

Sometimes by "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" value we mean monetary value, as when we are asked to declare the value of a package we are mailing and we force ourselves to say "no value" even though to us the item happens to be of great value.

The distinction between things which are valuable in themselves to all or most people and things which are valuable simply because they meet the needs or fulfill the desires of some people is sometimes important in ethical theory and practice, especially in social ethics. For example, some people believe it is extremely important to save whales or dolphins or owls or deer, but that it is not important to save unborn human beings from being put to death in abortion. Some people value their pets much more than they value other human beings!

C. Authority, Responsibility, Rights, Powers

The word "authority" means "rightful power; the right to command or to act, the right to impose a task or duty." The question here is, Does anyone have the right to command or to demand obedience?

The word "responsibility" means "accountability, especially moral accountability." It also means "a charge for which one is accountable." The question here is, If an authority imposes a lawful duty upon a person, does that person have the right to disclaim accountability for that duty by saying "I don't have to do anything I don't want to do!"?

The word "right" means "that to which one has a just claim; any power or privilege vested in a person by the law, custom, etc." The question here is, Are rights "given" or "extended to" persons, or are they simply "asserted" or "taken"?

The word "power" means "ability to act, capacity for action." It also means "authority or right."

Do human beings have the authority to define what their rights are? Do they have the authority to delimit the rights of another?

How do rights arise? From what source do rights arise? Does power produce rights? Or is there is difference between the power to do something and the right to do it? For example, is there a difference between the Jews' annihilation of the inhabitants of Jericho, and the Nazis' annihilation of the inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto? The Jews and the Nazis both had the power to annihilate; the question is whether they had the right? If the Jews had the right and the Nazis did not, where did the Jews get that right?

Human beings have the power to do all sorts of things. They have the power to hurt, to kill, to rape, to steal, to lie, to cheat, to terrify, to slander -- but do they have the right?

If we answer "No!" this assumes that there is a difference between what people have the right to do and what they do not have the right to do. And the question is, Where do rights come from? If I attend a meeting of my township board of supervisors or my city council and say, "I have the right to be heard!" where did I get that right?