

## Intrinsic Value and the Supervenience Principle

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Perhaps the most influential account of the nature of intrinsic value—the “Supervenience Principle” (SP)—holds that some object, event, or state of affairs  $\phi$  is intrinsically valuable if and only if the value of  $\phi$  supervenes entirely on  $\phi$ ’s intrinsic properties.<sup>1</sup> To deny SP is to accept that an object, state, or event  $\phi$  can be intrinsically valuable in a way that is explained at least in part by its extrinsic properties. SP is not a theory of what objects, events, or states of affairs actually *are* intrinsically valuable, on the order of hedonism. Rather, SP is an account of the *concept* of intrinsic value, a concept to which any particular first-order conception of intrinsic value—like hedonism—must live up.

In this paper, I argue that SP should be rejected. I argue that SP cannot accommodate important first-order features of intrinsic value. SP is therefore inordinately restrictive, and fails to accommodate many first order theories of intrinsic value. In particular, I argue that no SP-respecting conception of intrinsic value can accept the importance of *psychological resonance*. Given that psychological resonance is often, and plausibly, thought to be an important explanatory dimension of the *prudential good*, or what is intrinsically valuable for a person, SP’s inability to accommodate it is significant, and is hence strong reason to seek an alternative characterization of the nature of intrinsic value.

### 1. *Well-Being and Intrinsic Value*

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Ben Bradley, “Is Intrinsic Value Conditional?” in *Philosophical Studies* 107 (2002), 23. See also G. E. Moore, “The Conception of Intrinsic Value” in *Philosophical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 206.

Value-theoretic terminology is diverse. Philosophers often speak of “intrinsic value”, “extrinsic value”, “instrumental value”, “non-instrumental value”, “value as an end”, “final value”, etc. Thus some terminological explication is in order. Traditionally, “intrinsic value” is understood as synonymous with the idea of being “valuable as an end,” or, so to speak, valuable in a way that *really counts*. I will employ the traditional usage here. This differs from the practice adopted by, for instance, Christine Korsgaard. According to Korsgaard, intrinsic value just *is* value that supervenes on intrinsic properties. Value as an end is, on Korsgaard’s view, “final value”. According to Korsgaard, SP is analytic—but this says nothing about whether SP is a proper account of the nature of value *as an end*.

Much of the traditional identification of “intrinsic value” with “final value” or “value as an end” relies on the implicit assumption of SP. As Korsgaard notes, those who would prefer to identify intrinsic value with final value, and contrast it with, e.g., instrumental value, are advocating a substantive thesis about the concept of final value, viz., that the final value of any object supervenes on that object’s intrinsic properties.<sup>2</sup> This position is stated by Michael Zimmerman as follows:

[M]y keeping to the traditional practice of using the term “intrinsic value” to refer to [final] value is vindicated, for two reasons. First, since a state’s having the constituents that it has is part of its intrinsic nature (in both the nonrelational and qualitative senses of “intrinsic”) and since its final value supervenes on and only on its having the constituents that it has, *all final value is intrinsic value*. Second, there is...no nonfinal value that something can have that supervenes entirely on its intrinsic properties. Thus, *only final value is intrinsic value*. Hence Korsgaard’s distinctions coincide.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, I keep the traditional terminological link between intrinsic value and “value as an end”. However, this paper will oppose Zimmerman’s view; I argue that intrinsic value (in the sense of “value as an end”) cannot be adequately characterized by means of SP. If one prefers Korsgaard’s terminology, my substantive claim can be stated as follows: SP cannot be understood to characterize the nature of final value. My use of terminology admittedly divorces the terminological identification of intrinsic value and

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<sup>2</sup>Korsgaard, “Two Distinctions in Goodness” in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 253.

<sup>3</sup>Michael J. Zimmerman, *The Nature of Intrinsic Value* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 62.

“value as an end” from its philosophical basis (i.e., the implicit acceptance of SP). Nonetheless, it seems to me sensible to oppose SP in the language in which it is advocated.<sup>4</sup>

With this terminology in mind, the first point to make is that intrinsic value can take at least two forms. Intrinsic value can be *relational* as well as *non-relational*. An object  $\phi$  is relationally intrinsically good if it is intrinsically good *for* something or someone. Claims about the nature of well-being or prudential value are claims about relational intrinsic value. My experience of pleasure at  $t_1$  is intrinsically good *for me*. An object  $\phi$  is non-relationally intrinsically good if it is intrinsically good “period”, “*tout court*” or “full stop”. Indeed, particular objects can be relationally intrinsically valuable but not non-relationally intrinsically valuable, and vice versa. That something is good *for me*, or “relationally” does not guarantee that that thing is intrinsically good *tout court*, or “non-relationally”. My experience of pleasure might be intrinsically good for me, but might nevertheless lack non-relational intrinsic value. For instance, if I am a cold-blooded murderer, my experience of pleasure might be relationally intrinsically valuable (valuable for me), but it might, nevertheless, fail to be non-relationally intrinsically valuable, viz., intrinsically valuable *tout court*, or on the whole.<sup>5</sup> It might be intrinsically better, some have claimed, that cold-blooded murderers feel pain than pleasure, though such pain is certainly intrinsically worse *for them* than pleasure.

Some deny that intrinsic value can be relational. For instance, Noah Lemos writes: “according to the traditional view, intrinsic value is a *non-relational* concept. When one says that something is intrinsically good, in the sense with which we are concerned, he means just that, that it is intrinsically good *period*.”<sup>6</sup> However, Lemos does attempt to capture something like an account of relational intrinsic value:

we may also say, for example, that a state of affairs is intrinsically better for one person than for another. We might say that the state of affairs consisting in Smith’s being very happy and Brown’s being very unhappy is intrinsically better for Smith than for Brown. But this may be taken to mean roughly that Smith and Brown have certain characteristics,  $F$  and  $G$ , such

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<sup>4</sup>Not all people who identify “intrinsic value” with “final value” accept SP. See, for instance, Shelly Kagan, “Rethinking Intrinsic Value” in *Journal of Ethics* 4 (1998).

<sup>5</sup>See, for instance, Larry Temkin, *Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 260.

<sup>6</sup>Noah Lemos, *Intrinsic Value: Concept and Warrant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 3-4.

that Smith's having  $F$  is intrinsically better than Brown's having  $G$ . The fact that one person is better off than another when certain states of affairs obtain does not imply that intrinsic value is a relational concept.<sup>7</sup>

Lemos' accommodation is inadequate as an analysis of many common-sense claims about relational intrinsic value. For instance, the case of the cold-blooded murderer appears not to be adequately captured on Lemos' account. We might think that it is intrinsically good for a cold-blooded murderer to suffer. But this doesn't mean that suffering is intrinsically good *for the cold-blooded murderer*. The cold-blooded murderer might have a characteristic, suffering, such that the cold-blooded murderer's having that characteristic is intrinsically good. But nevertheless the cold-blooded murderer's suffering is surely intrinsically *bad* for the cold-blooded murderer. Lemos is correct to note that intrinsic value is not a relational concept in all cases. It permits of non-relational forms. However, it also permits of relational forms, such as when something is intrinsically good for a person.

At first glance, however, SP has serious difficulties accommodating many popular theories of *relational* intrinsic value, or well-being. Though some theories of well-being, simple hedonism, for instance, can be accommodated straightforwardly, many views cannot. Take, for instance, some popular refinements to hedonism, including the suggestion that *vicious* pleasures are not beneficial for those who experience them. Though two pleasures might have identical intrinsic properties, i.e., identical *pleasurableness*, these pleasures might be derived from, or taken in, very different things. My pleasure in listening to Mozart's *Requiem* might be identically pleasurable to a cold-blooded killer's pleasure at committing murder. But, it might be said, my pleasure is good for me, the killer's pleasure is not good for the killer. To explain this fact, we must appeal to facts that are extrinsic to the pleasure itself, including its causal origin. Furthermore, consider the suggestion that that which is good for me is the satisfaction of my preferences or desires. For SP, what is beneficial for me? Is it the *desire*? Surely not—the desire itself is not good for me. Is it the object of desire? Though this might be plausible, it is not compatible with SP. The value of that which is desired cannot rest on its intrinsic properties; in order for a particular desired  $\phi$  to be good for me, I must *desire* it.

These are serious problems for SP, but they can be overcome. According to SP, the only things that can bear intrinsic value are *states of affairs*.<sup>8</sup> If

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<sup>7</sup>Lemos, 4.

<sup>8</sup>Bradley, 26. See also Zimmerman, ch. 3.

this is correct, SP appears able to capture the views noted in the previous paragraph. According to SP, a state of affairs is intrinsically good for me if and only if its intrinsic value for me is explained by its intrinsic properties. Hedonism is thus accommodated: the state of affairs in which I experience pleasure is good for me. Furthermore, this move allows SP access to a preference or desire-satisfaction theory. For SP, the desire satisfaction view insists that that which is intrinsically good for me is not the desire, or the object of desire, but rather a particular state of affairs: the *conjunctive* state of affairs in which I desire that  $\phi$  and  $\phi$ . For the sake of brevity, call the conjunctive state of affairs in which  $x$  desires that  $\phi$  and  $\phi$ , a “D-state”. In addition to accommodating the desire-satisfaction view, SP can, by insisting that states of affairs are bearers of value, accommodate the various refinements to hedonism suggested above. I might take pleasure in a performance of Mozart’s *Requiem*. That this pleasure is *in Mozart’s Requiem* is a relational property of the pleasure. Furthermore, it is a relational property of me that I take pleasure in the performance. However, the intrinsic value for me of the *state of affairs* in which I take pleasure in Mozart’s *Requiem* can be perfectly well explained in terms of *its* intrinsic properties. Furthermore, the state of affairs in which I take pleasure in cold-blooded murder is *not* intrinsically good for me. In this way, SP appears fully able to accommodate a wide range of first-order theories of well-being.

Selecting states of affairs as the proper value bearers is important for SP not only in accommodating important theories of relational intrinsic value, or well-being, but also in accommodating additional claims about non-relational intrinsic value. In critiquing SP, Korsgaard writes:

Consider also the example of an extraordinarily beautiful painting unsuspectedly locked up, perhaps permanently, in a closet. Now a beautiful painting, I am supposing, is valued for its own sake. If [intrinsic value and final value] are equated, we must say it has intrinsic value. Yet it is locked in a closet, utterly unseen, and no one is the better for its existence. [...] Now on the Kantian type of account we can say that the painting is valuable for its own sake, yet so long as it remains locked up and unseen, it is no good at all. The condition of its goodness—the condition of the goodness of its beauty—is not met.<sup>9</sup>

In this case what seems to be missing from the locked-up painting is its being enjoyed by someone. If so, SP cannot accommodate this first-order fact

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<sup>9</sup>Korsgaard, 264.

about value: the value of the painting is explained in part by its relational properties, viz., its being enjoyed. Korsgaard insists that certain objects can only be good *given* the interest we take in them, given the fact that we value them as ends—as Korsgaard writes, “Value is, as I have put it, ‘conferred’ by choice.”<sup>10</sup> But if states of affairs, and not objects, are proper bearers of value, Korsgaard’s rejection of SP is too fast: SP can accommodate Korsgaard’s intuition regarding the painting in a natural way: by insisting that intrinsic value is not borne by the *objects* we value, but is rather borne by a state rather similar to a D-state, viz., the state in which the painting *is valued* or enjoyed. If states of affairs are value-bearers, Korsgaard’s critique fails.

SP’s acceptance of states of affairs as bearers of intrinsic value appears to vindicate SP’s ability to accommodate many common-sense first-order claims about both relational and non-relational intrinsic value. In what follows, I argue that this move is not enough. Though I allow that SP might plausibly accommodate Korsgaard’s intuition, and though I accept the claim that intrinsic value is borne only by states of affairs, I hold that SP has special problems when it comes to relational intrinsic value or well-being. SP cannot capture the plausible thought that one important fact that can contribute to the prudential value of  $\phi$  (whether a state, event, or object) for  $x$  is  $\phi$ ’s psychological resonance with  $x$ .

Furthermore, SP’s failure to adequately capture an account of relational intrinsic value is seriously problematic. Given that intrinsic value permits of relational and non-relational forms, we should expect that that which characterizes the concept of intrinsic value in one form should do so for the other. If SP cannot accommodate relational intrinsic goodness, there is strong reason to believe that it cannot characterize intrinsic goodness *tout court*.<sup>11</sup> (I will argue for this claim in §4.3) However, even if we reject the claim that relational intrinsic value and non-relational intrinsic value should be treated as different forms of an identical concept, whether SP characterizes the concept of relational intrinsic value is itself worthy of investigation, as many have held that SP must hold of any acceptable theory of well-being.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. *Desire and Internalism*

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<sup>10</sup>Korsgaard, 261.

<sup>11</sup>See, for instance, Chris Heathwood, “Fitting Attitudes and Welfare” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* v. 3, ed. Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 51.

<sup>12</sup>According to Ben Bradley, SP is a “non-negotiable” constraint on acceptable theories of well-being or relational intrinsic value. See Ben Bradley, *Well-Being and Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19, 27.

Take, for a moment, the desire-satisfaction theory. There are many such accounts, including so-called “simple” or “actual” desire fulfillment accounts,<sup>13</sup> “full-information” accounts,<sup>14</sup> “ideal advisor” accounts,<sup>15</sup> or “dispositional” accounts.<sup>16</sup> Which version one accepts is not important for the purposes of this paper. But it is worth noting that important statements of a desire-satisfaction view do not seem to fit the model of the desire-satisfaction view accommodated by SP, i.e., that treats D-states as the bearers of intrinsic value rather than the objects of desire themselves. Rather, the most popular account of such a view holds that the bearers of intrinsic value are the objects of desire (which might themselves be understood as states of affairs).

For instance, consider Peter Railton’s view. Railton writes: “an individual’s good consists in *what he would want himself to want*, or to pursue, were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error or lapses of instrumental rationality.”<sup>17</sup> Going back a bit further in history, Hobbes:

But whatsoever is the *object of any man’s appetite or desire*; that is it which he for his part calleth *good*: and the object of his hate, and aversion, *evil*; and of his contempt, *vile* and *inconsiderable*. For these words of good, evil, and contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so.<sup>18</sup>

Consider also the view offered by Sidgwick:

[I]t would have to be said that a man’s future good on the whole is *what he would now desire and seek* on the whole if all the consequences of all the different lines of conduct open to him were accurately foreseen and adequately realised in imagination

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<sup>13</sup>James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 10-11; Mark C. Murphy, “The Simple Desire-Fulfillment Theory” in *Noûs* 33 (1999).

<sup>14</sup>See Griffin, ch. 2; for criticism, see Sobel, “Full Information Theories of the Good” in *Ethics* 104 (1994).

<sup>15</sup>Most importantly, see Peter Railton, “Facts and Values” in *Facts, Values, and Norms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>16</sup>See David Lewis, “Dispositional Theories of Value” in *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>17</sup>Railton, 54. My emphasis.

<sup>18</sup>Hobbes, *Leviathan*, I 6. My emphasis. See also *Human Nature*, VIII 3.

at the present point of time.”<sup>19</sup>

These views share a common feature.<sup>20</sup> According to these views, that which is intrinsically good for someone is *that which is desired by the agent* (perhaps under certain idealized or counterfactual circumstances). For SP’s interpretation of the desire-satisfaction view, that which is intrinsically good for  $x$  is not the object of desire, but rather a D-state, i.e., the conjunctive state of affairs that includes  $x$ ’s desire of  $\phi$ , and  $\phi$ —whatever  $\phi$  might be. The views above claim, on the other hand, that what is valuable for a person is the object of desire, i.e.,  $\phi$ —whatever  $\phi$  might be—and the explanation of  $\phi$ ’s goodness is that  $\phi$  is desired. The latter view clearly violates SP.  $\phi$ ’s intrinsic value for  $x$  supervenes, at least in part, on a strictly relational property: being desired by  $x$ .

But so what? Why can’t supporters of SP simply insist that, just as Korsgaard was incorrect to insist that the bearer of value was a beautiful painting, desire-satisfactions views are incorrect to hold that bearers of value are objects of desire? The answer runs as follows. One important motivation for a desire-satisfaction theory of well-being is a plausible, though controversial, constraint on well-being: existence internalism.<sup>21</sup> Existence internalism about the personal good—very roughly—is the view that for  $\phi$  to be good for  $x$ ,  $x$  must be motivated to promote  $\phi$  (or motivated to promote  $\phi$  under relevant idealized or counterfactual conditions). Connie Rosati puts existence internalism in the following way: “The label ‘existence internalism’... refers to the general thesis that there is a necessary connection between motivation and normative status. The thesis tells us that something X can have a certain normative status N only if someone A would be motivated by it in sense M.”<sup>22</sup> Existence internalism is plausible, at least at first glance, and explains, at least in part, the appeal of a desiderative view of the personal good. Because only desires motivate, it must be the case that for  $\phi$  to be good for an agent, that agent must desire (or desire under some set of counterfactual conditions)  $\phi$ . Only in this way

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<sup>19</sup>Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981 [1907]), 111-12. My emphasis.

<sup>20</sup>This feature is shared by a number of other desiderative views. See, for instance, Mulgan’s account of the desire-satisfaction view. See Tim Mulgan, *Understanding Utilitarianism* (Acumen, 2007), 73.

<sup>21</sup>Many have held that the resonance condition is a crucial plank in the argument for desiderative views of practical reason and the personal good. See, for instance, Bernard Williams, “Internal and External Reasons” in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); David Brink, “The Significance of Desire” in *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* v. 3, ed. Shafer-Landau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Railton, 47.

<sup>22</sup>Connie Rosati, “Internalism and the Good for a Person” in *Ethics* 106 (1996), 297-8.

will there be a necessary connection between  $\phi$ 's "normative status" and the motivation to  $\phi$ . Existence internalism is not a plausible constraint on intrinsic value *tout court*—but it does appear to be a reasonable plausible constraint on prudential value, one that forms an important motivation for a desire-satisfaction view.

However, in insisting that the bearer of intrinsic value is a D-state, rather than an *object* of desire, SP fails to accommodate existence internalism, and hence fails to accommodate a major argument in favor of a desire-satisfaction theory. For SP to accommodate existence internalism, we must have some guarantee that, for every D-state, there is some further, positive motivational state taken toward that D-state. There can be no such guarantee. According to SP, for any given person, *any* D-state of desiring to  $\phi$  and  $\phi$  is good for them. *This holds no matter what  $\phi$  actually is, and no matter whether we actually desire to  $\phi$ , desire to desire that  $\phi$ , or desire the relevant D-state.* Take an example. I cannot stand the song "Ball and Chain" by the rock band Social Distortion. I have no desire to hear it ever again (and hence I have no desire for the state of affairs in which I hear that song). Furthermore, I have no desire to desire to hear "Ball and Chain". Actually, I am strongly averse to ever developing such a desire: I regard this song as objectively awful, and would regard a desire to hear it as a symptom of a general disintegration of my aesthetic sensibilities. For the same reason, I have no desire for the conjunctive state of my desiring hear the song and hearing the song. But according to SP's understanding of the desire-satisfaction view, the state of my desiring to hear the song and hearing the song is intrinsically good for me despite that state's utter impotence when it comes to my motivational states. This is a straightforward violation of existence internalism. According to SP, this state can be good for me even if I am strongly averse to it.

One might respond by restricting the range of intrinsically valuable D-states just to those that would motivate a given individual. One might restrict the acceptable range of  $\phi$ , and hence the range of intrinsically good D-states, by suggesting that a D-state is only intrinsically good for  $x$  if  $x$  desires the D-state in question. But this move is no help; it would obviously violate SP to be told that that a particular D-state is only good if I *desire* it; this would make the value of this D-state supervene in part on its relational properties.

However, one might argue that it is perfectly compatible with SP to restrict the range of intrinsically valuable D-states not by  $x$ 's attitude toward the D-state itself, but rather toward the relevant  $\phi$ , out of which the D-state is constructed. The most obvious strategy would be to claim that a particular D-state of  $x$ 's desire to  $\phi$  and  $\phi$  is only intrinsically valuable for

$x$  if  $x$  desires  $\phi$ . But there are two problems with this proposal. First, it would not accommodate existence internalism as stated. It would not guarantee that the bearer of intrinsic value for  $x$  motivates  $x$ ; it would only guarantee that one *element* of the D-state (i.e.,  $\phi$ ) motivates. I might desire  $\phi$ , but I might not desire to desire  $\phi$ , and hence I do not desire the relevant D-state, which, according to SP’s version of the desire-satisfaction view, is intrinsically good for me. But leave this aside. More importantly, this proposal also violates SP. Say, for instance, the relevant D-state is composed of my desire to hear “Ball and Chain” and my hearing “Ball and Chain”. In order to accommodate existence internalism, this D-state must not be good for me, because I fail to be motivated by it. The proposal now on the table is that this D-state is not intrinsically good for me because I fail to desire to hear “Ball and Chain”. But if so, facts about the intrinsic value of this D-state are settled by facts that are extrinsic to the D-state itself: the fact that I fail to desire to hear “Ball and Chain”—which is *not* a constituent of the relevant D-state. Hence it would appear that facts about the intrinsic value, or lack thereof, of a particular state of affairs supervenes on facts that are extrinsic to the state of affairs. It thus seems implausible that any potential restriction of relevant D-states can be found that (a) accommodates existence internalism *and* (b) accommodates SP.

Though some have thought existence internalism to be a plausible principle of non-relational intrinsic value, this principle is far more controversial than the claim that existence internalism is a plausible principle of *relational* intrinsic value, or, in particular the nature of prudential intrinsic value. Though we might accept the accommodation of Korsgaard’s painting by means of the value of a particular state of affairs, it is clear that a desire-satisfaction view, which draws substantially on existence internalism, cannot be accommodated by SP. This, I claim, is at least *some* reason to reject SP.

### 3. *Resonance*

The failure of SP to plausibly accommodate existence internalism—and with it an important motivation for a desiderative theory of the personal good—leaves us with two choices. First, we can reject SP. Second, we can reject a desire-satisfaction theory of the good. And there may be very good reasons to adopt the second course of action rather than the first. After all, if we feel much more strongly about SP than we do about the desire-satisfaction view (if in fact we do), we should not feel uncomfortable about jettisoning the latter to maintain the former.

However, *even if* we reject the desire-satisfaction view, I think the second route is implausible. First, SP is supposed to be a claim about the *conceptual* nature of intrinsic value. Even if the desiderative account of well-being is false, it seems wrong to say it is *analytically* false, or ruled out at the level of concept. Rather, we are much more likely to point out some of the more implausible features of a desire-satisfaction view, and claim that this view fails at a first-order, rather than second-order level. Second, and more importantly, existence internalism, on which a desire-satisfaction view relies, is merely one way of specifying a more general constraint on the nature of well-being, on which *many* views rely. In particular, it is one version of a *resonance* constraint. The resonance constraint is stated as follows by Railton:

Is it true that all normative judgments must find an internal resonance in those to whom they are applied? While I do not find this thesis convincing as a claim about all species of normative assessment, it does seem to me to capture an important feature of the concept of intrinsic value to say that what is intrinsically valuable for a person must have a connection with what he would find in some degree compelling or attractive, at least if he were rational and aware. It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage him.<sup>23</sup>

As noted by Railton, a resonance constraint claims, simply enough, that that which is intrinsically good for a person must *resonate* with that person. Put more precisely, for some state  $\phi$  to be good for  $x$  at time  $t$ ,  $\phi$  must be positively endorsed by  $x$  at  $t$ . Existence internalism is one form of resonance constraint: here the relevant positive attitude is the attitude of being motivated (or being disposed to be motivated under certain idealized or counterfactual conditions). But one could easily imagine a resonance constraint that insists that certain purported goods must be *believed* to be good, or must be the subject of autonomous *choice*, or must be *enjoyed*, or must be the subject of any number of additional attitudes on the part of individuals for whom those goods are good. SP fails to accommodate *any* form of a resonance constraint for the same reason it fails to accommodate existence internalism. Unless  $\phi$ 's intrinsic goodness for  $x$  can supervene on the fact that  $\phi$  resonates (however this is understood) with  $x$ , we cannot guarantee that that which is good will always resonate. Hence SP cannot

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<sup>23</sup>Railton, 47.

accommodate any version of a resonance constraint on that which is intrinsically good for a person.

Though we might seek to reject existence internalism, the more general *resonance* constraint is surely plausible. That an agent's good must resonate seems to be an adequate way to capture the thought that a person ought to have some *say* over what is good for her. Welfare goods, in other words, are not one size fits all—that  $\phi$  is good for an agent must be, in part, explained by something about *her*. Larry Temkin notes this feature of a desiderative view: “on this view, the agent is . . . the ultimate arbiter of her own good. What she desires is good for her, and, importantly, it is her desiring it which makes it so.”<sup>24</sup> Though this intuition is slippery and ill-defined, a natural and plausible way to capture it is to insist on a resonance constraint: for  $\phi$  to be intrinsically good for  $x$ ,  $x$  must somehow positively endorse  $\phi$ , whether that be in the form of a desire, choice, motivation, expression of one's autonomous will, etc.

The problem is magnified once we see that resonance can play an explanatory role in  $\phi$ 's intrinsic goodness for  $x$ , even if  $\phi$ 's resonance is not a *necessary condition* on  $\phi$ 's intrinsic goodness for  $x$ . In other words, some views might suggest that not all goods must resonate, but that  $\phi$  resonates with  $x$  is sufficient for  $\phi$  to be intrinsically good for  $x$ . Alternatively, one might suggest that resonance is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition, but that  $\phi$ 's resonance along with some other condition (such as  $\phi$ 's being at least neutral when it comes to some account of “objective” goodness) might be sufficient for  $\phi$ 's prudential value. Here resonance is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for  $\phi$ 's value for  $x$ , but *is* a contributing factor:  $\phi$ 's resonance with  $x$  is one thing on which the intrinsic goodness of  $\phi$  for  $x$  might supervene.

Take, for instance, the perfectionist theory of well-being defended by David Brink. This view insists not on the authority of *desire* over an agent's good, but rather on the authority of *autonomous choice*. Though Brink is agnostic concerning the way in which the content of one's choices ought to play a role in the evaluative authority of one's choices, he does claim that choices have normative significance insofar as they help to explain why some chosen object,  $\phi$ , is good for an agent  $x$  who autonomously chooses it.<sup>25</sup> On Brink's view, the fact that an agent autonomously chooses an object  $\phi$  can function as part of the explanation of  $\phi$ 's value, hence  $\phi$ 's value can supervene on  $\phi$ 's relations as well as  $\phi$ 's intrinsic properties. For Brink, the authority of

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<sup>24</sup>Larry Temkin, *Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 264.

<sup>25</sup>Brink, 40-45.

choice is limited. Chosen states must be, at least to some degree, inherently choiceworthy.<sup>26</sup> However, choice still enters into an explanation of  $\phi$ 's intrinsic value. Hence because, for Brink, choice *can* enter into an explanation of the value of particular states for persons, Brink's view is incompatible with SP. Call any view that takes seriously the importance of resonance to well-being, whether in the form of a constraint (such as existence internalism) or in the form of a non-constraint explanatory principle (such as Brink's perfectionism), a "resonance-respecting" theory of well-being.

Furthermore, it would seem that if we accept a standard understanding of "subjectivism" about well-being, SP fails to accommodate any subjectivist view.<sup>27</sup> Sumner, for instance, defines subjectivism this way: "a theory is subjective if it treats my having a favourable attitude toward something as a necessary condition of the thing being beneficial to me."<sup>28</sup> This is contrasted with an "objective" theory, which holds that "something can be (directly and immediately) good for me though I do not regard it favourably, and my life can be going well despite my failing to have any positive attitude toward it."<sup>29</sup> Sumner's account of the distinction between objective and subjective theories of well-being nicely maps onto a crucial feature of subjectivism noted by Richard Arneson: "One claim [that marks out subjectivism against objectivism] is that what is good for each person *is entirely determined by* that very person's evaluative perspective."<sup>30</sup> However, in order for "what is good for each person" to be "determined" by each individual's evaluative perspective, the *explanation* of  $\phi$ 's intrinsic value *for* that person must be given in terms of some pro-attitude adopted by the agent in question. Hence, on either Sumner or Arneson's account, no subjective theories of well-being can be captured by SP.

The mere fact that some philosophers have believed that resonance is important in explanations of relational intrinsic value is no reason *by itself* to reject SP. But the reach of resonance is important insofar as the resonance constraint *itself* is an important and attractive explanatory principle

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<sup>26</sup>Brink, 39-40.

<sup>27</sup>The "standard" understanding of subjectivism about well-being differs from the claim that a view is subjectivist if and only if that view insists that well-being "consists in, or depends importantly on, contingent psychological facts about an agent, such as what he desires or takes pleasure in," (David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 10).

<sup>28</sup>L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 38.

<sup>29</sup>Sumner, 38.

<sup>30</sup>Richard Arneson, "Human Flourishing versus Desire Satisfaction" in *Social Philosophy and Policy* 16 (1999), 116. My emphasis.

of the personal good. It is certainly plausible to say that at least *some* limited range of welfare goods (even if not all) depend on the pro-attitudes of the person for whom they are good. And though the explanatory power of resonance may well turn out to be chimerical, it would be substantially disappointing to be told that any theory that employs resonance *as* an explanatory principle is ruled out as a matter of concept. After all, we seem to be able to speak meaningfully of resonance-respecting theories of well-being as at least *competitors*. Hence, even if resonance-respecting theories are false, they are not ruled out at the level of concept. If so, it appears that SP cannot be an adequate mark of the concept of intrinsic value.

#### 4. Responses

That the relational intrinsic value of  $\phi$  can supervene on the pro-attitudes of agents for whom  $\phi$  is good is a reason to reject SP. However, there are three responses worth consideration here. The first response argues that though SP cannot accommodate the importance of psychological resonance to well-being, nothing is lost by rejecting resonance-respecting formulations of these views, because an SP-compatible translation yields identical verdicts. In other words, the difference between a genuinely resonance-respecting view and an SP-compatible translation of a resonance-respecting view is a distinction without a (philosophically significant) difference. The second response accepts my critique as it stands, but holds that SP is only a proper theory of *non-relational* intrinsic value. Third, and finally, I consider an argument, offered by Ben Bradley, that no matter how important resonance *seems* in discussions of well-being, no resonance-accommodating theory can be a proper conception of relational intrinsic value, because no resonance-accommodating theory can accomplish that which a conception of well-being must.

##### 4.1. Translations and Time

To begin this response, it is worth noting that SP can offer a translation of any resonance-respecting view, in terms of states that are similar in structure to D-states: SP will simply insist that, in the case of a resonance constraint, all intrinsically good states of affairs for  $x$  must be—at least—composed of  $x$  bearing a resonating pro-attitude toward  $\phi$  and  $\phi$  (call this an “R-state”). In the case of resonance as a merely explanatory principle, SP will hold that some states of affairs that are intrinsically good for  $x$  will include a conjunction of  $x$  bearing a resonating pro-attitude toward  $\phi$  and

$\phi$ . Of course, I argued above that an SP-compatible desire-satisfaction view cannot properly accommodate resonance-respecting views in terms of such translations.

One obvious response might be that, when all is said and done, the selection of value bearers matters little to an account of relational intrinsic value. Take the desire-satisfaction view for the moment. The standard, resonance-respecting desire-satisfaction view must hold that were a particular D-state to obtain, this would improve  $x$ 's well-being, for whatever value of  $\phi$ . After all, in any D-state,  $x$  desires some particular object or state, is motivated by that state, and this state occurs. Hence, were this particular D-state obtain, indeed *any* D-state,  $x$ 's well-being would improve, even for a resonance-respecting view. Thus the difference between a resonance-respecting desiderative view and an SP-respecting desiderative view might be substantially less than advertised, and perhaps not enough to reject SP on the grounds of inability to accommodate genuinely resonance-respecting views.

My response is as follows. Though the resonance-respecting view is surely committed to saying that, *whenever an R-state obtains*, this is good for  $x$ , the resonance-respecting and the SP-respecting view differ substantially when it comes to that which is good for a person *at a time*. There is a large and philosophically important difference between a counterfactual claim, e.g., “were this conjunctive state to occur, my well-being would improve,” and a non-counterfactual, e.g., “the R-state is itself intrinsically good for me”. One might put this in temporal terms. Any theory of well-being should, at least in principle, be able to come up with a rank-ordering (within the bounds of commensurability) of goods that can deliver a verdict about what is good for a person at  $t_1$ . What distinguishes resonance-respecting theories is that  $x$ 's pro-attitudes at  $t_1$  are relevant to the list: what is good for  $x$  at  $t_1$  is determined, at least in part, by  $x$ 's pro-attitudes at  $t_1$ . If we accept a resonance constraint, it will not be the case that the conjunctive state of my taking a pro-attitude toward hearing “Ball and Chain” and hearing it is good for me at  $t_1$ . The list of things that are good for me at  $t_1$  are composed of things that actually resonate with me at  $t_1$ , and the state in which I take a pro-attitude toward hearing “Ball and Chain” and hear it does not.

Any resonance-respecting view will hold that *were* it the case that I take a pro-attitude toward  $\phi$ , and  $\phi$  obtains, I would be better off *at the time at which  $\phi$  obtains*. This is substantially different, however, than SP's treatment. According to SP at  $t_1$ , this R-state is good for me, no matter the value of  $\phi$  (assuming that  $\phi$  also passes the relevant resonance-independent tests

prescribed by the resonance-respecting view). This is because SP understands that which is good for a person at a time in an entirely different way than resonance-respecting theories. According to an SP-respecting translation of a resonance-respecting view, the list of things that are good for me at  $t_1$  is in no way constrained by that which resonates. This is no superficial difference between first-order theories of well-being, and any theory of the concept of intrinsic value should be able to represent both such approaches.

#### 4.2. *The Supervenience Principle and Non-Relational Value*

The Supervenience Principle appears unable to plausibly accommodate the importance of resonance to well-being (whether in the form of a constraint or a weaker explanatory principle), which seems to form the backbone of many important first-order theories of relational intrinsic value. Given this fact, SP should be rejected as a theory of relational intrinsic value.

One option might be to divorce the second-order analyses of relational and non-relational intrinsic value. Given the *prima facie* importance of resonance to well-being, we might simply be content to allow SP to supply the best account of *non-prudential* or *non-relational* intrinsic value. If so, the argument I offer against SP is dulled. Though it may be compelling to hold that persons should have some say over that which is good *for them*, which in part explains the appeal of the importance of resonance, it is less appealing to hold that that which is good *tout court* must similarly resonate.

However, I think this strategy cannot be plausibly sustained. Recall what SP is. SP is not a theory about what makes something intrinsically valuable—it is not, in other words, a *conception* of intrinsic value. Rather, it is an *identifier*, or *mark*, of intrinsic value as a concept. Hence if SP is not to identify relational intrinsic value, it would appear that the term “intrinsic value” simply refers to two different concepts—one that is identified by SP, and one that is identified by some other principle. But this seems implausible. All the evidence seems to point to the fact that relational and non-relational intrinsic value are simply two forms of the same concept. For instance, one important mark of the nature of intrinsic value is its relation to practical reasons. It is plausible to say that if  $x$  is intrinsically valuable, I have at least *pro tanto* reason to promote it.<sup>31</sup> However, this is surely true of relational intrinsic value: if  $\phi$  is intrinsically valuable for  $x$ ,  $x$  certainly has *pro tanto* prudential reason to promote  $\phi$ .

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<sup>31</sup>This could be for many different reasons, and I remain neutral concerning which of the relata, “value” or “reason to promote”, is explanatorily prior.

Furthermore, consider three platitudes noted by Bradley that are generally associated with the concept of intrinsic value:

DEG: *Intrinsic value is the sort of thing that comes in degrees.*

MAX: *Intrinsic value can be added up and maximized.*

BET: *Adding something with intrinsic value to the world makes the world, or a life, or an outcome, better (other things being equal).*<sup>32</sup>

Each of these platitudes applies to relational intrinsic value. First, relational intrinsic value comes in degrees. Marrying my beloved is better for me than being a professional philosopher (or vice versa), for instance, though I might desire both for their own sakes. Second, well-being can be added up and maximized. The quality of my life at a given time is the aggregate of those things that count in favor of and against my well-being at that time. Furthermore, relational intrinsic value can certainly be maximized; indeed, maximizing my overall well-being appears to be the paradigmatic demand of prudential rationality. Finally, as BET notes, it is certainly true that adding something with intrinsic value *for me* to the world makes my life better (other things being equal). If a state of affairs is intrinsically good for me, and that state of affairs is brought about, or “added” to the world, my life goes better. Though this is not dispositive evidence that these concepts should be treated identically, it does shift the burden to those who would choose to accept SP for non-relational intrinsic value, reject it for relational intrinsic value. Given their similarity, relational and non-relational intrinsic value appear to be simply different forms of the same concept: intrinsic value.

As I noted before, however, even if we reject the claim that relational intrinsic value is a different form of the same concept as non-relational intrinsic value and claim instead that they are different concepts altogether, the failure of SP to adequately characterize the concept of relational intrinsic value is independently interesting. Many hold that SP is a requirement for *any* theory of well-being. One such thinker is Bradley, to whose defense of this claim I now turn.

#### 4.3. *The Concept of Well-Being*

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<sup>32</sup>Ben Bradley, “Two Concepts of Intrinsic Value” in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 9 (2006), 119. The “other things being equal” qualifier is meant to rule out bad instrumental effects of intrinsic goods.

In a recent book, Ben Bradley claims that no theory of well-being that rejects SP can be a genuine theory of well-being at all. Hence it would appear, if this is correct, that any account of welfare that accepts the importance of resonance to well-being must not be a theory of welfare proper.<sup>33</sup> Insofar as an extremely wide range of welfare theories accept the importance of resonance to well-being in at least some degree, Bradley’s claim, if true, would be substantially surprising. What is the argument for this claim?

According to Bradley, any acceptable theory of well-being must do three things:

- (1) First, we must say what sorts of states of affairs are intrinsically good or bad for us in the *most fundamental* way, or are *basically, non-derivatively*, good for us. Call these the *value atoms*. The value atoms are what fundamentally and completely determine how well things go for us. (2) We must then say what determines *how* good or bad those atoms are. (3) Finally, we must say how to determine the values of non-atoms we might be particularly interested in.<sup>34</sup>

At first glance, this list seems extraordinarily reasonable. One caveat, however, is worth mentioning. (1) is stated in a way that is difficult to understand. Bradley insists that we must identify the states of affairs that are “intrinsically good or bad for us in the most fundamental way,” or that are “basically, non-derivatively” good for us. It certainly seems plausible to say that any theory of well-being should strive to identify those states of affairs that are fundamentally good, if that simply means those states of affairs that are themselves *intrinsically good* for us. But what does it mean to be intrinsically good “in the most fundamental way”?

The most obvious possibility is that “intrinsically valuable in the most fundamental way” means *not intrinsically valuable simply as a conjunction of other, more basic states, that are themselves intrinsically valuable*. Indeed, this appears to be precisely Fred Feldman’s understanding of “basic intrinsic value”, which is cited by Bradley. Feldman writes:

When I say that these states of affairs have their intrinsic values in “the most fundamental way”, part of what I mean is that they do not have their intrinsic values because they are conjunctions or other combinations of smaller items that are intrinsically good. Thus, if some state of affairs, P, is intrinsically good, and

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<sup>33</sup>Ben Bradley, *Well-Being and Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19.

<sup>34</sup>Bradley, *Well-Being and Death*, 5.

some other state of affairs, Q, is intrinsically good, then their conjunction, P&Q, might also be intrinsically good. The value of P&Q might just be the sum of the value of P and the value of Q. In that case, P&Q would not have its value “in the most fundamental way”. It would have its value in virtue of the fact that it is composed of these parts, and they have their specified values. So P&Q could not be a basic intrinsic value state.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, a resonance-respecting view could agree: value atoms are those states of affairs that are *themselves* resonating (i.e., the objects of desire), not states of affairs that are merely conjunctions of other, more basic, resonating states. However, it is not clear that Bradley means “intrinsically valuable in the most fundamental way” as Feldman uses the term. A clue is given in Bradley’s direct argument for SP.

[SP] is a requirement of any acceptable theory of well-being. This is because, as noted above, the value atoms should be *instantiations of the fundamental good- or bad-making properties*—the properties that are fundamentally and completely responsible for how well a world (or a life, or . . .) goes. Suppose [SP] were false. Then there could be two properties, F and G, such that the only intrinsically good states of affairs are those involving the instantiation of F alone, but whose values are determined by whether there are any instantiations of G. But if that were true, F would fail to be a *fundamental* good- or bad-making property, for instantiations of F would fail to completely determine what value there is.<sup>36</sup>

It is true, of course, that any resonance-respecting view will accept that though F is that which is intrinsically good, F’s intrinsic goodness will—at least occasionally—require the presence not just of F (and F’s intrinsic properties), but also of some additional G. One might, for instance, replace F with “the state of affairs in which I listen to ‘Ball and Chain’”, and G with “the state of affairs in which F resonates with me”. For at least some true claims about well-being, assuming a resonance-respecting view, the value of F will depend on the presence of G, and hence F, according to Bradley, would fail to be a “fundamental” good- or bad-making property. Hence it would appear that Bradley means that a property can only be “fundamentally”

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<sup>35</sup>See Fred Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 173-4.

<sup>36</sup>Bradley, 19.

intrinsically good if that property is itself sufficient to “completely determine what value there is.”

We are now in a position to see the error in Bradley’s argument for SP. Depending on the interpretation of “fundamentally”, Bradley’s argument either equivocates or simply begs the question against the denial of SP. For the argument to yield the truth of SP, it must be the case that, in (1), “fundamental” is understood to exclude the possibility of the intrinsic value of a value atom supervening on relational properties of these value atoms. But this simply begs the question in favor of SP. Furthermore, if (1) is to be understood in this way, it has no plausibility. It would exclude, for instance, any resonance-respecting theory as a genuine theory of well-being. But as we have seen, many important verdicts about the nature of welfare and well-being depend upon respecting a resonance condition. If so, under this understanding of “fundamental,” it (a) begs the question and (b) is implausible to boot, as I have been arguing at length so far.

However, if we are to interpret (1) in a way that doesn’t straightforwardly beg the question, we must understand “fundamental” differently. We must understand it in Feldman’s way. Furthermore, (1) is independently plausible only if (1) holds that any theory of well-being must identify those states of affairs that are intrinsically good in a basic way, as Feldman understands it: value atoms that do not simply depend on their being conjunctions of further intrinsically valuable states. Surely any theory of well-being must provide a plausible account of such value-atoms! Hedonism, will, for instance, suggest that value atoms are discrete moments of pleasure.<sup>37</sup> The desire satisfaction view will claim that value atoms just are those most basic states of affairs that are desired for their own sakes. But (1) can be satisfied by any resonance-respecting theory of well-being if at least part of the explanation of the value of at least one basic intrinsic good  $\phi$  for  $x$  is that  $\phi$  resonates with  $x$ . Hence we should not accept Bradley’s argument for SP. Either Bradley equivocates on “fundamental” (between Feldman’s understanding, and the understanding that implies SP), or interprets “fundamental” in a way that begs the question in favor of SP.

## 5. Conclusion

SP cannot plausibly accommodate the importance of resonance to judgments of well-being, or what is intrinsically good for a person. If so, it seems to me, we have strong reason to reject SP as an account of the con-

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<sup>37</sup>Cf. Feldman, 174.

cept of intrinsic value. This concept permits of conceptions of intrinsic value for which resonance plays an important explanatory role.

It should be noted that the denial of SP does not commit me to any *particular* first-order facts about intrinsic value, nor does it commit me to any particular account of the distinction between intrinsic value and various other sorts of non-intrinsic value.<sup>38</sup> The rejection of SP, however, is essential to capturing a wide-range of judgments about relational intrinsic value, including judgments about the nature of intrinsic value for a person. The true nature of intrinsic value—or “final” value, in Korsgaard’s terminology—must await further examination.

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<sup>38</sup>One promising possibility is suggested by Bradley, “Is Intrinsic Value Conditional?”, 33.