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## SUBJECTIVISM AND OBJECTIVISM\*

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Whenever values are on the carpet the objectivism-subjectivism controversy lurks in the background. The issue seems to be particularly pregnant when discussions concern intrinsic and final values, i.e., what has value in itself or for its own sake. G. E. Moore, for one, was a stout defender of the idea that the notion of intrinsic value is in some sense the property of objectivists; only objectivists can coherently speak of intrinsic value. I think Moore was wrong about this—just as I think those (mostly subjectivists) are wrong who argue that these notions are incoherent.<sup>1</sup> There is nothing to prevent subjectivists from recognizing the final or intrinsic value of something. There is an important difference, of course, between subjectivism and objectivism, but it is not one that excludes subjectivists from ascribing intrinsic or final value to things. My main aim here, however, is not to argue that these notions are available to subjectivists. Rather, I will outline an approach to how we should distinguish between objectivists and subjectivists. This approach makes a distinction between two related but nonetheless different claims about value: (i) values are

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<sup>1</sup> Moore found at least two faults with subjectivism—it makes the objectivity of good disappear, and it makes it impossible that things are intrinsically valuable. The following passage is often taken to express, by implication, the latter point: “To say that a kind of value is ‘intrinsic’ means merely that the question whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possesses it, depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question” (“The Conception of Intrinsic Value”, *Philosophical Studies*, 1922). The subjectivist, according to Moore, makes value dependent on something external, the subject, and the subjectivist’s alleged value is therefore not an intrinsic value. For another early attempt to argue that subjectivists cannot coherently speak of intrinsic value, see the German value theorist Erich Heyde’s *Wert: Eine philosophische Grundlegung*, Kurt Stegner, Erfurt, 1926).

*supervenient* properties, i.e., properties that accrue to the valuable object in virtue of some or all of its other kinds of (subvenient) properties,<sup>2</sup> and (ii) values are *constituted* by subjects (i.e., by their final attitudes).<sup>3</sup> This distinction between supervenience and constitution is not new, nor is it, as will appear, the only tool needed to separate subjectivists from objectivists. Nonetheless, overlooking the distinction continues to give rise to unnecessary confusion. This is not the only reason why I think we ought to reconsider our understanding of the two positions. Paying attention to the difference between (i) and (ii) will move us beyond certain one-dimensional approaches that regard, for instance, a subjectivist as someone who only locates value to subjective states, or who thinks that objectivists cannot share the evaluations of a subjectivist. On the approach defended here, subjectivists and objectivists may well share each other's evaluations, and they need not at all disagree about what objects are the appropriate bearers of value. Distinguishing between the two theories in the way defended here does not take a stand for or against any of the theories. However, it does suggest that subjectivism is a much more complex notion than what its critics sometimes have maintained. In fact, hand in hand with the overall objective of this essay comes another aim: to underline a significant advantage with this approach, viz., that it permits us to raise a number of fresh questions

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<sup>2</sup> Though the approach defended here thrives on there being a consensus regarding the idea that value properties are supervenient properties (which cuts across the division between subjectivists and objectivists), this consensus does not unfortunately extend to how this special relation should be best characterized. In "Dislodging Butterflies from the Supervenient" (this volume), I discuss one such attempt to understand supervenience. However, in what follows I sidestep the interesting issue of the precise nature of this relation.

<sup>3</sup> Distinguishing between these two theses has, for instance, a clear relevance to what view we should take concerning a central claim in L.W. Sumner's *Welfare, Happiness & Ethics* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1996). Sumner argues that the perspectival character of prudential value (welfare) is not shared by other kinds of values. Prudential value is unique in that it has this *value-for* nature. Moreover, he claims that only subjectivists can in fact account for this character of value-for. According to him, only subjectivists make welfare logically dependent on the attitudes of the welfare subject. They do so by regarding welfare as mind-dependent (of the subject whose well-being is under consideration), and in so doing they succeed in establishing a link between the value and the bearer of value that qualifies the value as being perspectival in its nature. However, as I have argued (see: "L.W. Sumner's account of Welfare" in eds., Juan José Acero, Francesc Camós Abril, Neftalí Villanueva Fernández *Actas del III Congreso de la Sociedad Española de Filosofía Analítica*, Granada, December 2001), whether it is only subjectivists that can account for this perspectival character of welfare is a matter that very much depends on just where you place these attitudes of the welfare subject. Are they regarded as *constitutive* of welfare, or do they belong to the supervenience base of welfare? Sumner is here open to more than one interpretation. If the latter but not the former is the case, then I see no reason why objectivists cannot account for welfare. The approach advocated here would also (which I hope to show in a coming work) throw light on another interesting work, which also regards welfare as being in a sense perspectival, namely Stefan Darwall's recent *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton UP, 2002).

regarding most notably subjectivism. This is done notably by showing that the notion of “value constitution” is open to a number of interesting interpretations.

A caveat is in place: I will not be saying anything about rival definitions of the latter pair of notions. The view defended here has enough angles of approach to stand on its own feet.<sup>4</sup> However, to begin with I will comment briefly on some further assumptions from which I set out.

### *1. Preliminaries*

My ambition is but to state the essential differences between objectivism and subjectivism in as clear way as I possibly can. These two positions are, I believe, naturally seen as arising from questions concerning how to understand the nature of value (and, in the prolongation, value-judgments). They are rival theories of how to analyze one and the same thing (value or evaluations). Therefore, the first thing to keep in mind is that the distinction between subjectivism and objectivism is *not* a distinction between two different *substantive* views. The issue between subjectivists and objectivists is (if we confine ourselves a moment to the ethical aspects of the evaluative) *metaethical*; advocates of these theories give us different answers to how we should best understand and analyze value claims. However, the positions in themselves do not force us to take any evaluative stand.<sup>5</sup> In other words, nothing in principle prevents subjectivists and objectivists from endorsing the same evaluative judgments. Since I am here focusing on the disagreement between these positions that concerns how judgments about final values should be analyzed, the point can be expressed as follows: whether you are a subjectivist or an objectivist does not require you to accept or reject any substantive claims to the effect that final value accrues to a certain object. Judgments such as “Final value accrues to pleasure”, “Only preference satisfaction is intrinsically valuable”, and “La Gioconda is valuable in itself” are among the stuff about which objectivists and subjectivists disagree as to how it should be analyzed. These claims express judgments about the source or locality of value, i.e., what value supervenes on. Such judgments about value sources are *bona fide* examples of *evaluative* claims. To endorse any of the above judgments is to take a clear evaluative stand.

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<sup>4</sup> For some different versions of ethical subjectivism, see, for instance, David Wiggins “Objective and Subjective in Ethics” in ed., Brad Hooker (1996), *Truth in Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell Publisher.

<sup>5</sup> Of course, some writers do regard subjectivism as a theory that takes a substantive stand. For instance, when Royce calls ‘Why should I obey the moral law?’ “the old question of subjectivism” he is obviously not thinking of subjectivism in the same way as I do. Royce (1891, p.109) “Discussions: The Outlook of Ethics”, *International Journal of Ethics*, Issue I, pp. 106-111).

In light of the formal character of the two positions, it is therefore paramount to define objectivism and subjectivism in as evaluatively non-committal a way as possible. In other words, the positions should be put together in such a way that they are neutral as to what properties of a valuable object are value-making. However appealing it may be, we should resist the temptation to smuggle in among the value-making properties certain favored ones; yielding to this temptation would be to infringe on the neutral character of the metaethical approach. Perhaps this pull is especially strong among subjectivists who connect value with the attitudes of the subject. Setting out from the idea that values are somehow related to subjects' attitudes, they often embrace the substantial claim that "value necessarily supervenes (in part) on the attitude of the subject". This is nothing but a tiny step, but one that we nevertheless should avoid taking if we want to stay on the metaethical scene.

Insisting that we should keep the formal and substantive sides of value apart as much as possible will, to some readers, I am sure, be pretty uncontroversial and obvious. But let me dwell just a little more on this issue. In my experience it is common to find defenders of these positions who cross the formal/substantive border without making it clear that in doing so they are in fact hoisting a new, non-neutral flag. If they justify, for instance, why they are treating questions which require substantive evaluative answers as not open, and the reason they give is that they take these answers to somehow be entailed by their favored position, we may strongly suspect that they are sailing under false colors. We should at least expect that they have brought into their definition of these positions some evaluative content.

There is an objection to my insistence on taking the metaethical character of subjectivism and objectivism seriously—one that, moreover, is to be expected from the objectivist rather than the subjectivist side of the issue: Isn't it part of the very objectivist approach that (if I am allowed to simplify matters considerably) value is either reducible to the natural (at least non-evaluative) or is, as it was once put by Mackie, part of the fabric of the world, something *sui generis*? And isn't it a fact that in either case doing neutral analyses of value claims, especially if that includes ascertaining their truth-value, is tantamount to taking a substantive stand? In fact, is it not highly dubious in the first place to believe that we can separate the metaethical level from the substantial evaluative level?

At the risk of being accused of ducking some serious issues here, I will confine myself, I am afraid, to some rather undersized notes on these matters. Regarding the latter question, which is the more serious one, I do in fact think we have to face the fact that this distinction is not clear-cut. However, admitting this is not to admit that the terms "metaethics/ethics" or "formal/substantive" value judgments lack meaning. Surely the proper (common sense) way of understanding the latter question is that it sometimes is impossible to judge

whether a judgment or a position falls within the area of metaethics or ethics.<sup>6</sup> The mundane reason for this might well be that we presently do not have what it takes to analyze these judgments properly. This is a fact about us (or, at least about myself). But more importantly, it need not be; it might be the case that the distinction actually breaks down in certain cases.<sup>7</sup> To recognize the latter possibility should not lead us to the radical conclusion that we never are able to distinguish whether a certain claim about values is a formal or a substantive one. To argue that the distinction lacks applicability is to make a much too encompassing claim—one that appears to me to be utterly questionable. I venture that on most occasions it is not very hard to separate the metaethical parts from the substantive issues. In most cases it is fairly easy to separate the non-evaluative from the evaluative.

At this point it will be wise to comment on yet another related topic. Subjectivism and objectivism are often regarded as belonging to a particular kind of metaethical views, namely views about the *meaning* of moral terms. From this perspective subjectivists, for instance, are typically said to endorse a certain naturalistic analysis of value judgments. The following is merely one example: the meaning of “x is good” is “x is liked by me”. *Pace* the tradition I think this view should not be confused with subjectivism. Suppose this kind of naturalism maintains that there is a supervenience relation between value properties and natural properties—in the (minimal) sense that if two objects have exactly similar natural properties then it follows *due to the meaning of ‘good’*, that the objects are (or are not) good. But in that case, the theory runs counter to the idea that subjectivism is a purely metaethical position that must not force us to take any evaluative stand. To call this kind of naturalism subjectivism is therefore not a good idea. On the other hand, a naturalism that rejects the idea of value being a supervenient property is in my view not a viable alternative. The supervenience relation between evaluative properties and natural ones is indeed hard to question.

The so-called naturalistic versions of subjectivism, and objectivist theories that purport to say something about the meaning of value terms (or value judgments) must be contrasted with a third alternative—referred to as prescriptivism (non-descriptivism or expressivism). Advocates of this third kind of view strongly dissociate themselves from an idea shared by the two other alternatives, viz., that evaluative judgments have primarily a descriptive function in lan-

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<sup>6</sup> How do we decide what is the “stuff” which should be analyzed by objectivists and subjectivists? Have we not, in fact, by singling out certain stuff (say, judgments containing features of certain kind) rather than something else, already taken an evaluative stand? Perhaps this is the case. But even if this were true, which I am not sure it is, it would not follow that we couldn’t in an intelligible way still go on applying the notions ‘formal/substantive’ within this special framework.

<sup>7</sup> Just think of Prior’s famous counterexamples.

guage, i.e., saying, say, that x is good is to describe how x as a matter of fact is. The prescriptivists, as I will refer to them here, argue that value terms, in addition to whatever descriptive meaning they have, are essentially prescriptive: sentences such as ‘x is good’ or ‘you ought to help the poor’ are the linguistic tools we choose when we want to tell our listener to *make something the case* rather than to tell them that something *is the case*.

The prescriptivists’ attempt to pen up naturalistic subjectivists together with naturalistic objectivists under the same roof (viz., descriptivism) seems straightforward from one perspective. Still, this is but one approach. The really interesting issue, in my view, is the contrast between theories that regard value notions as being attitude-related and those that do not. Of course, I don’t want to deny that the issue between descriptivism and non-descriptivism is an important one. I just find that the demarcation line that runs between those who think value is essentially related to the attitudes of the evaluator and those who deny it is the more interesting one.

Now to some the approach defended here will appear old-fashioned. Why stick to ‘subjectivism’ and ‘objectivism’ when we have notions such as descriptivism and non-descriptivism? But I am not sure to what extent the approach in this paper is in fact traditional. Outdated it is not. Rather, despite the apparent risk that my characterization is biased, I would like to describe it as the metaethical correspondent to the Jenka dance (two steps ahead, one step back, and three steps ahead). Now and then there is nothing necessarily bad about taking a step back if doing so can throw new light on these notions that still play a considerable role in today’s metaethical discussions.

After the above digression it should hopefully still be clear that if claims about supervenience bases are evaluative claims, it cannot be in this neighborhood that we should look for the difference between subjectivism and objectivism—at least not if we want to retain the value neutral metaethical character of these views. The difference lies elsewhere; subjectivists make a claim that objectivists deny or at least interpret differently, viz. that *values are constituted by subjects*.<sup>8</sup> According to subjectivists we must not conflate claims about “value-making properties” and the constitutive ground of value. That an object is valuable is to be found in something external to the object; it is the pro- et contra attitudes of the subject that bestow value on the object towards which they are directed.

## 2. Constitution

That we should differentiate between the constitutive grounds of value and the supervenience base of value is an idea that has appeared in different works in

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<sup>8</sup> In *The Life of Reason* (1922) p. 221 Santayana expresses an early example of someone who thinks value is constituted by subjects: “Our consciousness of an object’s value, while it declares the blind disposition to pursue that object, constitutes its whole worth.”

recent years. I first became familiar with the distinction due to a work by Wlodek Rabinowicz and Jan Österberg.<sup>9</sup> Their distinction serves well to illuminate the division between those who believe value is necessarily related to subjects and those who deny this relation. As I conceive of subjectivism it is a theory that claims that whatever value there is, it is there in virtue of the fact that a subject has (had or would have) a certain attitude toward the object of value (under certain circumstances). By ‘attitude’ I will henceforth mean, unless otherwise stated, so-called final attitudes, i.e., attitudes such as, say, favoring or disfavoring an object *for its own sake* (in contrast to instrumental attitudes). Thus what gives rise to the value of La Gioconda is that a subject has an attitude toward this very painting. Subjectivists will between themselves disagree about the precise nature of this attitude. Some will want to include much under the notion in question, e.g., emotions, desires, preferences, intentions. Others will take a narrower look on the matter and exclude everything except one kind of attitudes. In what follows I will sidestep this issue. However, a brief terminological point is in place here. I shall say that to have such a constitutive attitude toward an object is to evaluate the object (or, at least to be present when the subjects evaluate). Since objectivists typically will deny that evaluating involves having some attitude, we would, for the sake of clarity, need to use a subscript to remind us that we are speaking of evaluating in one specific subjectivist sense (evaluating<sub>s</sub> in contrast to evaluating<sub>o</sub>). However, since we are now aware of this distinction there should be no real danger if we avoid the cumbersome subscripts.

Rabinowicz further clarifies the distinction between supervenience and constitution by looking at the role conventions play in chess (p. 21): Thus, in a chess game certain moves will be permissible and others will not. The permissibility of a particular move depends on how the table is set at the time of the move. For instance, a white rook at square a1 can take the black queen on a7 because the features of the game now make it possible to move the rook all the way up to a7 (before there was, say, another piece blocking the way to a7). Now, the permissibility of the move a1xa7 does depend (supervene, if you like) on the (internal) features of that particular game, at that particular time. However, the constitutive ground for this move is to be found in the social convention that maintains the rules of chess, and which, among other things, specify how the rook and other pieces move.

Rabinowicz’s analogy with what conventions constitute when it comes to chess is illuminating. Of course the analogy does raise important issues that

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<sup>9</sup> A detailed elucidation of it is found in Rabinowicz, W. and Österberg, J. (1996), ‘Value Based on Preferences’, *Philosophy and Economics*, 12. See also Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen “A Distinction in Value: Intrinsic and For Its Own Sake.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 2000, vol. C, part 1, 33-51, and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2001. I owe Wlodek Rabinowicz a lot for having over the years so generously discussed the distinction with me. However, he is not to be blamed for anything that I say here.



need to be commented on. I have particularly in mind the kind of relativism that subject constitution appears to bring in its train. Is this idea at all combinable with notions such as intrinsic and final value that appear to invite a more absolute reading? Some philosophers have claimed that it is not. I will return to this issue in a moment. Meanwhile I will suggest another analogy that does not center on conventions but on perception. This example will help us emphasize some features of the supervenience-constitution distinction, and make it possible in due time to distinguish between different subjectivist positions.

Imagine a photo of, say, yourself. Let “Photoyou” refer to the picture (i.e, the image) of you. Photoyou does depend on the properties of the photopaper (which I sometimes will refer to as ‘the paper’ or ‘the sheet’). Another paper with the same physical properties of the original photopaper would also put Photoyou on show. Now, some might object that I seem here to actually assume that Photoyou is a part of the photopaper, but surely, the objection goes, we must understand such an idea figuratively. Photoyou should not be located *on* the sheet of the paper; it is rather in the head of the person who looks at the photopaper. Whether or not this is the right ontological position to take with regard to Photoyou (and I am not arguing for any position here), the illustrative force of this example does in fact very much derive from the belief that Photoyou is not *on* the paper but rather *in* the head of the spectator.<sup>10</sup> The ground (in this case the constitutive ground) of Photoyou is to be looked for in the fact that *the observer perceives the properties of the paper*; Photoyou is, the analogy goes, constituted by your *perspectival* look on the paper (the supervenience base of Photoyou). If you are a projectivist<sup>11</sup> of some kind, you will find reason (most probably in your phenomenological experience) to say that Photoyou is also “out there”, *put there by you*. Many subjectivists of the kind outlined here will probably be projectivists about value. However, as far as I can see, projectivism and subjectivism need not go hand in hand. What makes a relation into one of value constitution is essentially the nature of its relata, particularly the relata of the attitude element. Establishing a relation between an object and a final attitude is what is needed (perhaps all that is needed) to generate an act of constitution.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Notice that by saying that Photoyou *is* in the head, I am not committing myself to the idea that there is only one sense in which something can be in someone’s head. In particular, I do not want to be understood here as claiming that there necessarily is some kind of *image* in the head. The expression ‘in the head’ is certainly open to interpretations.

<sup>11</sup> Projectivism as I understand this theory is the view that we project onto the world what in fact is the product of our own minds. Thus, beauty lies, in other words, not merely in the eye of the beholder, it is also placed onto the object.

<sup>12</sup> The ‘Photoyou’-analogy is not perfect, but, then, analogies seldom are; originally I used the example of an image in a mirror. And there are other good (and in some respect perhaps even

Consider a different, in a sense more “realistic” interpretation of this example, one that sets out from the idea that Photoyou should in reality be located not in the head of the viewer but rather on the surface of the paper. “*Outside* Photoyou”, as we might call him, would, in other words, actually emerge (in contrast to, say, being projected) “out there” on the paper. But now the analogy becomes much more strained; it can be questioned what exactly this new *Outside* Photoyou depends on (in the supervenience sense). That is, it seems harder to uphold the idea that the paper is the sole supervenience base. It looks less convincing to make a sharp distinction between on the one hand the paper (supervenience base) and on the other hand something else, say you, that would fill the role of the constitutive ground. In the earlier example, it is the perspectival view of the supervenience base that constitutes the Photoyou. And since this perspectival view is literally not something (in contrast to physical properties) that can be caught by a camera lens, it is consequently nothing that will be captured by any photopaper. However, given the new interpretation the emergence of *Outside* Photoyou does not require any perspectival view from a subject to be present; what emerges on the paper is all that is needed, or so it seems, for *Outside* Photoyou to be present; this entity exists in virtue of some underlying properties, and it is far from clear why we should confine these properties to those of the photopaper. Why not include among the underlying features the fact that you put yourself in front of the lens?

But perhaps we could even in this new case draw a line between, say, the supervenience base (the properties of the paper on which *Outside* Photoyou exists) and those other properties that led to there being a paper with those particular features in the first place, and perhaps these later properties could be said to belong to the constitutive ground. Again, we could speak about more or less extended supervenience bases, and there would be no reason, or so it seems, to invoke any constitutive media here. What would count in favor of making even in this case a distinction between different kinds of properties, and perhaps in the prolongation, a distinction between supervenience and constitution, is the following: All that is needed to get a copy of *Outside* Photoyou is to make a copy of the photopaper. We do not have to make a copy of the situation that gave rise to the original photo. Still, whether or not this is a good reason to uphold the distinction in question even with regard to *Outside* Photoyou, the earlier example is the more apposite one. After all, although Photoyou obviously mirrors you, it is not—*given the first interpretation of Photoyou*—your physical appearance that constitutes Photoyou; it is your perspectival viewing of what eventu-

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better) analogies. For instance, Erik Carlsson has suggested (personal communication) that I should replace Photoyou with the well-known Duck-Rabbit picture.

ally resulted from placing your body in front of the camera that constitutes Photoyou.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. *Different kinds of subjectivism.*

The chess and photo analogies ought to make it clear that the notion of value constitution should not be confused with another idea that we could call, following Manfred Moritz, the *spotlight view of value*. According to this view, subjects do not constitute value. Rather, the value is already there—independently of any subject; the role of the subject is rather to make the value visible, typically done by directing a certain attitude toward the valuable object. By, say, desiring the object for its own sake, the value of the object becomes lit up. Such a view, it is interesting to note, need not be very much rephrased in order to be compatible with subjectivism as well as with objectivism. After all, what seems to be at the core of theory is that the spotlight is not invested with any constitutive powers at all, nor is it the case that value accrues to the beam of light. Since the view does not necessarily take any stand here with regard to constitution and supervenience, it should be consistent with any of the two positions discussed here.<sup>14</sup> However interesting, the beam theory is, at least here, best put aside as a curiosity. But the theory does accentuate one interesting issue, viz., is there on a constitutive account of value, a one-to-one relation between value and the constitutive act? In other words, is an object valuable at time  $t_n$  *only in so far* as it is the (intentional) object of the attitude of the subject at  $t_n$ ? Will the valuable object cease being valuable at the literal instant the subject turns his attention to something else? Is there value only as long as constitution is going on?

Subjectivists have more than one alternative here; what we may refer to as the “*Coexistent view*”—the value and the constitutive act cannot in time exist apart from each other—can be rejected or embraced *in toto*, or subjectivists can endorse it when it comes to certain objects and disallow it with regard to other objects. Of course, the same possibilities arise with regard to what might be referred to as the “*Valuable until further notice*” view<sup>15</sup>. On this view, once a

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<sup>13</sup> There is another reason why Outside Photoyou better suits an objectivist view of value than a subjectivist one. On the latter position it is *attitudes* of subjects that constitute value and not merely the physical appearance of a subject.

<sup>14</sup> Moritz’s so-called “strålkastarteori” is more complex than what my brief outline discloses; for one thing there is another version of it, which is much more close to the constitution-theory of subjectivism presented here. However, Moritz does not discuss the theory in any detail, the reason being that he did not consider it to be a theory about value judgments (“värdesatsteori”); see Moritz 1968, *Inledning i värdeteori; värdesatsteori och värdeontologi*, Lund, pp. 49-51.

<sup>15</sup> Both positions are here mentioned merely as two (extreme) examples of how to answer the overall question: what is the relation between the act of constituting and the constitutive object (i.e., value)? The mentioned positions do not exhaust all the alternatives. Moreover, they can be cast in more or less plausible forms depending on, for instance, if we require the

constitutive act has taken place there is value until the subject changes his mind (which can be done in more ways than one). The constitutive act need not, in other words, be going on in order for there to be valuable objects. Both positions are standard targets for objectivists for reasons that I will come to in a moment. In the meantime a caveat is in place here.

It is easy to imagine that arguments for any of the above positions will ultimately be substantive by nature, in which case the favored theory would no longer be a clear-cut metaethical view. There need not be anything lamentable about this, as long as we are clear that the analysis is no longer entirely neutral. Be that as it may, not all arguments regarding this issue will endanger the neutral status of subjectivism. For instance, it is not obvious that endorsing the *Coexistent view* is actually compatible with value being supervenient.<sup>16</sup> Suppose a person claims that *a* is valuable but denies that *b* is valuable, even if he agrees that *a* and *b* are identical with regard to universal properties (they are merely numerically distinct). Suppose further that he invokes as his reason that in the former case *a* is the object of his attention, whereas this is not the case with *b*. I am not sure I would understand such a claim. At least, I would certainly be prone to understand what was going on here as someone who is evaluating “*a* being the object of my conscious attention” or something to that effect, rather than *a period*. And of course, if it is the former alternative which he values there is nothing that endangers the supervenience idea; if *b* is not the object of his present attitudes, then despite the fact that *a* and *b* are identical with regard to other properties, supervenience alone cannot force him to evaluate *b*.

Faced with these three alternatives (rejection, endorsement, and neither one *in toto*) regarding the *Coexistent view* and (its most salient counterpart), the *Valuable until further notice view*, a sound subjectivist strategy should be to focus on the kind of attitude involved in valuing. If there are different kinds of attitudes, then we ought to, *qua* subjectivists, acknowledge that ‘value is constituted by attitudes’ can be understood in more ways than one, depending on the kind of attitude involved. So if my attitude to *x* is in fact conditional on, say, *x* being the (intentional) object of my conscious attention, then the *Coexistent view* is correct for those kinds of cases. The *Coexistent* kind of subjectivism is consistent with value being supervenient.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps we do not have “*Coexistent attitudes*”; maybe *all* of our attitudes are in fact such that some states of affairs should obtain whether or not the object of our preference is the object of our conscious-

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act of constitution to be *occurrent* (i.e., part of the conscious thought of the subject) or merely *dormant* (not part of the subject’s conscious).

<sup>16</sup> If we differentiate like Hare, which I think we should, between universalizability and supervenience, this claim holds *a fortiori* if the value judgment is a universalizable one.

<sup>17</sup> In fact, this kind of attitude would constitute an *extrinsic* final value. For an analysis of extrinsic value, see Rabinowicz & Rønnow-Rasmussen 2000.

ness, in which case the *Coexistent* issue would not be relevant here. Still, there seems to be nothing conceptually wrong with the former kind of attitudes.

Now, even if a subjectivist does not have to endorse the *Coexistent view*, he is still vulnerable to another related objection: the attitudes we have appear to be very much a question that depends on arbitrary factors. Hence, if we tie values to such highly capricious entities as attitudes, we make the question of what values there are dependent on highly contingent matters, and this is not how we normally conceive of values. The suspicion is, in other words, that once we relate value to attitudes, value becomes a relative notion, and value relativism is an idea that it is hard to combine with the idea expressed by the following thesis:

*The Invariance thesis:* The final value of an object is invariant over possible worlds.

It follows from this thesis that if an object is valuable, the object (or any object exactly similar to it) carries this value in whatever possible world in which it is present. It is a standard objection to subjectivists' accounts that they have to reject the Invariance thesis; if we fix value to desires and other kinds of attitudes then an object,  $x$ , would not be valuable (i.e., its value would not have been constituted) in a possible world in which  $x$  is not the object of a desire. If the world were different, with a different set of desires, there would be another set of valuable objects than what is actually the case.

Also on this matter we may expect different subjectivist responses. To begin with, it is in this context paramount to realize that the idea that value is invariant is in itself a much-debated view. Although a number of influential axiologists have defended the *Invariance* thesis over the years (e.g., G. E. Moore), it has come under considerable fire these last years (for a recent defense of this matter see Zimmerman 2001). Its plausibility depends on the nature of the valuebearer,  $x$ , or, to be more precise, on what kind of properties are included in the supervenience base; if  $x$  is valuable in virtue of its *non-essential* properties, then the Invariance thesis clearly looks too encompassing. If La Gioconda had been painted with, say, different color properties, then it would not have been valuable.<sup>18</sup> However, things are different if by ' $x$ ' we have in mind an object, such as an abstract entity, that is valuable in virtue of its essential properties. Such an entity will be the same in all possible worlds, and hence its value will remain the same in all worlds. If  $x$  refers not to, say, the concrete La Gioconda itself but rather to some abstract entity such as the fact (the obtaining of the states of affairs),<sup>19</sup> say, that La Gioconda exposes such and such features then we cannot

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<sup>18</sup> That is, assuming that the colors are not essential properties of La Gioconda.

<sup>19</sup> See here Lemos, Noah M. (1994), *Intrinsic Value, Concept and Warrant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 25-6, and Zimmerman, Michael J., (2001), *The Nature of Intrinsic Value* (Rowman & Littlefield), p. 50.

“tamper” with the features of this fact; if we did it would no longer be the same fact, and hence, its possible value or disvalue would have no bearing on the issue under discussion.

Unqualified, the Invariance thesis is ruled out as an obvious demarcation line between objectivists and subjectivists; both positions may agree that if an object supervenes on non-essential properties, then in a world in which the object lacks some of these properties, it will no longer be valuable. Even an objectivist could agree to this. Again, their view may be quite a different one: objectivists (as well as subjectivists) can adhere to a *certain* kind of what we may refer to as *value bearer monism*. On this particular view only entities that have whatever features they have *essentially* (e.g., states of affairs) carry (final) value. If objectivists and subjectivists share this view, their responses to the invariance thesis will inevitably be different from each other.

Subjectivists will naturally reject the Invariance thesis. But subjectivists have quite a lot of leeway as to how they will go about discarding it; some ways, for instance, will be more ‘objectivistic’ (attitude-independent) than others. Suppose there is some state of affairs that I want to see realized for its own sake, say, that people look at (and appreciate) La Gioconda. Putting aside the substantial question whether this is really a good example of a value bearer, the nature of my attitude is here understood as being universal. In other words, I have this attitude not only for the actual work of art, people and world. Rather, the scope of my attitude ranges over all the worlds in which this state of affairs obtain; in any such world I prefer it to be a fact. Given my actual preference, the value of the object *x* will in other words be invariant. One salient aspect of this example is that the constitutive ground of value does not coincide with the supervenience base. Actually, there is nothing particularly odd about this; we need just remind ourselves that some objects of our attitudes (say, objects of preferences) do not coincide in time with our preference. I may, for instance, now prefer that when I am old someone will not make me go on living at any price. I may prefer this although I have good evidence that most people in fact do want to go on living even if the cost is very high when they become old. Moreover, some of my preferences are unquestionably conditional in form; for instance, I prefer now that if I were on Venus that I had brought along something with which to protect myself.

Now, on what I will call *First- Person Perspective Subjectivism* the Invariance thesis is true *relative* to the first person perspective but false on a third person perspective. Thus, given my actual perspective of what I here and now prefer, the value of whatever I value will be invariant across worlds. But as soon as I step out of this first person suit, and look upon the whole situation from the position of a detached observer, it will be clear that value may in fact vary de-

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pending on what preferences there are. Or to be more accurate, value is still dependent on the subject's "actual" preferences; it is just that *what the actual perspective is may vary depending from which world the preference stems*. From this impersonal perspective the value of an object can only be constituted by attitudes that belong to the same world as the valuable object. Taking this third person perspective is therefore not tantamount to giving up the idea that value is fixed to attitudes. The *First- Person Perspective Subjectivism* is still a theory according to which value is *constituted by attitudes*. Value is still invariant across worlds given desires.

*First Person Perspective Subjectivism* should be distinguished from its close relative, *Exclusively First Person Perspective Subjectivism*. In comparison this view makes a much less committing statement; it merely says that the Invariance thesis is true *relative* to the actual first person perspective period. Some might want to discard this alternative as not being well enough thought out to be taken seriously, but it is not necessarily a half-baked alternative. The reason for not taking the further step of acknowledging the third person perspective may be a denial that such a perspective is possible; closely related (but nonetheless not identical) is the idea that the detached perspective does not make sense. The moment I try to take a third person viewpoint I lose sight of whatever values there are, and consequently I cannot say anything reliable about value being or not being constituted by this or that perspective. Since I cannot separate myself from my perspective it will be useless to have an opinion about what goes on from some imaginary third person level.

One remarkable aspect of the general idea of distinguishing between objectivism and subjectivism in terms of the supervenience/constitution distinction is that it will actually be possible to adhere to what at least appears to be something in between subjectivism and objectivism. Consider, for instance, what we might call (for reasons that will emerge in a moment), *Proper Actualism*; according to this view, the Invariance thesis is true from a first as well as a third person perspective. But in contrast to First Person Perspective Subjectivism, this kind of subjectivism does not recognize that "actual preference" may refer to just any preference that coexists in a world with the object of value. There is only one set of actual preferences, namely, the one that belongs to the actual world. Alternatively this view acknowledges that it makes sense to say "the actual preference in the possible world  $W_p$ ". But despite this it maintains that only preferences belonging to *this* actual world are invested with constitutive powers. The plausibility of this point of view may be hard to detect. It might also be questioned to what extent this view is really a version of subjectivism; if 'attitude-related' is at the core of any subjectivist view on value, and this view is taken to entail some version of value relativism, then *Proper Actualism* does seem difficult to squeeze in. Nonetheless, the view still insists on there being a

link between values and attitudes, which I think justifies its place here as at least a possible coherent alternative for the “wannabe” subjectivist.

For the sake of completeness we must add a final alternative, what might be referred to as *Variance Subjectivism*. On this view we have reason to reject the Invariance thesis since it is false from the first as well as the third person perspective. This variant is a full-fledged form of value relativism.

<i>Values are constituted by attitudes</i>	<i>Values are invariant across possible worlds</i>
1 <sup>st</sup> person perspective Subjectivism	<i>True</i> given the 1 <sup>st</sup> person perspective <i>False</i> given the 3 <sup>rd</sup> person perspective
Exclusive 1 <sup>st</sup> person Perspective Subjectivism	<i>True</i> given the 1 <sup>st</sup> person perspective
Proper actualism	<i>True</i> given the 1 <sup>st</sup> person perspective <i>True</i> given the 3 <sup>rd</sup> person perspective
Variance Subjectivism	<i>False</i> given the 1 <sup>st</sup> person perspective <i>False</i> given the 3 <sup>rd</sup> person perspective

*Fig. 1.*

The above alternatives are all subjectivist views in the minimal sense that they claim that value is constituted by attitudes (from at least one perspective). Add to the list further variables such as (i) the ontological status of value (realism, projectivism, irrealism . . .) and (ii) the nature of the attitude (should the attitudes comply with certain conditions such as being rational?) and it should stand clear that understanding subjectivism in terms of constitution and supervenience gives us a wide range of possible subjectivist notions (not all of which, of course, are as significant as others—but that is a substantial issue).

Of course, the term ‘objectivism’ also conceals a wide range of possibilities, but not quite in the same way. By separating value from the subject the first and third person perspective distinction becomes pointless to an objectivist. The subject’s perspective doesn’t enter into the picture at all. Disagreements in between objectivists will notably concern the nature of the supervenience relation and the ontological status of value.

Several aspects of the distinction between the supervenience base of value and the constitutive ground of value talk in favor of using it as a means to distinguish the two classical positions subjectivism and objectivism. For one thing, the distinction allows us to group theories together in interesting ways without infringing on the following two ideas (In fact, I would say the distinction is prompted by these very ideas): these positions are formal rather than evaluative positions, and they have the same aim, viz., to analyze value. Secondly, the idea of value being (or not being) *constituted* allows us to capture some important differences among especially subjectivists. Notwithstanding, there is perhaps



also a drawback that should not be dismissed hastily. It is not uncommon to find people who look upon the subjectivism-objectivism controversy as an ‘either... or...’ choice. But it does seem as if the approach outlined in this paper undermines this feeling. First, Proper Actualism appears to combine elements from both views. Second, and more importantly, there is a version of the above table in fig. 1 that replaces the left column with one containing four new alternatives that share the idea that value is not constituted by attitudes. They might (but need not) recognize that all value supervenes on objects with non-evaluative properties. But this fact is not enough to characterize them as objective theories. In contrast to proper objectivism, what might be referred to as Suobjectivism acknowledges the applicability of the first and third person perspective to the effect that it could be combined with any of the alternatives in the right column above. If that makes sense then we are in fact not facing an ‘either or’ choice. And to call these new alternatives objectivist theories is no solution: it would, I believe, be to strain this notion too much. Objectivist theories do not admit, as Suobjectivism might, that the Invariance thesis may be false (except, as mentioned earlier, in those cases where value supervenes on an object’s non-essential properties). There is something in between subjectivism and objectivism, and hence, the new approach opposes what is (if not the standard way then at least) a common way of understanding these notions.

Choices sometimes incorrectly appear to us as being in a sense a matter of ‘life or death’, without it being the case that the choice really is one between mutually exhaustive alternatives. The fact that we often do treat the question about subjectivism and objectivism as an ‘either-or’ choice therefore gives us no conclusive reason for regarding them as mutually exhaustive theories. As a matter of fact I think that there is here, parallel to the above intuition, another equally strong intuition, namely, that objectivists and subjectivists are in fact not always talking about the same thing.

#### 4. Concluding remarks.

The approach argued for here, of how to draw the line between subjectivism and objectivism, distinguishes between two related but nonetheless different claims about value, viz., that (i) values are *supervenient* properties, and (ii) values are *constituted* by subjects. Claims about supervenience bases are evaluative claims; therefore, if we want to respect the value neutral character of subjectivism and objectivism, then we must look for the difference between these positions somewhere else. The suggestion is that subjectivists endorse a claim that objectivists deny, viz., *subjects constitute values*.

The idea that value is constituted by subjects raise several interesting issues. One might think, for instance, that by relating final (and thus, intrinsic) value to attitudes, our notion of final value becomes relative. However, this squares badly with the so-called *Invariance thesis*, to with, the claim that the final value

of an object is invariant over possible worlds. But this does not seem to be guaranteed by a constitutive account of value; if values are fastened to desires and other kinds of attitudes then a valuable object would not be valuable (i.e., its value would not have been constituted) in a possible world in which the object is not the object of an attitude. Or so it seems. In fact, the Invariance thesis does not work as a demarcation line between objectivists and subjectivists; *if* value accrues to an object in virtue of its non-essential properties, the thesis in question is implausible, which is something that even an objectivist ought to subscribe to. It is true, nonetheless, that subjectivists in contrast to objectivists will always discard the *Invariance thesis*, but what has not really been appreciated (Rabinowicz is the exception) is that subjectivists can do so in different ways, some of which appear quite 'objectivistic', i.e., they seem to make value to a great extent attitude-independent.