
CAN INSTRUMENTAL VALUE BE INTRINSIC?

BY

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Abstract: In this article, I critique a common claim that instrumental value is a form of extrinsic value. Instead, I offer an alternative dispositional analysis of instrumental value, which holds that instrumental value can, in certain circumstances, be an example of intrinsic value. It follows, then, that a popular account of the nature of final value – or value as an end – is false: the Moorean identification of final value with intrinsic value cannot properly distinguish between value as an end and value as a means.

In her pioneering article ‘Two Distinctions in Goodness,’ Korsgaard distinguishes 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

With these categories in mind, the nature of *final* value that has received the most philosophical attention. And why shouldn’t it? After all, of all the various types of value, final value is the sort that really *counts*. For instance, morality will often require us to promote value. But though this may imply obligations to promote instrumental value or other kinds of non-final value, one has such obligations only insofar as doing so serves the promotion of *final* value. Act-consequentialism, for instance, holds that we are morally required to promote the best state of affairs, where betterness is measured by the extent to which these states of affairs are valuable *as an end*. Furthermore, final value has not just moral but prudential importance. In determining that which improves the quality of my

life, I ask not what is instrumentally valuable for me or what is good for me in some derivative sense, but rather what is valuable, for me, as an *end*.

Because of its moral and prudential importance, a number of influential analyses of final value have been offered. Perhaps the most important account of the nature of final value holds that 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'.² This is the position of Moore, Zimmerman, and others (call this the 'Moorean' view).³ Others believe that something can be valuable as an end not simply on the basis of its intrinsic properties, but also on the basis of some relational or extrinsic properties, and hence that final value is – or can be – a form of extrinsic value. This view is held by, e.g., Korsgaard, Shelly Kagan, and Thomas Hurka.⁴

One important thing to note is that final value, whatever theory one accepts, is properly contrasted with *instrumental* value. But though instrumental value is final value's natural contrast, it has received comparatively little attention.⁵ Instrumental value is often characterized in vague terms, without any clear analysis of when, or why, a particular object, state, or event is instrumentally valuable. In this article, I seek to offer an account of the nature of instrumental value, for two reasons. First, previous accounts – even those that have sought precision – go wrong in properly identifying the nature of instrumental value. If my account of instrumental value is correct, instrumental value can no longer be classified as a form of *extrinsic value*. Instrumental value occasionally – though not always – supervenes wholly on intrinsic properties of objects, states, or events. Second, because instrumental value is final value's natural contrast class, the account of instrumental value I offer in this article is important for our understanding of final value. If my view is correct, the Moorean view of the nature of final value is false: the identification of final value with intrinsic value fails to adequately distinguish between final value and instrumental value.

1. *Instrumental value: first steps*

In defining the idea of instrumental value, Christine Korsgaard writes the following: '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.'⁶ There is clearly something right in Korsgaard's brief account. If an object has instrumental value, this does not

imply that the object has value for its own sake. Of course, objects can be both instrumentally valuable and finally valuable, in which case an object might both be instrumentally valuable and valuable for its own sake or as an end. Nevertheless, the mere fact that something is instrumentally valuable does not by itself imply that the object is valuable for its own sake. Rather, its instrumental value has to do with its value as a *means*.

But Korsgaard's account – sketchy though it is – has two major defects. First, something can possess instrumental value without being valued as such. For instance, I might not value my cell-phone for the sake of anything at all. In fact, I might fail to value it. Furthermore, it might be that *no one* values this particular phone; perhaps no one has ever stopped to consider it. But it still possesses instrumental value, insofar as I might use, or have used, it to call the police, or order pizza, or ask my beloved out to dinner, all of which contribute to finally valuable states, such as pleasure. (I will assume for the purposes of this article that pleasure is a paradigmatically finally valuable state, though nothing important turns on this assumption.)

The second problem is that to be valuable *for the sake of* something else does not entail that this object is valuable *as a means to* something else. For instance, something can possess *signatory* value: value as a *sign* of intrinsically good things.⁷ Though this thing may be valuable for the sake of other things, this does not, however, mean that it is valued *as a means to* some other thing. But even if we identify instrumental value with the value an object possesses *as a means*, independently of being valued as such, the account fails without further specification. After all, for something to be valuable as a means, it cannot simply be a means to any old thing. A particular missile key might be a means to global thermonuclear war. But it does not possess instrumental *value*.

The last point illustrates the distinction marked by C. I. Lewis between something's being instrumentally *valuable*, and something's being merely *instrumental* or *useful*.⁸ A missile key is instrumental or useful for the production of global thermonuclear war. But it is not instrumentally valuable. Though instrumental value clearly has something to do with a particular object's effects or potential effects, and as such clearly has something to do with that object's being instrumental or useful *for something*, instrumental value is possessed not in virtue of any old effect of the object, but in virtue the effects of that object that are finally valuable, or valuable as ends. But the precise relationship between the instrumentally valuable object or state and the finally valuable state it is or may be a means to is not precisely understood. Moore, for instance, writes this about instrumental value: 'Whenever we judge that a thing is "good as a means," we are making a judgment with regard to its causal relations: we judge *both* that it will have a particular kind of effect, *and* that that effect

will be good in itself'.⁹ Along the same lines, C. I. Lewis writes: 'A thing *A* will never be said to have extrinsic value or instrumental value, unless it is meant to imply that there is some other thing, *B*, to which it is or may be instrumental, which has intrinsic value.'¹⁰

The problem with the accounts offered by Lewis and Moore is that the consequences or causal effects of a given object or event might be of mixed value. For instance, if I decide tonight to have a second glass of wine, that glass of wine is instrumentally valuable in the production of pleasure. However, the glass of wine is also instrumental to my oversleeping my alarm, missing my lecture, and feeling pain as a result.¹¹ If the pain I experience in the morning outweighs the pleasure I feel at night, it seems quite plausible to say that the glass of wine is not instrumentally valuable, even though it was instrumental to at least one finally valuable state, viz., my pleasure at drinking the wine.¹²

The sensible solution here is to suggest that the instrumental value of a given object or event is determined by the value of its *total* consequences, including what it causes, and what it prevents from occurring. In other words, the instrumental value of an object or state of affairs clearly involves a comparison between the value of what actually happened, and the value of what would have happened, had the purportedly instrumentally valuable object or event not occurred or existed. There is, however, one catch, as Ben Bradley notes:

[A] grenade falls in the middle of a group of people. Person *x* heroically jumps on it, sacrificing himself to save the group. There's a clear sense in which his jumping on it was an extrinsically good thing because of the suffering it prevented – even if the saved lives end up having no intrinsic value from then on. But maybe there was another person in the group – call her *y* – who was willing to jump on the grenade, but waited to see if *x* would do it first. If *x* hadn't jumped on the grenade, *y* would have. The intrinsic value of the world had *y* jumped on the grenade would have been the same as if *x* had jumped on it. Then *x*'s jumping on the grenade fails to move the world up on the overall value scale.¹³

Motivated by this example,¹⁴ Bradley suggests that to adequately understand the instrumental value of an object or event, one needs to specify the proper worlds with which to contrast the actual world. In judging the instrumental value of *x*'s jumping, you do not contrast the actual world with the world in which someone else jumps on a grenade. You contrast the actual world with worlds in which *no one* jumps on the grenade. According to Bradley, the proper contrast worlds are set contextually.¹⁵ Given the context, it is clear that the relevant contrast world is not the world in which *y* jumps on the grenade, but rather the world in which the grenade explodes as normal.

In an effort to capture this feature of instrumental value, Bradley offers the following account of *extrinsic value*:

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 , $EV<s, w, c> = IV(\text{the total consequence of } <s, w, c>) - IV(\text{what } <s, w, c> \text{ prevents})$.¹⁶

The basic idea is that we pick a contextually defined contrast world – the closest world in which a particular state of affairs does not occur – and measure the final value of the states that occur in that world against the final value of the states that occur in the actual world.¹⁷ The state is instrumentally good to the extent that the final value of the resultant states of the actual world are of greater value than the final value of the states in the relevant contrast world.

Of course, it must be said that Bradley's account is not an account of instrumental value *per se*, but is rather an account of extrinsic value. But, according to Bradley, instrumental value is one form of extrinsic value; as Bradley suggests, any definition of extrinsic value must provide a proper account of instrumental value. This is a natural thought, especially if one is committed to the Moorean view. If instrumental value is not a form of extrinsic value, this would appear to imply that instrumental value can be a form of intrinsic value, and hence intrinsic value would appear to be a poor analysans of final value. Furthermore, *that* the proper account of extrinsic value should provide a proper account of instrumental value is intuitive. After all, if ϕ is valuable as a means, doesn't this in part depend on its relational properties, viz., its *being a means* to something else? With this being said, I think that Bradley's contextual analysis adequately corrects defects in the Moorean and Lewisian understanding of instrumental value. I think it is correct 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.

One further virtue of Bradley's account is worth noting. Though Bradley does not discuss this possibility, his view can also account for the instrumental value of objects and events rather than simply states of affairs. For instance, one might say that the instrumental value of a particular five-dollar bill is determined by a comparison between the states of affairs that result in the actual world, and the world closest to the actual world in which the five-dollar bill does not exist. This, I claim, is a

noteworthy feature of treating instrumental value as a special case of BEV.

Given its virtues, the best place to begin an inquiry into the nature of instrumental value is to examine Bradley's view. In the next section, I argue that Bradley's account of extrinsic value is not an adequate analysis of instrumental value – successful though it may be at correcting defects of previous accounts. The failure of Bradley's view is instructive, however, and motivates an alternative analysis of instrumental value. If my analysis is correct, there is good reason to believe that *no* theory of extrinsic value can properly capture the nature of instrumental value; instrumental value (or so I shall argue), can supervene entirely on the intrinsic properties of a bearer of instrumental value.

2. *BEV and instrumental value*

My task in this section is to argue that BEV cannot adequately capture the nature of instrumental value. To this end, I here introduce a bit of terminology. I would like to distinguish between instrumental value, on the one hand, and being instrumental *to* value, on the other. For my purposes here, say that ϕ is 'instrumental to value' – very roughly speaking – if its actual consequences are, on balance, good, i.e. if it is causally implicated in the actual production of final value.

With this in mind, Bradley's analysis of extrinsic value is, I daresay, sufficient to capture the concept of any ϕ 's being instrumental to value. Indeed, it seems to capture precisely what we want out of such an account. If being instrumental to value means being valuable in some way or other, this value is clearly extrinsic: it clearly depends on an object or state's relations with things that are finally valuable. Hence an analysis of ϕ 's being instrumental to value seems to call for an analysis of extrinsic value. But Bradley's account of extrinsic value seems more than adequate to the task. In determining whether something is instrumental to value, it seems relevant to compare its actual consequences with the consequences of its failure to obtain – if it is genuinely causally implicated in the production of value, the subsequent value of its world will be greater than the world in which it fails to obtain. Hence, in determining the extent to which ϕ is instrumental to value, we determine the relevant contrast worlds, and we compare the on-balance value of the resulting states of affairs of the actual world and the relevant contrast. If the consequences of the actual world are of greater final value than the consequences of the relevant contrast world, ϕ is instrumental to value. Bradley's BEV, it seems to me, is a tailor-made account of ϕ 's being instrumental to value.

However, Bradley does not seek to give us an account of a state of affairs' being instrumental to value. Rather, Bradley claims that his

analysis of extrinsic value is adequate to capture the concept of *instrumental* value. But given the structure of his theory, if Bradley's account of extrinsic value is adequate to the concept of instrumental value, it must be the case that any ϕ is instrumentally valuable if and only if ϕ is instrumental *to* value. And I think there are very good reasons to doubt this biconditional. Two cases shed light on this.

2.1. HANK'S STOLEN MONEY

Consider Sam Raimi's neo-noir thriller *A Simple Plan*. Hank, played by Bill Paxton, Hank's brother Jacob, and Jacob's friend Lou stumble onto a payload of 4 million dollars in cash in a downed airplane. The three men hatch a scheme to keep the money. But, as such schemes are wont to do, their plan unravels and eventually results in the deaths of Lou, Lou's wife, Jacob, and other innocent bystanders. Eventually Hank comes to learn that despite causing, directly or indirectly, the deaths of many people close to him in an effort to keep the money, the only course of action that will allow him to avoid prosecution for grand theft and murder is to burn the illicit pile of cash. We would surely say that the money Hank burns is *instrumentally valuable*. Indeed, so instrumentally valuable that he is led to kill for it. But of course this money is not instrumental to value. Indeed, the total consequences of the money's existence (assume, for the purposes of this argument, that the bills are newly minted and unused) are substantially worse than the total value of that which the money's existence prevents: several innocent people are dead, two more lives are simply ruined. But we would certainly *not* declare that, for this reason, the cash lacks instrumental value. Indeed, it seems quite right to say that the cash is as instrumentally valuable as any other pile of cash totaling 4 million dollars.

2.2. STEINBECK'S ORANGES

A second case is helpful here. Consider the following quote from Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*:

The decay spreads over the State, and the sweet smell is a great sorrow on the land. Men who can graft the trees and make the seed fertile and big can find no way to let the hungry people eat their produce. Men who have created new fruits in the world cannot create a system whereby their fruits may be eaten. And the failure hangs over the State like a great sorrow. The works of the roots of the vines, of the trees, must be destroyed to keep up the price, and this is the saddest, bitterest thing of all. Carloads of oranges dumped on the ground. The people came for miles to take the fruit, but this could not be. How would they buy oranges at twenty cents a dozen if they could drive out and pick them up? And men with hoses squirt kerosene on the oranges, and they are angry at the crime, angry at the people who have come

to take the fruit. A million people hungry, needing the fruit – and kerosene sprayed over the golden mountains.¹⁸

The oranges described in the passages here are clearly valuable. Their destruction, so searingly described by Steinbeck, is a terrible waste, especially for those whose lives depend on their consumption. But these oranges do not possess *final* value. Oranges are not properly valued as ends. Furthermore, these oranges do not possess *signatory* value. (If anything, the oranges possess *negative* signatory value, as they are a harbinger of extremely bad things, including the rampant suffering of rural Americans during the Great Depression.) They are, rather, *instrumentally* valuable. The tragedy of Steinbeck's story is that *instrumentally valuable goods are going to waste*, goods that might have helped Tom Joad and his family survive, goods that might have nourished, and given pleasure to, the hungry. But given their waste, we should say that the oranges are not instrumental to value. Their existence seems to have no finally valuable consequences at all: the world in which they exist is no better for their existence than the contextually identified relevant contrast world, viz., the closest world in which they never grew. But that does not lessen the extent to which merely letting them rot or incinerating them is a waste of instrumentally valuable goods. Hence, it would appear, being instrumental to value – as captured by Bradley's BEV – is not identical to being instrumentally valuable.

2.3. TWO RESPONSES

Two responses are worth consideration here. I have so far been speaking of objects – such as Hank's stolen money, and Steinbeck's oranges – as possessing instrumental value, or of being instrumental to value. But Bradley assumes that extrinsic value (and hence instrumental value) is borne by states of affairs, and not objects.¹⁹ If so, one might think that I have inadequately characterized these objects as counterexamples to the claim that being instrumentally valuable and being instrumental to value are identical. Not so: though it is improper to claim that these objects are instrumental to value, it is also improper to describe them as being instrumentally valuable. Objects are not bearers of instrumental value.

I think this is an important response, but it is not sufficient to salvage BEV as an account of instrumental value even if we accept the claim that instrumental value can or should be ascribed to states of affairs only. In particular, each of the cases above permits translation. Rather than considering the instrumental value of Steinbeck's oranges or Hank's cash, one might consider the state of affairs in which there are budding oranges on California trees during the Great Depression, or the state of affairs in which Hank possesses \$4 million. These states of affairs are

clearly instrumentally valuable, though the instrumental value of these states of affairs, in essence, goes to waste; these states of affairs are not instrumental to value. Altering the relevant value bearers does nothing to vindicate the claim that a value bearer is instrumentally valuable if and only if it is instrumental to value.

As a second response, it might be claimed that the fact that an instrumentally valuable ϕ can sometimes fail to be instrumental to value can be interpreted in the following way: the oranges, say, (or the state of affairs in which there are budding oranges on California trees) have a certain modal property: the property of *potentially* being instrumental to value. Hence it might be said that instrumental value is not properly ascribed of the oranges. Rather, it is correct to say that these oranges have *potential* instrumental value, given that they have the potential – as yet unrealized – to be instrumental to value.²⁰ This response would allow BEV to function as a proper theory of instrumental value: actual instrumental value (captured by BEV) is analyzed in terms of the actual consequences of the object – an object's being instrumental to value. *Potential* instrumental value is analyzed in terms of an object's potential or capacities: its ability or capacity to be instrumental to value.

I think this response is untenable for two reasons. First, it misrepresents our reaction to the cases given here. Steinbeck's image is so tragic because these oranges (or, perhaps, the states of affairs in which there are budding oranges in California groves) *are* valuable; it is not because they might be valuable under some other conditions. Furthermore, it seems to me, there is no other way to explain their value than by insisting that they are valuable instrumentally. Their value is actual; the tragedy is that their actual instrumental value goes to waste. Second, it is unclear what precisely this form of 'potential' is supposed to amount to. It could refer, for instance, to a simple modal property, viz., that these oranges are actually instrumental to value in another possible world. But this is not a satisfactory analysis of the case. Any object has instrumental value in some other possible world. However, there is something importantly different between the value possessed by the oranges and, say, the value possessed by the body of this dead fly, which is instrumental to value in another possible world in which dead flies are as rare, and as prized, as diamonds are in this world. The loss of a dead fly is not tragic – not a waste – in the way the loss of the oranges is. The oranges have, I claim, actual instrumental value – actual value that goes to waste.

Alternatively, one might define the 'potential' of the oranges or Hank's pile of cash in terms of a certain form of unactivated disposition – the disposition to be instrumentally valuable. But though I think the disposition to be productive of final value is certainly an important part of the story concerning instrumental value, I think it is a mistake to say that possessing this disposition is merely possessing a disposition to be instrumentally

valuable. In fact, it seems right to say that the possession of this disposition is, in an important sense, *explanatory* of the value that the oranges possess. Recall a previously quoted passage from Lewis. Lewis writes that ‘A thing *A* will never be said to have extrinsic value or instrumental value, unless it is meant to imply that there is some other thing, *B*, to which it is *or may be* instrumental, which has intrinsic value,’ (my emphasis). As Lewis notes, an object’s being instrumentally valuable can supervene on the potential, or disposition, it has to contribute to final value. In this thought, I claim, lies the key to understanding instrumental value.

3. *Instrumental value as power*

A *disposition* or *power* is a property that attributes to an object the tendency to behave in a certain way assuming certain conditions obtain. For each disposition, there is a manifestation, and for each object that possesses this disposition, there is a set of *activation conditions*, i.e. conditions that, for this object, tend to produce the manifestation. The textbook example is *fragility*. An object is fragile, for instance, if it has the power to break given the assumption of certain activation conditions – for a wine glass, the activation conditions will include being thrown against a brick wall, or being in the room when Ella Fitzgerald hits a high C#. For different objects, the activation conditions of the specified disposition may vary. Two fragile glasses may require different activation conditions to display the disposition’s manifestation: one glass may require Ella Fitzgerald to hit a high C#, the other may not break in response to sound waves at all, but will crumble upon coming into contact with human hands. Both, however, are fragile. With this in mind, I submit the following account of instrumental value:

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

Instrumental Value as Power can treat the above cases adequately. Hank’s \$4 million is instrumentally valuable according to *Instrumental Value as Power*. Hank’s cash is disposed to be instrumental to value. Under the proper activation conditions (such as being turned in for movie tickets, or delicious meals, or whatever), Hank’s \$4 million will be instrumental to value, will be causally implicated in the production of final value. In the case of Hank’s cash, the power is unmanifested: the pile of cash does not become instrumental to value. Nevertheless, the power remains. The case is the same when it comes to Steinbeck’s oranges. These oranges are disposed, possess

a power, the manifestation of which is being instrumental to value, and the activation conditions of which include, say, being consumed by the hungry.

Hence *Instrumental Value as Power* conforms to considered judgments about instrumental value that an analysis of instrumental value in terms compatible with BEV cannot. Being instrumentally valuable is not the property of being instrumental to value, but is rather the property of being *disposed* to be instrumental to value. In this way, we capture the ascriptions of instrumental value for objects or states – like Steinbeck's oranges or Hank's money – that do not manifest in being instrumental to value. Furthermore, *Instrumental Value as Power* can accommodate any case of genuine instrumental value accommodated by Bradley's theory of extrinsic value: to be causally implicated in the overall bettering of states of affairs, any ϕ must have the *disposition* to do so under some range of specified activation conditions. Hence it would appear that *Instrumental Value as Power* is a well-suited conception of instrumental value.

If *Instrumental Value as Power* holds, BEV cannot be a proper analysis of instrumental value. But there is also reason to believe that *no* account of extrinsic value could be a proper analysis of instrumental value. Why? Because – though this principle will require some correction below – on common understanding dispositions are intrinsic properties. 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 . In other words, as David Lewis puts the matter: 'if two things (actual or merely possible) are exact intrinsic duplicates (and if they are subject to the same laws of nature) then they are disposed alike.'²¹ D. M. Armstrong, when discussing the fragility (or 'brittleness') of a glass, writes that '[t]he possession of the disposition [of brittleness] must . . . depend upon *non-relational* properties of the glass,' which, according to Armstrong, generalizes to all dispositions.²² George Molnar holds that one of the key intuitive judgments that any analysis of dispositional property ascriptions must accommodate is the judgment that dispositional properties are intrinsic properties.²³

If *Instrumental Value as Power* is true, it would appear that instrumental value is not a form of extrinsic value. If dispositions are intrinsic, and if instrumental value supervenes on a disposition, instrumental value would appear to supervene not on extrinsic properties, but on the intrinsic properties of the bearers of instrumental value. It follows that the Moorean view is false.

4. *Why some instrumental value is extrinsic*

At this point, I should consider an objection to *Instrumental Value as Power*. Some have argued that instrumental value cannot depend *solely* on

the intrinsic properties of objects or states in the way that *Instrumental Value as Power* seems to require. In particular, there appear to be two important examples.

First, Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen accepts that objects or states of affairs can be instrumentally valuable without also being instrumental to value; he holds that objects can be instrumentally valuable even if 'there appears to be no actual relation . . . but a potential one' between that which is instrumentally valuable, and that which is finally valuable.²⁴ But, *pace* my analysis so far, this cannot motivate the claim that instrumental value supervenes on intrinsic properties. At least in some cases, instrumental value must supervene on a relational property. Rønnow-Rasmussen considers an example borrowed from Korsgaard, that of an unused (and hence not instrumental to value) mink coat: 'When we claim that the mink coat has instrumental value, we seem to be implying (among other things) that if the situation had changed, the mink coat might in fact lose its instrumentality (say, the owner became allergic to fur). This suggests that there is in fact some relational property involved.'²⁵ Rønnow-Rasmussen appears to be making the following claim. Despite the fact that the relationship between the mink coat and final value is merely potential, the instrumental value of the mink coat must depend on a relation, in particular, the allergies (or lack thereof) of its owner. If so, assuming that dispositions are intrinsic properties, the instrumental value of the mink coat cannot depend *solely* on a disposition to be instrumental to value.

Is Rønnow-Rasmussen correct? I think it depends on how his claim – in particular, that when it comes to the instrumental value of the mink coat, there is 'some relational property involved' – is interpreted. First, it might be said that whether any instrumentally valuable object or state of affairs will become instrumental *to* value depends on the relational properties of that object or state of affairs. I think this is clearly correct. Indeed, for a fragile glass to break, it must be, say, smashed by another object or force. In this way, relations are an essential part of understanding the nature of fragility: without a particular relational property being present, the disposition will not manifest. Similarly for instrumental value. It might be that one *activation condition* of the mink coat's instrumental value is being owned by someone who is not allergic to it. But this could be true even if instrumental value is an intrinsic property: any intrinsic duplicate of the coat would still have the same disposition and the same activation conditions. That instrumental value depends on relations to be *activated* does not shed light on whether instrumental value is a disposition, or whether it is an intrinsic or extrinsic property.

However, one might read Rønnow-Rasmussen's argument in a slightly different way. For any given mink coat, we would say that it is instrumentally valuable, but *only on condition* that certain extrinsic properties hold, for instance, that its owner is not allergic to mink. If so, however, it must

be the case that the instrumental value of the mink coat supervenes, at least in part, on the extrinsic properties of the coat. One might put this point in the following way. Call a property or relation an 'ascription condition' of instrumental value for ϕ if and only if ϕ 's instrumental value, at least in part, depends or supervenes on this property or relation. In this case, Rønnow-Rasmussen might be claiming that being owned by someone not allergic to mink is not an activation condition, but is rather an *ascription* condition, of the mink coat's instrumental value. But if this relation is an ascription condition of the mink coat's instrumental value, then the mink coat's instrumental value supervenes, in part, on a relation. Insofar as dispositions are intrinsic properties, it would appear that the instrumental value of this mink coat cannot supervene solely on its disposition to be instrumental to value, and hence *Instrumental Value as Power* is false.

As an aside, I don't think this reading of Rønnow-Rasmussen's example is particularly plausible as a rejection of *Instrumental Value as Power*. In fact, just to note my own gut linguistic intuition, it does not seem to me to be the case that we would describe a perfectly good mink coat as losing instrumental value when its owner becomes allergic. I would claim instead that being owned by someone who is not allergic to mink is an activation condition, not an ascription condition, of the coat's instrumental value. A coat owned by someone allergic to mink is instrumentally valuable but – like Steinbeck's oranges – will not be instrumental to value (unless, for instance, its ownership is transferred).

This is my gut reaction to the case, which may not be shared by all, so I propose to leave it aside and consider another case in which the instrumental value of a particular object appears to *clearly* supervene on its relational properties. Consider, for instance, Hank's pile of cash. Any given bill in that pile is instrumentally valuable. But this instrumental value depends crucially on the *place of origin* of the bill. United States currency is only instrumentally valuable (or only instrumentally valuable in the standard way) if it is printed under the auspices of the United States Bureau of Engraving and Printing, or – at the very least – is *thought* to be so printed. The qualitative duplicate of a genuine 100-dollar bill is instrumentally valuable only if that qualitative duplicate was also printed by the US government – if its qualitative duplicate fell from the sky, or was printed by Joe Counterfeiter, or merely popped into existence, this bill is not instrumentally valuable. Hence it would appear that the instrumental value of Hank's pile of cash depends crucially upon a relational property, viz., the property of having been printed – or at least not being thought not to have been printed – by the US Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

If so, it would appear that *Instrumental Value as Power* is in trouble. Whether the instrumental value of the mink coat depends on its relations,

it is relatively clear that the instrumental value of the cash *does* depend on its extrinsic properties, in particular, its origin. If powers are intrinsic properties, and if the instrumental value of Hank's pile of cash supervenes, at least in part, on its relational properties, instrumental value cannot be accounted for in terms of dispositional properties or powers.

The argument just presented is valid but unsound. The instrumental value of Hank's cash shows not that instrumental value is not a disposition but rather that, contrary to Armstrong *et al.*, dispositions, such as the disposition to be instrumental to value, can be extrinsic. Indeed, Jennifer McKittrick has, to my mind, done much to show that dispositional properties *can* be extrinsic: in other words, the ascription conditions of some dispositional properties involve the presence of extrinsic properties. Though not all of McKittrick's examples are equally plausible, the following example seems to do the trick. McKittrick discusses the example of *weight*: 'x has weight n iff x has a disposition to depress a properly constructed scale so as to elicit a reading of n pounds in x's [current] gravitational field.'²⁶ This disposition is clearly extrinsic – it supervenes not only on the object's mass, but also on the presence of the object in a gravitational field that will allow it to depress a properly constructed scale by n. However, weight, as McKittrick defines it, bears all the relevant marks of a dispositional property.²⁷ In the face of McKittrick's examples, Michael Fara states that 'an insistence that dispositions must be intrinsic properties starts to seem like simple prejudice.'²⁸

Hence it seems right to say not that *Instrumental Value as Power* is false, but rather that instrumental value can *sometimes* be an extrinsic property. In the case of Hank's pile of cash – and perhaps Rønnow-Rasmussen's mink coat – instrumental value clearly supervenes on extrinsic properties. But this simply goes to show that, in these cases, ϕ 's disposition to be instrumental to value supervenes on ϕ 's extrinsic properties. It does not show that instrumental value is not a disposition.

5. *Why some instrumental value is intrinsic*

Instrumental Value as Power allows that instrumental value can sometimes be a form of extrinsic value, as required in the case of Hank's cash. But it remains to be seen whether *all* instances of instrumental value must be extrinsic. Indeed, there is some evidence that instrumental value will always be an example of an extrinsic disposition. For instance, consider Steinbeck's oranges. For the oranges to be productive of final value, it must not be just that they are eaten, but that they are also present in a world like ours, i.e. a world in which human digestive systems have certain properties, in which they react well to citric acid, for instance, and take nourishment from vitamin C and fruit glucose, etc. These are extrinsic

properties of the oranges, and would appear to be essential for any ascription of instrumental value to them. But presumably one could come up with a similar list of essential extrinsic properties for any instrumentally valuable state or object. Hence, so the argument goes, *all* instrumental value is extrinsic.

However, this argument proves too much. If taken seriously, it would show not only that all instrumental value is extrinsic, but also that virtually *all* dispositions are extrinsic. After all, whether a particular glass is fragile, or whether salt is water-soluble, will depend not only on intrinsic properties of the glass and salt, but also on the relevant *laws of nature*. But even though Armstrong's claim that all dispositions are intrinsic is false, it seems right to say that the 'brittleness' of a wine glass depends on its non-relational properties. But how can this be said, given that virtually any disposition will depend on extrinsic properties, including the presence of certain laws of nature?

The answer runs as follows. Take the oranges. For the oranges, presence in a world like ours is not an ascription condition of instrumental value, but is rather an *activation* condition of instrumental value. To see this, we must first do some minor investigation into the way dispositions are ascribed. Though I do not want to commit to any particular theoretical analysis of dispositional property ascriptions, one important *feature* of such ascriptions that must be respected by any analysis is the fact that, when we ascribe dispositions, we do so within a particular context, and under the assumption that certain relevant features of this context hold. On this point, Stephen Mumford writes:

To say that something is soluble is to say that it will dissolve, in liquid, in a context relative to the ascription. The ascription in the actual world is relative to actual world conditions. It is also relative to actual world conditions that can vaguely be understood as 'normal' . . . In making an appropriate and useful disposition ascription I am saying that, in ordinary conditions for the present context, if a particular antecedent is realized, a particular manifestation usually follows.²⁹

In making dispositional property ascriptions, we assume a set of background conditions that are contextually defined relative to the speaker's interests or set of circumstances. When I say that a wine glass is fragile, I am saying, as Mumford notes, that if thrown against a brick wall 'in ordinary conditions for the present context', it will break. But understood in this way, fragility is perfectly intrinsic. Any intrinsic twin of the wine glass will, if thrown against a brick wall 'in ordinary conditions for the present context', break. The same analysis holds of the instrumental value of Steinbeck's oranges. When I describe these oranges as instrumentally valuable, I claim that they will be instrumental to value if eaten by humans in 'ordinary conditions for the present context'.

A sensible way to describe this phenomenon is as follows: being present in 'ordinary conditions for the present context' is not a relation upon which the ascription of a disposition depends. Rather, this relation is one that, when present, will help to produce the manifestation associated with that disposition. In other words, when making dispositional property ascriptions, the contextually relevant background conditions are *folded into the activation conditions* of any given dispositional property ascription. For instance, in claiming that oranges are instrumentally valuable, I am claiming that they will contribute to final value if eaten by humans in a world relevantly like mine. But this is true of the oranges. Indeed, it is true of *any intrinsic twin* of the oranges. Thus when it comes to Steinbeck's oranges, the disposition to be instrumental to value is an intrinsic property – it is a property shared by any intrinsic twin. The same should be said of the fragile wine glass. In ascribing fragility to the wine glass, I am not saying that it is fragile *because* it is in a world like ours. Rather, I am claiming that – given its intrinsic properties – it will smash if thrown against a brick wall *in a world like ours*. But this is true of any intrinsic twin of the wine glass, no matter its extrinsic properties.

Thus, it seems that instrumental value, depending on the object or state, *can* be an example of intrinsic value. In the case of Hank's cash, instrumental value is a case of extrinsic value. In the case of Steinbeck's oranges, instrumental value is a case of intrinsic value. Whether the disposition to be instrumental to value is intrinsic or extrinsic for a given ϕ will depend on whether the ascription condition of the disposition to be instrumental to value depends on extrinsic properties or does not. This will be decided on a case-by-case basis. In the case of the oranges, the ascription conditions of instrumental value are not dependent upon extrinsic properties: any intrinsic duplicate of an orange will be identically disposed to be instrumental to value. In the case of the money, it is not the case that any intrinsic duplicate will be identically disposed to be instrumental to value. In conditions relevantly like mine, an intrinsic twin of the money might not be disposed to be instrumental to value. In particular, it might be counterfeit. In principle, when a particular object's instrumental value is extrinsic and when a particular object's instrumental value is intrinsic may permit of a more thorough analysis; I will not attempt such an analysis here.

This result is significant. Though instrumental value is, on occasion, an extrinsic property, it is also *often* an intrinsic property. Hence instrumental value is *often* a form of intrinsic value. The significance of this result goes beyond an inquiry into instrumental value, however. If *Instrumental Value as Power* is true, one cannot claim that ϕ is finally valuable if and only if ϕ is intrinsically valuable. The Moorean cannot properly distinguish final value from instrumental value.

6. Two objections

In this section, I consider two objections to *Instrumental Value as Power*. The first concerns the fact that instrumental value can be *gradable* or *scalar* – in other words, one can describe a particular ϕ as being *more* instrumentally valuable than a particular ψ . It would appear that *Instrumental Value as Power* cannot accommodate the scalarity of instrumental value judgments. Second, one might argue that *Instrumental Value as Power* is not a proper theory of instrumental value at all, but is rather a theory of so-called ‘potential value’.

6.1. HOW INSTRUMENTALLY VALUABLE?

Instrumental value is a gradable predicate. A five-hundred dollar bill is *more* instrumentally valuable than a one-dollar bill. But whether a particular ϕ possesses the disposition to be instrumental to value is an all-or-nothing matter. Hence it would appear that *Instrumental Value as Power* assigns a *binary* predicate: *whether* a particular ϕ is instrumentally valuable. How are we to understand when one ϕ is *more* instrumentally valuable than another, given that the extent to which an ϕ has the disposition to be instrumental to value is all-or-nothing?³⁰ Call the *amount* of instrumental value displayed by ϕ the *scalar extent* of ϕ ’s instrumental value.

This worry involves no particular problem for *Instrumental Value as Power*. Dispositions are themselves gradable.³¹ Though *Instrumental Value as Power* is silent on the scalar extent to which any particular ϕ is instrumentally valuable, this view could be supplemented with a further account of the gradability of instrumental value trivially. Consider, for instance, the following view. 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. Hank’s pile of money is extremely instrumentally valuable, because, given the activation conditions, one can expect that the good consequences will be much better than the bad consequences of this pile of money. A smaller pile of money would be less instrumentally valuable, i.e. able to generate less final value given the relevant activation conditions. This account of the scalar extent of an object or state’s instrumental value is compatible with *Instrumental Value as Power*, and with the claim that some instances of instrumental value are also instances of intrinsic value. When I claim that Steinbeck’s oranges are valuable to a certain scalar extent, I am claiming that they have a certain expected BEV value, *given* the various activation conditions, including the background conditions relevant to the context of ascription, i.e. that Steinbeck’s oranges have the disposition to create *this much* final value. Scalar

extent is thus shared by every intrinsic twin of the relevant ϕ . (Though I leave open the possibility that other accounts may provide a better understanding of the scalarity of instrumental value judgments, this proposal will succeed for my purposes here.)

6.2. POTENTIAL VALUE

One further response is worth consideration. Bradley has suggested that the disposition to be instrumental to value should not be understood as a proper analysis of instrumental value, but rather *should* be a proper analysis of 'potential' value.³² Potential value is not the same as the suggestion considered in §2, i.e. the potential *to be* instrumentally valuable. For Bradley, potential value is a genuine form of value, but is assigned not based on the extent to which ϕ is instrumental to value, but rather based on the extent to which ϕ has the potential to be instrumental to value. Potential value would permit of the dispositional analysis provided here. Instrumental value would be understood as a form of extrinsic value, analyzed by BEV.

I have two responses. First, I am strongly inclined to believe that, e.g., Steinbeck's oranges and Hank's pile of cash are instrumentally valuable, and that as such instrumental value requires a dispositional analysis. In other words, I find it very difficult to believe that Hank's pile of cash is 'potentially valuable' in a way that is distinct from its instrumental value. (Indeed, that these objects are instrumentally valuable appears to accord with Lewis's declaration that an object is instrumentally valuable if it is *or may be* instrumental to finally valuable objects or states.) Given this, the suggestion that Steinbeck's oranges and Hank's money are 'potentially valuable' rather than instrumentally valuable seems *ad hoc*. Of course, this is just table-pounding in favor of my own linguistic intuitions. I hope the reader will share them, but perhaps she will not. My second response runs as follows. Even if we accept that *Instrumental Value as Power* really functions as an analysis of potential value rather than instrumental value, because potential value permits of a dispositional analysis, the most important conclusion of this article remains untouched: not all forms of intrinsic value are forms of final value. Because, on this analysis, 'potential' value can be a form of intrinsic value, the Moorean view remains false, whether this is because instrumental value is a form of intrinsic value, or whether this is because potential value (if such a thing is not simply identical to instrumental value) is a form of intrinsic value.

7. Conclusion

I have argued here that *Instrumental Value as Power* is a defensible theory of instrumental value. If so, it would appear that, according to my view,

instrumental value can be a form of intrinsic value. If this is correct, the traditional Moorean treatment of final value fails: because instrumental value can be a form of intrinsic value, that something is intrinsically valuable does not mean that it is valuable as an end.

Some Mooreans, in light of this view, might be tempted to retreat to a similar, but weaker position. Some might hold that rather than identifying the concepts of final value and intrinsic value, *no* object can be finally valuable if its value does not supervene on its intrinsic properties. In other words, instrumental value may sometimes be intrinsic value, but final value is *never* a form of *extrinsic* value.³³

Though this position is perfectly possible, it would strip the Moorean view of all its force as an account of the nature of final value. If *Instrumental Value as Power* is true, one must provide a *different* account of the distinction between final value and other sorts of value, one that does not make use of the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic properties.³⁴ But let's assume this account is offered. Under this assumption, it is very difficult to imagine that the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value should play any substantial philosophical role. To put this another way, when it comes to the sorts of value that really *matter*, the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic value appears to be of little philosophical interest, even *if* all final value happens to be intrinsic value. Hence though this position is available, it appears to sap much of what is distinctive of the Moorean view.³⁵

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NOTES

¹ Korsgaard, C. (1996). 'Two Distinctions in Goodness' in her *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Zimmerman, M. (2005). *The Nature of Intrinsic Value*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, p. 62.

³ Some identify 'intrinsic value' with 'final value' even though they dispute that final value supervenes on intrinsic properties. See Kagan, S. (1998). 'Rethinking Intrinsic Value,' *The Journal of Ethics* 2, pp. 277–297.

⁴ See Hurka, T. (1998). 'Two Kinds of Organic Unity,' *The Journal of Ethics* 2, pp. 299–320. See also Korsgaard, op. cit., Kagan, op. cit.

⁵ Some important discussions of instrumental value include C. I. Lewis (1946). *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*. Indianapolis, IN: Open Court, pp. 382–388; G. E. Moore (1903). *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 22–23; Bradley, B. (1998). 'Extrinsic Value,' *Philosophical Studies* 91, pp. 109–126; Rønnow-Rasmussen, T. (2002). 'Instrumental Values: Strong and Weak,' *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 5, pp. 23–43.

⁶ Korsgaard, p. 250.

⁷ Cf. Bradley, pp. 118–120.

⁸ C. I. Lewis, pp. 384–5.

⁹ Moore, p. 22.

¹⁰ Lewis, p. 385.

¹¹ Cf. Bradley, pp. 111–112.

¹² An anonymous reviewer suggests that we might say that objects like the wine, though not ‘instrumentally valuable’ *tout court*, might very well maintain *some* ‘instrumental value’, insofar as the wine produced at least some finally valuable states. I myself find that this locution violates my linguistic intuitions, but nothing much turns on this. My account is compatible with scalar judgments of instrumental value, as I argue in §6.1. If so, I might accommodate this particular locution by holding that an object has ‘more’ instrumental value as its results (or, most importantly for my own view, potential results) include items or states of affairs of increasing final value, but that an object is ‘instrumentally valuable’ *tout court* when its total consequences (or potential total consequences) are, on balance, of final value. I will leave this particular intuition aside here, but simply flag that my analysis of instrumental value is perfectly compatible with this claim.

¹³ Bradley, pp. 115–116.

¹⁴ Bradley, p. 116.

¹⁵ Bradley, p. 116.

¹⁶ Bradley, p. 117.

¹⁷ Bradley later amends BEV to calculate the extrinsic value of an object via a sum of all the states of affairs at *w*, and all the states of affairs at the relevant contrast world. For the purposes of this article, this amendment makes no difference.

¹⁸ Steinbeck, J. (1939). *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Viking Press, p. 476.

¹⁹ Bradley, p. 112.

²⁰ See, for instance, Zimmerman, p. 255. Note, however, that Zimmerman claims that to be potentially instrumental to value is a *kind* of value. See §6.2 for a discussion of a similar position.

²¹ Lewis, D. (1997). ‘Finkish Dispositions,’ *The Philosophical Quarterly* 47, pp. 143–158 at p. 147.

²² Armstrong, D. M. (1973). *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 12.

²³ Molnar, G. (1999). ‘Are Dispositions Reducible?’ *The Philosophical Quarterly* 49, pp. 1–17 at p. 3.

²⁴ Rønnow-Rasmussen, p. 30.

²⁵ Rønnow-Rasmussen, p. 30.

²⁶ McKittrick, J. (2003). ‘A Case for Extrinsic Dispositions’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 81, pp. 155–174 at p. 160.

²⁷ See McKittrick, pp. 156–8.

²⁸ Fara, M. (2008). ‘Dispositions’, in E. N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall edn.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/dispositions/>>.

²⁹ Mumford, S. (1998). *Dispositions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 89. See also Manley, D. and Wasserman, R. (2008). ‘On Linking Dispositions and Conditionals’, *Mind* 117, pp. 59–84 at p. 65.

³⁰ Thanks to Ben Bradley for pressing this important objection.

³¹ Cf. Manley and Wasserman, p. 71. Importantly, Manley and Wasserman’s analysis of gradable dispositional predicates adequately captures only one dimension along which dispositional predicates may be gradable. According to Manley and Wasserman’s account, one might properly say that an object is ‘more fragile’ if it is disposed to break under many different sets of conditions. One might also say, very roughly, that an object is ‘more fragile’

than another if, in the circumstances in which it is disposed to break, it, say, breaks into more pieces, or completely shatters, rather than breaking into, say, one or two pieces. Manley and Wasserman's analysis captures only the former dimension along which dispositional predicates may be gradable. I take it that, when it comes to instrumental value, it is the latter dimension of gradability that is more relevant, and it is this dimension I seek to capture here.

³² Ben Bradley has suggested this line in personal communication.

³³ Ben Bradley has offered this position in personal communication.

³⁴ An anonymous reviewer suggests the following response to the claim that instrumental value can be a version of intrinsic value. Perhaps what my argument shows is not that instrumental value can be intrinsic, but that we should stop identifying 'intrinsic value' as Korsgaard does, i.e. as value that supervenes on intrinsic properties. I have no *per se* argument against this possibility; I merely seek to show here that instrumental value can supervene solely on intrinsic properties. This result is significant, insofar as it shows that the Moorean approach to the nature of final value and instrumental value fails. How we choose to react to this failure (whether by redefining intrinsic value, or by claiming that instrumental value can be intrinsic), is neither here nor there for the purposes of this article.

³⁵ I would like to thank Graham Oddie, Chris Heathwood, and members of an audience at the 2009 Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress for helpful comments on this article. I would also like to thank Ben Bradley for very constructive and helpful discussion and criticisms throughout.

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