

Roadmap:

This paper has grand ambitions. First, Dorsey seeks to break the intrinsic value - final value connection and the extrinsic value - instrumental value connection. Second, he seeks to undermine the view that dispositions supervene solely on a thing's extrinsic properties (i.e. he will argue that some dispositions supervene on a thing's intrinsic properties / relations). Lastly, he will argue that being instrumental to value is a disposition. Sometimes, this disposition will supervene on a thing's intrinsic properties, and so Moore and others would be wrong. Other times the disposition will supervene on a thing's extrinsic properties, and so certain theories about dispositions will be wrong. If successful, Dorsey will have shown that instrumental value is a much more robust, and under analyzed, concept than previously noted. And, even if everything stated above is false, showing that it is false will require a deeper and more thoughtful discussion of instrumental value than has previously been offered.

Background

In her 1983 article 'Two Distinctions in Goodness', Christine Korsgaard distinguished between four types of value:

Final Value: ϕ is finally valuable if and only if it is valuable as an end.

Instrumental Value: ϕ is instrumentally valuable if and only if it is valuable as a means.

Intrinsic Value: ϕ is intrinsically valuable if and only if it is valuable in a way that supervenes only on the intrinsic properties of ϕ .

Extrinsic Value: ϕ is extrinsically valuable if and only if it is valuable in a way that supervenes – at least to some extent – on the extrinsic properties of ϕ .

1. Instrumental Value: first steps

Final value (that which is valuable as an end) has received the most attention in the literature. This makes sense given that, for example, ethics is interested in promoting whatever is finally valuable (i.e. Moore's idea of doing whatever is optimific; Kant's idea of always fulfilling one's duty, etc.). Additionally, final value is important prudentially since it is widely thought that what will increase the quality of my life is not that which has only instrumental value, but that which is valuable as end. Moreover, it has been common to connect the notions of final value with intrinsic value, and instrumental value with extrinsic value. Such a view is as follows:

“ ϕ is finally valuable if and only if its value supervenes on its intrinsic properties. On this view, ϕ is valuable as an end if and only if ϕ is intrinsically valuable; or, as Michael Zimmerman puts it, ‘Korsgaard's distinctions (i.e., between final/instrumental and intrinsic/extrinsic) coincide.” (pg 138)¹

¹ Though, there is an ambiguity here. Is ϕ finally valuable because its value supervenes on *all* of its intrinsic properties, or just some?

This view is usually called the Moorean view. Though there are other accounts of final value, Dorsey is right to point out that instrumental value has not received nearly as much attention in the literature. Since instrumental value is the natural contrast class for final value, shedding light on it will shed light on final value.

Bradley's Helpful Failure

To start, Dorsey finds two things wrong with the following quote from the Korsgaard paper.

“Objects, activities, or whatever, have an instrumental value if they are valued for the sake of something else – tools, money, and chores would be standard examples . . . The natural contrast to a thing that is valued instrumentally or as a means is a thing that is valued for its own sake or as an end.”

Korsgaard's view, according to Dorsey, does get some things right. Something being instrumentally valuable for some other thing is not inconsistent with it also being valuable as an end. Knowledge, for example, may be valuable as an end, but I also value a doctor's knowledge as a means (e.g. a means to bettering my health). Despite this minor agreement, Dorsey claims that there are two things lacking in Korsgaard's assessment.

First, there is a distinction to draw between how *we* value a thing versus the *actual* value of the thing in question. By connecting the having of instrumental value with the requirement that 'they are valued for', Dorsey is raising the issue between how we in fact value something versus the value that it actually has (in some sense, how it should be valued). Such a nuance is glossed over by Korsgaard.

Second, Dorsey denies that X being valuable *for the sake of* Y entails that X is valuable *as a means to* Y. Here he relies on Ben Bradley's notion of *signatory value*. I may, for example, value something not because it is a means to something, but merely because of what it signifies. The UNO logo, for example, signifies an institution of higher learning. I value the logo for the sake of higher learning, but not as a means to higher learning. Moreover, even if instrumental value just is the value that something has as a means, it cannot just be a means to anything. The nuclear codes are a means to global war, but the codes do not possess instrumental *value*.²

Additionally, we do not have a very precise understanding of the relationship between being instrumental and being of final value. Moore (and C.I. Lewis) think of it as a causal relationship. Such an understanding has trouble accounting for effects which are of mixed value. The example in the paper is that of drinking wine. The solution is to determine the instrumental value of a cause by the *total* consequences (both what is actually caused and what is prevented

² They may, then, be instrumentally disvaluable. The literature on disvalue is even more sparse than the literature on instrumental value.

from occurring). Invoking such counterfactuals, however, is its own challenge. Dorsey offers us Bradley's solution to these issues:

Suppose s is a state of affairs that occurs at world w . Let W be a function that determines what world would have obtained, given a context c , had s not occurred – i.e., the closest world to w , given c , where s doesn't occur; we can represent this as $W<\neg s, w, c>$. To determine the extrinsic value of s at w given c , or $EV <s, w, c>$, first we determine all the states of affairs other than s that obtain in w but not in $W<\neg s, w, c>$ – call their conjunction 'the total consequence of $<s, w, c>$ ' – and calculate the intrinsic value of the total consequence of $<s, w, c>$. . . The intrinsic value of the total consequence of $<s, w, c>$ is equal to the sum of the basic intrinsic values of its conjuncts. Then we determine the conjunction of all the states of affairs that obtain in $W<\neg s, w, c>$ but not in w – call this 'what $<s, w, c>$ prevents' – and let the intrinsic value of what $<s, w, c>$ prevents be the sum of the basic intrinsic values of its conjuncts. Here, then, is the formula that determines the extrinsic value of $<s, w, c>$:

BEV: For any state of affairs s , world w , and context c , $EV <s, w, c> = IV(\text{the total consequence of } <s, w, c>) - IV(\text{what } <s, w, c> \text{ prevents})$. (pg 141)

Such a view corrects deficiencies in the Moorean / Lewis view since it incorporates the total consequences of a state of affairs. Dorsey is happy to admit that 'insofar as instrumental value is related to the *actual* consequences of a given instrumentally valuable state of affairs, it is related in the way Bradley notes.' (pg 141) Despite this, Dorsey will now argue that Bradley's account of extrinsic value does not fully analyze instrumental value.

2. BEV and Instrumental Value

Dorsey begins this section by making a distinction. The distinction is between being instrumental to value on the one hand, and having instrumental value on the other. If ϕ 's consequences are, on balance, good, then ϕ is instrumental to value. Bradley's account, Dorsey claims, is more than adequate as an account of being instrumental to value. It explains how something's total consequences justifies viewing it as getting us what we want. Bradley, however, intended his account to explain instrumental value. If Bradley were right, then it must be the case that any ϕ is instrumentally valuable if and only if ϕ is instrumental to value. Dorsey denies this. In order to justify this criticism of Bradley's account, Dorsey uses the cases of Hank's stolen money, and Steinbeck's oranges. (pg 143 - 144)

After criticizing two potential responses, Dorsey moves on to his positive project.

3. Instrumental Value as Power

Instrumental Value as Power (IVP): An object, state, or event ϕ is instrumentally valuable if and only if it possesses the disposition to be instrumental to value. (pg 146)

Dorsey explains how IVP can accommodate cases such as Henry's Cash and Steinbeck's oranges. The reason that the oranges and the cash have instrumental value is because they are disposed to be instrumental to value. The fact that the activation conditions never actualize does not entail that they do not have the disposition. After this, Dorsey's next move is to remind us that dispositions can be understood to be intrinsic to a thing (and have been understood by many influential philosophers). As an example of this, David Lewis (one of the 🦊's) is quoted.

"Necessarily, so the principle goes, if any object ϕ is replaced with a qualitatively identical object ψ , and if ϕ possesses disposition d , ψ will also possess disposition d ." (pg 147)

In conjunction with IVP, this account of dispositions results in the view that instrumental value supervenes on the intrinsic properties of a thing, and not the extrinsic. Hence, the coinciding of the intrinsic with the final would no longer hold. In other words, it follows from this account of dispositions coupled with IVP that the Moorean view is false. So, Dorsey has two things to prove: that some instrumental value (tentatively taken to be dispositional in nature) supervenes on the intrinsic properties of things, and that some instrumental value supervenes on extrinsic properties.

4. Why Some Instrumental Value is Extrinsic

This conclusion is due to Jennifer McKittrick's influential work in the disposition literature (UNL!). She has, to many people's satisfaction, introduced examples which undermine the idea that dispositions supervene only on the intrinsic properties of an object (contra Lewis above). Her most famous example, which is different from the one Dorsey explains, involves the disposition to *be vulnerable*. A city, for example, may be vulnerable in one location, and not vulnerable in another. Given that being vulnerable is a disposition, and all of the intrinsic properties of the city are held fixed, it would seem to follow that whether or not the city is vulnerable is dependent upon factors outside of the city (i.e. in its extrinsic / relational properties). Hence, some dispositions supervene on a thing's extrinsic properties. Dorsey ends this section by summarizing that " ϕ 's disposition to be instrumental to value [can, like *being vulnerable*, sometimes] supervene on ϕ 's extrinsic properties." (pg 150) Some dispositions, then, supervene on the thing's extrinsic properties. What remains is for Dorsey to show that some other dispositions supervene on a thing's intrinsic properties. If he can do this, then both Moore, Lewis, Korsgaard and many others will have been wrong both about the intrinsic / extrinsic / final / instrumental distinction, as well as about the nature of dispositions.

5. Why Some Instrumental Value is Intrinsic.

The challenge to address here is that an argument can be given which, if sound, would prove that all instrumental value is extrinsic. Something like the following seems to be what Dorsey has in mind (and which some of you raised when we discussed R&R last class):

It might be thought that oranges are instrumentally valuable because of what they do *for us*. Such a claim would place instrumental value outside of the oranges. If this is true, then it would be the extrinsic / relational properties of the orange would be why it is instrumentally valuable. Hence, the orange's instrumental value supervenes on its extrinsic properties. Such a move will likely be possible for all cases of instrumental value (the laws of nature, after all, will always be required and those are most certainly extrinsic). Thus, all instrumental value would be extrinsic. Additionally, since most (all?) dispositions require something external to an object in order to manifest, then all dispositions will be extrinsic. So much for undermining Moore.

In order to combat this argument, Dorsey points out that while it is required that certain extrinsic, situation specific, features need to be present for a disposition to manifest, that does not entail that dispositions supervene solely on those extrinsic, situation specific, features. The key to this claim is his further point about comparing *intrinsic duplicates*. If we take a champagne flute and replace it with one that is an intrinsic duplicate, then that new glass is just as fragile as the original. For Dorsey, this is enough to show that while the activation conditions are 'folded in' to the disposition ascription (i.e. how we ascribe fragility to an object), it is just the intrinsic properties of the glass that ground its fragility. Moreover, if we keep the world the same but change the intrinsic properties of the champagne flute such that each atom of silica is replaced by an atom of iron, then the flute is no longer fragile. Getting back to Steinbeck's oranges, Dorsey's view is that the oranges are instrumentally valuable (they give us good health) but, while the activation conditions required something external (creatures like us for whom oranges provide nourishment), their *value* is found in the intrinsic properties of the oranges themselves. Hence, some instrumental valuable things supervene on the intrinsic properties of that very thing.

6. Two Objections

The first objection that Dorsey considers whether or not instrumental value is *gradable*. If it is, then IVP would seem to be false since its formulation appears to be inconsistent with such gradability. Call the amount of instrumental value that is displayed by ϕ the *scalar extent* of ϕ 's instrumental value.

Dorsey doesn't think that this objection has much bite. For starters, dispositions themselves are gradable (e.g. a crystal vase is *more fragile* than a vase made of tempered glass). True, IVP does not account for scalar extent, but making such an addendum is unproblematic to Dorsey's goal.

One possibility might be to suggest that the extent of a given state's scalar instrumental value is determined by the expected BEV score given the contextually identified activation conditions. Put more crudely, the scalar extent of

ϕ 's instrumental value is given by the amount of final value ϕ has the disposition to produce. (pg 153)

Accounting for such scalarity, then, though not entailed by IVP, is consistent with it. Hank's pile of money has a lot of intrinsic value once the activation conditions occur. Such a consequence will be much better than the bad consequences. A smaller pile of money will likewise have a smaller amount of good and bad. Ranking these is no problem. What about cases where instrument value are cases of intrinsic value? The expected BEV of the oranges, given the various activation conditions, have the disposition to create *this much* final value. So, accounting for the scalar extent of ϕ 's instrumental value does not require a rejection of IVP.

The second objection takes us back to Bradley who in essence makes *potential value* intrinsic, and being *instrumental to value* extrinsic. Dorsey does admit that, to some degree, the disagreement with Bradley is not much more than a disagreement about which intuitions are correct (metaphysics!). Thankfully he offers a second response. Even if Bradley is right, and instrumental value is a purely extrinsic thing, potential value would be intrinsic. Potential value is not the same as final value, and so, Moore is wrong still.