Dave Nearing

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*On Dorsey’s “Intrinsic Value and the Supervenience Principle”*

G.E. Moore’s Supervenience Principle in its most basic form (SP) postulates that for any *x* and *y*, if *x* and *y* share an identical set of intrinsic properties, then *x* and *y* have identical intrinsic values. In his paper “Intrinsic Value and the Supervenience Principle,” Dale Dorsey argues for the rejection of SP on the grounds that there is no conception of intrinsic value that is at the same time compatible with SP and with the concept of “psychological resonance.” In Part I, I will clarify and distill Dorsey’s argument as much as possible and in Part II, I will raise attempt to show that although there is a great deal of evidence to support Dorsey’s general position, discarding SP outright leaves a vacuum which a resonance-compatible theory of intrinsic value cannot satisfactorily fill.

**I.**

First and foremost, it is necessary to understand the principles behind Dorsey’s argument. Dorsey begins by establishing a distinction between two forms of intrinsic value: “non-relational intrinsic value” (N-value) and “relational intrinsic value” (R-value). N-value is value which does not supervene on anything but its own intrinsic properties (Moorean intrinsic value). R-value is value which supervenes in part on its value to or for something or someone (examples of R-value include Aristotle’s “final goodness,” Kagan’s “value as an end,” and Korsgaard’s interpretation of Kant’s “conditionally valuable good under conditions of goodness”). Dorsey establishes the difference between the two types of value (R and N) with the example of a murderer who derives R-value from killing, an action that does not have N-value. Dorsey also shows that it is possible for the murderer to have the characteristic of suffering, a state of affairs that has N-value, but from which the murderer does not derive R-value.

If it *is* the case that, as Dorsey claims, there are two different subtypes of intrinsic value, then SP bears the burden of supporting the existence of both N-value and R-value. Should it fail in either respect, then it is clear that SP is an inadequate definition of intrinsic value. Given a case of N-value, SP holds up admirably. For the purposes of argument, I will restrain myself, as Dorsey does, to the view of intrinsic value as only applying to states of affairs under SP. Imagine an instance where there existed a state of affairs which could be represented by a fractal. The state of affairs would be comprised of nothing but goodness, and on every possible level of examination would be seen as arising from the same good state of affairs on and on *ad infinitum*. In other words, imagine an instantiation of a perpetual “goodness cycle” without beginning or end. The state of affairs within the instance would fulfill the conditions of N-value, because it was good irrespective of its relations (being composed of nothing but goodness), and it would fulfill the conditions of SP because its component properties were good and their component properties were good and their component properties were good on and on *ad infinitum*.

When applied to R-value, however, SP runs into a problem. If there exists a state of affairs *d* that I take pleasure in, the fact that I take pleasure in *d* is a relational property of the pleasure. According to SP, the pleasure cannot be intrinsically valuable to me, because it supervenes upon a relational property (that it is pleasurable to me); however, *d* can be intrinsically valuable to me because its instantiation does not supervene upon my taking pleasure in it, but rather upon a distinct set of discernible intrinsic properties. To combat this objection, Dorsey suggests that SP can handle the existence of R-value by demoting it to a level beneath a broader state of affairs with a demonstrable N-value. To do this, Dorsey applies a rule which I will call the “D-state rule,” *dP*&*dU→D*, where *dP* is the desire of person *P* that state of affairs *d* instantiate and *dU* is the instantiation of state of affairs *d* in instance U; if *dP* and *dU*, then *d* exists in a “D-state,” which is to say it exists in a state where it satisfies a desire.

Dorsey argues that should SP utilize the D-state rule to handle R-value instantiations, then it follows that D-states are the only indicators of intrinsic value. In other words, *dU* cannot be intrinsically good for *P* (*G*), and as it is obvious that *dP* alone cannot be *G*,then *D* is the only thing that can be *G.* If there existed some *P* who desired all and only that which was *G*, then *d*’s goodness would necessarily supervene in some way upon *dP*, which is a clearly relational property unique to *P*, a move that is not allowed if *d* is to be intrinsically good under the definition outlined in SP. Furthermore, under the D-state rule, any and all D-states are *G*, regardless of *d, dP,* or *DP* (whether *P* desires that *D*).

For instance, heroin is probably not a good thing to use (*d*), I have no desire to use heroin (~*dP*), and I have no desire to desire to use heroin (*~DP*). However, according to the D-state rule as established above, if I desired to use heroin and used heroin, it would be *G,* even if *~DP*. This problem makes it impossible for SP to coexist with existence internalism (EI) (the view that for *d* to be *G*, *P* must be motivated to promote *d*) because if *~DP P* would (1) not be motivated to bring about *D*, even if *dP* and *dU*, and (2) the further fact that *~DP* means that the intrinsic value of *D* is in part determined by *P* because if *D* is *G* and *~DP*, then it can be said that *P* desires *~G*, a state of affairs which is bad, which is bad. Such determination is not an intrinsic property of *D* and as such is not allowable under SP.

This brings us at long last to the heart of Dorsey’s argument. We are faced with a choice based upon the above deductions, we can either discard SP or discard EI. If we choose the latter in favor of the “reasonably entrenched” SP, we have still to deal with the unquestionable existence of “psychological resonance constraints” (PRC*s*) and their incompatibility with SP. Put generally, a PRC claims that for *d* to be *G* at time *t*, *d* must be positively endorsed by *P* at *t*. EI advances only one type of PRC, motivation, though many other types of PRC exist (belief, enjoyment, disposition towards, assent to, &c.). This being so, Dorsey argues that even if EI is false, the concept behind EI (the concept of a PRC) cannot be ruled out out of hand. If we discard EI, we are still faced with a multitude of other PRCs, and it is unreasonable to discard them all in light of the fact that many different PRCs are conceivable. In sum, the burden is on SP to either disprove or incorporate R-value. The evidence for the existence of R-value is not only intuitive but also supported by the existence and application of a wide variety of PRCs. Since SP can neither satisfactorily disprove all PRCs nor satisfactorily incorporate R-value, IT IS THEREFORE REASONABLE TO DISCARD SP.

**II.**

My chief objection to Dorsey’s otherwise sound and well-presented argument is that it makes an error in rejecting the possibility of SP’s amendment to include PRCs. In §5.1, Dorsey claims that since PRCs exist, a state of affairs where *P* resonates with *d*, and *dU­*, is the only intrinsic value bearer that is compatible with SP (as opposed to D-states or unqualified states of affairs). Further, he points out that this explanation does not depend upon the *d* in question or the motivation of *P* to pursue *R*. However, Dorsey makes the mistake in believing that under the SP-independent view (1) *R* is only *G* at the time when *R* obtains and (2) believing that *R* is not *G* until *P* has acted actively and positively under the operating PRC in order to bring about *R*.

I believe that this runs dangerously close to saying that things can only be good if we assent to them, which is obviously not true. Imagine that I am severely mentally ill and am forced to take medication in order to make me well again. Under the PRC of my delusion, imagine that I believe that I am sane and that taking medication is going to hurt me. In such conditions, I am not inclined to act positively towards bringing about a state of affairs where I am not mentally ill, a state of affairs which is obviously *G*. If we allow for SP, even though I do not obtain an R-state, do not assent to treatment, desire treatment, or desire to be cured, being cured of my illness can still be a good state of affairs that is a valid end sought irrespective of its relation to whether or not I give my consent or otherwise actively seek it.

If we discard SP, it is logical, although not reasonable, to claim using Dorsey’s argument to claim that even though I am mentally ill and would probably be better off not being mentally ill, I should not be cured because the fact that being cured does not resonate with me, a fact which makes my being cured an undesirable state of affairs. As such it seems clear to me that SP has a place in the theory of intrinsic value, even if it does not represent an infallible conception of intrinsic value.