

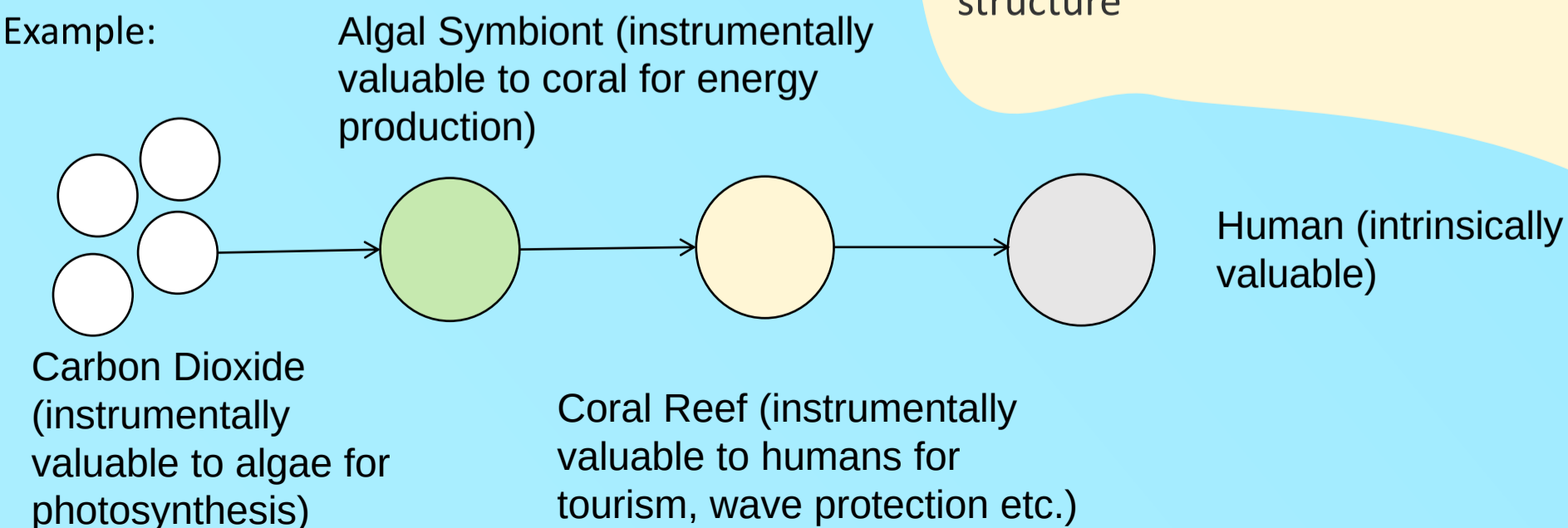
# Reframing ecological value: lessons from coral reefs

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Ecological value **is the way in which things in ecosystems are important or significant**, e.g. the moral importance of a living creature, or the biological importance of fish as nutrition for other organisms. Coral reefs provide examples for changing how we think about ecological value, which matters for **environmental philosophy**, and also areas like economics and sociology

## The 'standard model' of ecological value

1. Value comes from only one kind of thing, e.g. something is valuable because a human mind says it is, or because it suits the interests of an organism, or because it is part of an ecosystem
2. Ecological value is primarily moral value, and is distinct from social value (e.g. economic)
3. Value emerges at the end of a process
4. Value has two distinct types: intrinsic (what something is) and instrumental (what something does)
5. Instrumental value forms unidirectional chains between pairs of things
6. Chains end at singular intrinsically valuable entity
7. Things in ecosystems are related by a 'ball and chain' structure



## What we learn from coral

1. Value comes from the relations things have to many other things, notably minds, organisms and ecosystems
2. Social (e.g. economic) and ecological value are continuous (non-humans can have economic relationships!)
3. Ecosystem processes themselves are valuable, as well as producing valuable products
4. Instrumental and intrinsic value are ideal points, many cases are a mixture of both
5. Things in ecosystems overlap and may live inside each other. Lots of reciprocal connections between different things.
6. No reason to assume chains end at an intrinsically valuable individual
7. Things in ecosystems are related by a web structure

## Revised model

