

Value and Time

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Value is a historical category, and there does not exist any “super-historical” value. The value, as the distinctive character of historical category, needs to be studied from the historical dimension by applying historical methods. This is just like what Hans-Georg Gadamer says: the value-concept has to historically describe the philosophical dilemma by means of self-contemplation. The social history, however, is only the one-directional and one-dimensional extension of time. In accordance with the irreversibility of time, the past, present and future altogether constitutes a long and entire historical picture, which is the “background” and “spatiality” of all human value activities. To research the value theory, it is necessary to comprehend and grasp its historical dimensions and methods from the perspective of time concretely.

1 Time Dimension of Value

Since time is a philosophical category pertaining to “actual humans”, time dimension becomes indispensable to understand the value. Human beings are the temporal existence and the living organism generating and existing with the historical development, namely, time is the existent living form, the existent positive state, and the necessary requisite of human life practice. The extension of “abstract” and “objective” time, prior to human beings or outside human beings, has no special meaning and no relevant to human value possessed with the practical trait. In consideration of the value theory, only when time is related to actual humans and practical human activities, does it have constructive and constitutive significance. It is just the purposeful, independent and initiative human beings by the creative social practice that bestow time on the distinctive meaning.

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Conforming to the time fleeting, both the object and the world do have certain change-“humanization”. To be specific, the objection and the world, in the process of unceasing “humanization”, emerge into the meaningful existence and the significant social space for human living and development. At the same time, by making full use of time in life practice, humans do realize, cultivate and improve themselves, and contribute the social and historical meaning to the extension of life as well. From this point of view, time is the “space” in which humans take the value activities to “change the world” and make self-cultivation, self-creation and self-improvement. As Karl Marx points out, “time is IN FACT the active existence of the human being. It is not only the measure of human life. It is the space for its development”.¹ Without time, the social space for human activities and the measure of subjective life, we can neither truly comprehend and elaborate the concrete and historical value, nor grasp how the value comes into being and exists in time, especially in the limited life of each person.

What is one crucial feature of western philosophy since the contemporary time is to pay attention to the historical and time dimension. Basing on the achievements of natural science like the theory of evolution and of relativity, the time dimension is essential, even the main factor and hermeneutics dimension for the philosophy of Marxism and the conspicuous schools, like the creative evolution (Henri Bergson), existentialism, phenomenology, historicism, process philosophy and modern hermeneutics. Heidegger claims that “time must be brought to light- and genuinely conceived-as the horizon for all understanding of Being for any way of interpreting it”.² Time, of course, should also be the horizon for all understandings of value for any way of interpreting it.

The historical dialectic, by emphasizing history and time dimension, is distinguishable from the mechanical historical view in spatiotemporal view. Ignoring time means that, in the social and historical field, people neglect the influences from the historical and cultural tradition, from the duration of human life and from the active role in human life practice. Hence, it is believed that what people can only do is to submit to fate and accept the arrangement of fate negatively, so they reckon social history and life outlook as wasting the time. On the contrary, stressing the importance of time means to emphasize human positive existence, the inheritance of social history, the human active role as the subject, and to grasp humans own destiny as well. The human life, by the activities and creation in every second, bestows the significance to the passing time, even “change the world” by the physical or mental creation in order to make their lives (especially their mental life) to “be immortal” after death.

Since the ancient time, the close relationship between time and value, in fact, had already been thought from the rational and sensory aspect for many times.

¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works (Volume 33)*, Moscow: Progress Publishes, 1991, p. 493.

² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Macquarrie & Basil Blackwell, New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 1962, p. 39.

What we think at once is plenty of apothegms, such as “time is life”, “time is money”, “wasting our own time equals to suicide, and wasting others to murder them for money”. Social psychological professor Robert Levine, in his book called *A Geography of Time*, summarizes some “power” of time: time is money; the law of supply and demand regulates the line; we value what we wait for; status dictates who waits; the longer people will wait for you, the greater your status; the more powerful control who waits; The Siddhartha move³; time can be given as a gift, etc.⁴

Time, indeed, is extremely indispensable to humans and human value, because the one-dimensional and limited time is the one-off resource which cannot be stored, reused, lent and exchanged. Since each of us just has one life which is the limited duration of time, all value is created in this limited time. There is a saying—God creates the world and bestows the value to creatures before human coming-into-being—which is just the religious and theological hypothesis only understood by believing unconditionally. If we ground human value on the ration, we will find that all human value is, in fact, created in the social and historical activities. Therefore, apprehending the historical value without time is in vain. Even though it were true that God did create the world and bestow value to creature, this “almighty” power would only be possessed by God instead of the historical and realistic ordinary people. Time, hence, is a *sine qua non* for human practice and all value creation. How to create and achieve maximum value in the limited time is a vital life issue confronted by people. The human realistic value ends up with consuming their entire time, and as time goes by, the value of human life will be judged and verdict impartially.

Karl Marx once uncovered that the value of commodity, in economic sense, refers to the labor time spending on per unit of product. So the contradictions and struggles based on material interest, in the antagonistic social formations, even in some non-fundamental confrontations, often manifest in fighting for the survival time and labor time.

The exploitation made by slave-owners to slaves, by land owners to farmers, by capitalists to employees, by power grabbers to the ruled, appears to occupy on other's labor and product, but, in essence, often on “the *theft of alien labour time*”.⁵ For example, the capitalist accumulates and improves their wealth precisely by stealing worker time as the premise, just as “The *theft of alien labour*

³ Young Siddhartha believes “Everyone can perform magic, everyone can reach his goal, if he can think, wait and fast”. With the right attitude, waiting is a potent tool against the obstacles of life; waiting can in itself be a powerful act. This is consistent with what we are often sayings: Time cures the hurts, time eliminates pain...choosing noting is a kind of choice, doing nothing in itself is also a kind of action.

⁴ See Robert Levine, *A Geography of Time: the Temporal Misadventures of a Social Psychologist, or How Every Culture Keeps Time Just a Little Bit Differently*, New York: Basic Books, 1997, pp. 101–126.

⁵ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works (Volume 29)*, Moscow: Progress Publishes, 1987, p. 91.

time, which is the basis of present wealth.”⁶ The theft and exploitation of time results in the alien employees who have to unceasingly sell their time cheaply in order to obtain the limited subsistence necessary for their survival, and often falls into this vicious cycle. Karl Marx, in *The Capital*, ruthlessly exposes and criticizes the capitalists, after the wonderful analysis on which the capitalists exploit the surplus value from the workers. In contemporary world, the capitalist owners run around the world, even move their factories to the developing countries constantly, just because there are cheap employees (relatively low wages per unit time) and the huge time of surplus value which can be deprived. Karl Marx asserts that the history will evolve into the communist society in which the “alien” phenomenon of time will vanish with eliminating the antagonistic social classes gradually. Until then, “the growth of the productive forces can no longer be tied to the appropriation of alien SURPLUS LABOUR, and that the working masses must, rather, themselves appropriate their own surplus labour...then, on the one hand, necessary labour time will be measured by the needs of the social individual; and, on the other, society’s productive power will develop so rapidly that, although production will now be calculated to provide wealth for all the DISPOSABLE TIME of all will increase.”⁷ With the more free time, human beings will have more “free space” for free and comprehensive development on which the society will be undergoing a profound and historical progress.

Time, in actual and social life, plays a much more conspicuous role than it did before, according to the evolution of times, the deepening of industrialization and the acceleration of life pace. The utmost loss of value, as often as not, lies in the time-wasting and needless time-spending. Besides the following common-sense phrases about time, such as “time cannot flow backwards”, “history does not repeat itself”, “fleeting youth never returns back”, “happy times fleets quickly”, “things flow away day and night”, we still have some new ones: “an inch of time is an inch of gold, but you cannot buy that inch of time with an inch of gold”, “when an opportunity is neglected, it never comes back to you”, “the waste of time amounts to the waste of life”, “wasting other people’s time is tantamount to robbery or murder”. These are all needless time-spending and time-wasting, which cause to sigh deeply for some damage of value, even for vanishing value forever. In contrast, the real gains and utmost savings are almost the saving of time. All these notions, like “time is life”, “time is money” and “efficiency is life”, reveal that value is progressively generated and added within time flying and consuming. Due to this, the conspicuous and valuable creation is more likely to design for saving time and improving efficiency. For example, transportation means like carriages, automobiles, ships, trains, airports and spacecrafts, aim at shortening human time in travelling and transmission; the communicational tools including

⁶ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works (Volume 29)*, Moscow: Progress Publishes, 1987, p. 91.

⁷ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works (Volume 29)*, Moscow: Progress Publishes, 1987, p. 94.

the telegraph, phone, internet, and mail delivery, intend to reduce the communicational time; kinds of machines such as manual, semi-automatic and automatic machines, are conducted to shorten the processing time. Moreover, with the improvement of labor efficiency and social progress, free time is increasing as labor time is becoming less, thus humans have the more liberal conditions and possibilities for comprehensive and free development.

Certainly, some people also uncover that human beings do make some technological creations so as to save time, such as the massive new inventions and considerable new technology, which do not save time indeed, but rather beget more time-wasting. The invention of telephone makes the remote communication become convenient and swift by saving considerable transmission time. However, as the widespread of telephone, the telephone seems to be “the time killer” because much precious time, without calculating by people, is spent on the unnecessary calls, even with long time, especially owing to its cheaper price. Newspapers, magazines, televisions, movies and internet, and so on do save the information transit time, but also “murder” a great amount of time by reading or watching insignificant materials. For instance, plenty of people unconsciously spend their countless leisure time on lots of “soap opera series” which flood in TVs. What a time we waste! Obviously, it is lack of logic to connect the invention of new technology with time-wasting. After all, the new technology is in people’s hands and actually decided by the subject itself about whether to use it or not and how to use it.

In any case, with the development of times and of society, people are gradually aware of the significance in time value and life practice. The creation of human value enduring in the revolution of time has already been or is enormously changing the world. Meanwhile, in the duration of time, the world with more efficient and greater ability to innovate becomes more “humanization” and turns into a value world keeping pace with times and changes. When the social progress provides human beings with more free time, human beings gain more free and comprehensive development, and become more “being a man” and unceasingly improving.

2 Past, Present and Future

The arrow of time eternally targets one direction, and appears the basic pattern of “past–present–future”. In the flows of this singular and one-dimensional time, human value not only possesses the character of Da-sein and irreversibility, but also faces future ideality and transcendence. In other words, in this time stretches of “past–present–future”, human beings are different from any other animals. They are never satisfied with the present situation, and always develop for surviving, explore and turn into the desired direction at all times.

In the time dimension of value, human value practice has inseparable relations with history in accordance with the one-dimensional and singular time flowing.

The present human living world originates from the past human value practice, so human value practice cannot be unaffected by realistic environment and historical tradition. The contemporary human value practice, meanwhile, is also limited by the future ideality and the value goal, for the future contributes the structure meaning to the present. This is typically reflected in the distinctive tool activities of human beings. The Tool, as a result from the prior human activities, not only condensates our ancestors labor, the past innovative ideas and wisdom, but also is designed by the realistic needs and future ideality, and is the prerequisites and means for future creation and the key to open the future gate as well. Therefore, we know that human value activities for living inherit the historical memory and tradition, benefit from the social heredity of human accumulation and confined by it, and also clearly point to the future, to create the idealist world in the future.

For instance, we are living in a world full of past inventions and creations, in a “humanization world”, even the “artificial world” transformed by the past life practice. By looking around our homeland, engaging in our learning and working environment and introspecting our lives and entertainment, we can discover that everywhere is permeated with the imprints of past value activities. This, of course, is not just the entire enjoyment of the positive value, but also engages humans to suffer the massive negative value. Typically, environmental pollution and ecological imbalance caused by human previous activities have made so many people lose their survival homelands, suffer from effects like the raging sandstorm, scarcity or pollution of drinking water, littered rubbish everywhere, air pollution, energy shortages, frequent calamities and so on. By virtue of these ill consequences, many people have to endure varieties of inexplicable sufferings for a long time, and even to end their lives in advance.

At the same time, people still live in the ideal construction and transcendent fantasy for the future. It is indeed important to have the present consumption and entertainment and so forth. But if we indulge ourselves in this, have no beliefs and ideals in our lives, even give up the openness and transcendence for the future, there is no difference between us and other animals, which are solely drove by the instinct and only abided by the “measure of matter” to muddle along. The reason why humans can transcend the past and create the future constantly lies in consistent with the “measure of human beings” (including the aesthetic measure), besides the “measure of matter”. Human beings never succumb to the plight of history and reality, and never be satisfied with the gained achievements, but rather gradually improve themselves and create the glorious future, based on the ideality and transcendence of their own initiative and consciousness. For example, although human beings, in the past and present, have beset by plenty of environmental and ecological disasters, the responsible person is never willing to let it worsen in this way and wait passively by doing nothing, but to plan and design future with rational and scientific attitudes and practical actions for their generations. With regard to the deep introspection of the past sufferings and the profound dissatisfaction with the existing world, it is a far-reaching significance for people to advocate the environmental protection and sustainable development, so we form the following kind of value judgment about the future: never overdraw our future

life and environment, never overspent our generations' resource and wealth, and must take practical actions by self-adjustment so as to save the earth, ourselves and our future.

It is worth pointing out that "the samsara of cause and effect" in Buddhism was once involved in the value relations of the "past-present-future" between cause and effect. Although this value relation of the "past-present-future", to some extent, does have some similarities with ours, these two kinds of value relations are not simply identical with each other. The doctrines of Buddhism are believed that human life is an instant and continuous transmigration leaving nothing after experiencing, and has sufferings from the "Karma" made by the previous life. To be specific, the doctrines of Buddhism demonstrate "two aspects of cause and effect in the three times", namely, the present suffering results from the illusion and karma chiefly in previous existence, and the future suffering the present illusion and karma. It should be said that the samsara of cause and effect in Buddhism can only be understood on the basis of faith, and not be testified by the rationality or the science. Here, we want to uncover and approve that the reasons for all this do not lie in the Buddhist so-called mysterious fate, but in the realistic human and life practice. It is the human beings and the specific and historical practice that lead to the generation of value and the relations of cause and effect manifested in the time chain. That is to say, the value relations of "past-present-future" are not entirely unreal and false, but rather the realistic phenomenon caused by human being in the real life practice. Only when we embark on the concrete and historic human beings and on the realistic practice, can we comprehend the chain of cause and effect correctly, and carry out the proper transformation.

Humans need to evaluate the past and present value actions carefully on the grounds that the value has the inseparable relations, even the relations of cause and effect, with the time series. The aphorisms, like "history is the best judge" and "time is the most impartial judge", illuminate that the time plays an indispensable role in the value judgment. The value does not reverse from the perspective of time, so the past events have gone and cannot be pursued again, and the past mistakes cannot be made up by reversing the time. We are always unavoidable to have the regrets, and do not have the so-called "regret medicine" to eat. The purpose of evaluating the past is to summarize the experience objectively, to learn from the experience carefully, and try our best to avoid repeating the past mistakes again. If so, the experience and lessons, as the "gift" or the inheritance bestowed by the past time, will become the "booster" to create the present and future value. Meanwhile, human beings need to carry out the prudent designs and plans for the future by themselves. As a kind of animal striving for living by the value creation, human beings are confronting the future creation at all times. Thus human nature, rather than some kind of fixed or static state, is a dynamical trend and a generation of historical process toward the future. We construct the glorious dream and reasonable anticipation for the future, which is not only the goals and directions of life practice, but also provides the passion and motivation for human activities. Certainly, we can construct and anticipate the future, but whose realization needs

to take the past achievements as the foundation, to start from the present and to fulfill it by “realistic present”—the present state of consuming time.

It can clearly be seen that the crucial issues of value is to sum up the past carefully, to strive for grasping the present and to create the future attentively. The present is a time link between the past and the future, and a crucial factor to create all the values. The present is continuously fleeting and vanishing, but Jacques Lacan puts forward that the death brought by life or the death bringing the life, whose two kinds of death has the essential meaning for it indicates whether a person adopts the positive or the negative attitude toward life. The positive life attitude requires the urgent sense of “living-towards-death” and the transcendence of “tending-towards-eternal” to grasp the present by producing the maximum value of the present and the positive possibilities for the future. Only when we really hold the present, can we make up the past wasting time, overcome the past mistakes and confusions, inherit the value creation of the past, live up to the past hard work and effort, in order to produce the substantial benefits from the past experience or lessons. What is more, by holding the present effectively, we do not let the present become regret again, make the solid foundation for the happy future life and guide to construct the glorious blueprint of future value. By virtue of this, these following ideas and behaviors cannot be accepted by us: let a day pass negatively and passively without doing anything; *carpe diem* of the consumerism by caring noting; tend to “smash a pot to pieces just because it’s cracked—write oneself off as hopeless and act” with the destructive attitudes, trifle with youth and life, and so on. All these cannot be taken as our lives attitudes and behavior-orientations for they show the disrespecting to our lives value and the self-destructive possibilities for the glorious future.

3 Temporality of Value

Although we assure the time dimension of value and its relevance with the time extension, we, by no means, mean all the objects, at any time, have the same value to every subject (human beings).

As mentioned before, there does not exist any value beyond the time in fact. It doesn’t like what some thinkers believe that we can ignore the differences of value in the past, present and future. We often need to emancipate our minds, get rid of the superstition, keep pace with times and “reevaluate all values”, particularly in the social transformation or social reformation, because of the great changes in the condition of times, the spirits of age, the needs and abilities of subject, the ideas of times, the technology of measuring time, the pace of life, etc. As often as not, this is the era of great value transformation as well.

The distinctive temporality of value originates from the concrete historic subject itself, from the purposes and needs of the subjects accordance with the times, from the constant generation and improvement of subject basing on the life practice. Whether the subject at different times or the same subject at different

developmental stages confronts different environment for subsistence and activities, thus are asked to solve different questions. Moreover, their needs, cultivations and abilities vary from time to time. There is not possible for people to always feel and think alike on the nonfactual value issues, and more possibly to change with time. Actually, “all the things transfer with the time, place and conditions”. Today, if we measure the past by present subjectively and simply, the ancients may be just “speechless” or “acquiescence”, but are not really identical with it. Also, if we simply outline the future from the past and present aspects, our descendants may be laughed at it, just like what we treat many past prophecies in the value field.

The basic fact is that if we analyze the specific and historic value subject, we find that even if it had value in the past, it maybe does not have the same value for the present and future. The ancient bow had played an indispensable role in the age of broadsword and lance on account of its remote destruction. However, due to the emergence of modern firearms multiplied their destruction, bows and arrows gradually lost their power once they had, even have already been abandoned in actual combat, and now become the traditional athletics or recreational activities. The ancient transportation tools like the ox-drawn cart, carriages, mule cart were once the important means of transportation. After the more efficient tools like bus, train and airplane were invented, these ancient transportation tools gradually lost their existent meaning as the transportation, can only be found in some remote rural areas that lag behind. Likewise, some materials is valuable at present and future, but may be valueless the past, or whose value had been neglected. For example, considerable “newly” “discovered” recourses and “new” materials, leaving aside those artificial synthesis, others were said to have been neglected their values mostly. Also, some rare ores were abandoned in nature without ignoring, because there is no need in the relevant industrial production or the restriction of the smelting technology. But now, thanks to the production needs and technological advances, the rare ores are becoming the indispensable production resource. Today, people, “rereading the classics” and rewriting the history, actually “revalue the value” as well. Moreover, the valuable materials at past and present may become little value or even valueless in the future, just like the development process of the abacus. The abacus—so-called “ancient computer”—becomes almost useless in front of the calculator and modern computer. Therefore, it is reasonable and realistic to have these common sayings, such as “wait to sell at a good price”, “await an opportunity to take action” and “opportunity knocks but once”.

Even though the value is of temporality and varies with time, place and conditions, we constantly discuss these two issues, namely, the eternity and the immortality, which are even taken by considerable people as their ultimate values to pursue in their lives, like Shu Sun-bao, the Chinese aristocrat from the State of Lu in the Spring and Autumn Period. He puts forward “three kinds of immortality”: “the highest immortality is the establishment of the gracious virtue; the

second, the realization of the glorious achievements; the third, the generation of the famous speech. When these kinds of immorality are not forgotten after a long time, they are what so-called ‘immorality’ is”.⁸ Then, does the eternal and immortal value exist?

As far as I am concerned, the eternal and immortal value does exist in theory, for it can be the time state for the existence of the subject value.

For example, human beings, as a whole, favor the things and activities which are good for their entire reproduction, subsistence and development, so these things and actions have the eternal and immortal value for human beings. It is far-reaching significant for human beings to protect environment and to maintain the ecological balance, because it protects the eternal existent homeland and the activity venue, and maintains the life quality of human beings and the fair and justice of intergeneration. For most social communities, the objects or activities either protective or beneficial to their lasting existence, sound subsistence, collaboration and development should also have the eternal and immortal value. Alternatively, the eternal and immortal value should also be endowed with the subjects conforming to the life-long primary purposes, interests and needs, as well as the vital events and achievements significant to the human life.

From another perspective, the value activity is irreversible in time. The value of the things, at any time, does not have repeatability. Thus, it is the “present” that has the crucial significance in the subjects’ value activity. The present going to become past comes to the future. Indeed, it is not unreasonable for someone to say that grasping the present and moment is just getting the eternal. Each of us, just recalling back, have gone through some important moments, and have some historical moments worth memorizing and cherishing, such as the happy childhood memories, the experienced vital events, the distinctive life experience, the achieved vital success, the aesthetic moment of “fall in love at first sight”, and so on. Although all these classic “historical moments” pass in the twinkling of an eye, they are the wonderful and precious experience in our lives. Once we missed, it cannot come again, and repentance is unavailable. Once we grasped these moments memorized in our lives, they will become the eternal. We have not only the video products concluding the photos, music records, documentary films and other audios, but also the documentary works compounding the diaries, random thoughts, faithful records and reportage, and historical materials as well including the reminiscences, archival resources, oral history, whose importance lies in cutting off the time, and making the unforgettable historical moments and events become eternal for remembering and summarizing. Broadly speaking, human life is composed of considerable moments and events. Once we let the time, especially in the youth, slip away by accomplishing nothing, what we can do is just to recall it, rather than to trace it back. Therefore, it is important to grasp present, “retain the time” in order to realize the value of youth, and make the fleeting time become

⁸ Zuo Zhuan-the Duke XIANG’s Twenty-Fourth Year.

meaningful, which becomes eternal for its value and has the immoral essence to human beings.

Of course, we must assure that the eternal and immoral value has the condition and limitation, and cannot be comprehended mechanically and rigidly or understood it in a stationary and absolute state. Only when the value has the specific subject in the certain development stage with the specific measure, can the value make sense. Definitely, it does not mean that what the world exists is like the fields of facts, and is the “value of iron” or the “truth of value”, which is not only beyond the specific subject, time and space, but also always right and universally applicable. Whether in history or reality, some people believe and accept this kind of “value of truth”, and even to sell it forcefully. As a fact, this kind of “truth of value” is nothing but the “mythology” of their beliefs, or the value judgment reflecting their purposes and interests, even the unscrupulous propaganda in order to achieve specific purposes. This kind of immoral and eternal value establishing on deception, hegemony and power, cannot stand up to measure from other specific subject and history by standing on other position. After all, its selfishness, hypocrisy and ridiculousness will be testified by history and time.



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