absolute values may include human life, the continued existence of the human species, or the well-being of the biosphere. The challenge arises from debates that tend to fixate on intrinsic value itself, rather than clearly articulating the final value and advocating for distinct axiological perspectives. Additionally, the absolutization of these values can sometimes lead to prematurely closing discussions rather than fostering open and constructive dialogue.

By introducing the concept of unconditional values—values that possess intrinsic worth while retaining their capacity for instrumental use without diminishing their axiological significance. We should create a space for substantive discussions concerning the ultimate values of SD. While eco-ethicists may diverge on the realm of absolute values, the possibility of forging consensus on the level of unconditional values remains attainable. The concept of unconditional value not only allows us to elucidate the instrumental facets of SD but also provides an assurance that we will not veer away from the foundational principles established by critical final values. What may appear as a simple linguistic addition actually opens up an expansive axiological arena for deliberation, effectively addressing two of the most critical axiological limitations within the current SD discourse. Consequently, the cultivation of a durable and sustainable culture of moderation necessitates the embracement of an ongoing and fruitful debate regarding unconditional values in SD

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## Footnotes

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<sup>i</sup> A brief linguistic commentary is warranted here to illustrate the richness and nuance that discussions on final values can achieve when we open ourselves to a broader array of terms beyond just 'intrinsic value.' In the original text, the author employs Polish terms such as 'względne,' 'bezwzględne,' and 'absolutne.' The last one, 'absolutne,' poses no particular difficulty as its translation to English is straightforward—it is simply 'absolute'.

However, the term 'względne,' especially within an axiological context, is often translated as 'relative' in English, which captures part of its meaning but may not fully convey the depth of its connotations. This term implies 'seeing, through introspection, a reason for value to depend on something other than the value itself.' It is here that the intricacies of translation become apparent, as there appears to be no direct English equivalent that encompasses the essence of 'względne'.

On the other hand, the accurate translation, based on usage tradition, of the Polish term 'bezwzględne' would typically be 'intrinsic.' In Polish philosophical literature, it is frequently employed as the opposite of 'instrumental.' This is where the final conundrum arises: 'bezwzględny,' when literally translated, becomes 'unconditional.' Thus, it appears that there is no single Polish word that adequately encapsulates the full spectrum of meanings associated with 'intrinsic' in the context of axiological debate. There seems to be a gap in the Polish language when it comes to a term that encompasses both the reference to an object's internal properties and its fundamental nature—two crucial aspects of 'intrinsic.'