

## Comments on Stepanenko, “Beyond Intrinsic Moral Worth”

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I take the view to be saying that unique and particular properties of individuals are why certain relationships hold. These relationships confer moral status on individuals.

### **In response to The Second Problem:**

The properties that explain why individuals have moral worth are not necessarily the same properties, nor should they be the same properties, that explain why individuals are otherwise valued or loved. A view that does not equate the features for moral status with the features that give reasons to care or to love is not “overlooking” the latter features; rather the features are taken to simply not be relevant to a view on moral status. So you’re right, that it would be strange for a parent to love his child merely because it is sentient; however, that one must care for people solely due to their moral-status-granting properties is not an implication of IMMW.

### **In response to The Third Problem:**

Stepanenko argues that there is a problem with pointing to integrity as an intrinsic monadic property of moral worth, because this property isn’t actually doing the normative work. Stepanenko finds that it’s the relations one has to oneself over time that is doing the normative work and gives rise to this property of integrity. Yet, if someone were to suffer from a mental illness that steals one’s capacity for integrity, whether that’s an ability to stick to a “commitment to a vision” (as described) or whether that’s an ability to see oneself as a singular person who exists over time, then it would seem such an individual would lack moral worth, because the underlying relational requirements for integrity would not be present. Not only does such an individual lack integrity, they also lack moral worth on your view because they fail to have a consistent relationship with themselves over time. Claiming individuals with certain mental conditions might not have moral status seems problematic.

### **In response to the Positive View**

DRA may be too broad. Two examples illustrate the problem. First example: Rock A possesses unique features (e.g., Rock A is located at this particular spot on the surface of the earth). The unique features of Rock A explain why the relation of Rock A to Rock B holds (e.g., Rock B is located five feet away from A’s particular location). According to DRA, it would seem that Rock A and Rock B would have moral status since they stand in relation to each other across time. Second example: If I stand in a certain relation to my houseplant (I’ve watered it for twenty years), then it seems that relation is sufficient to explain why both my houseplant and I have moral status.

These two examples suggest that not just any unique properties give rise to a moral relation, and not just any relation is a moral one and one that could possibly confer moral status. For example, every object stands in an identity relation with itself—is this enough to grant moral

status? It seems not. It seems that only certain types of self-relations are valuable, but what makes such relations valuable? It's because some relations, as Stepanenko says, "generate various reasons for planning to create various forms of value." But, given what he says here, it's not the relation then that is valuable—the relation is merely instrumental for creating something else that is valuable.

Human lives or animal lives are not valuable because of relations that humans or animals happen to stand in—it's the other way around—those relations become significant and valuable because they are relations between entities with certain monadic properties.

Concerning the diachronic feature of Stepanenko's view, certain entities such as newborn infants would not have moral status because they do not as of yet have diachronic relations with either themselves or their parents in the instance in which they are born. This seems wrong. It seems a newborn infant has moral status in the instant they are born if not before birth. But which relation establishes the moral worth of an unborn fetus? Is it the relation of the parents to the fetus? If we allow someone to be in significant relationship with someone else despite their not yet being born, then it would seem this reasoning could also work in the other direction—that the dead, the no longer living, could also have moral status so long as the living maintained a relation with them. This would mean we would have to consider the dead as part of our moral community, which would be an odd implication of the view.

But perhaps the moral status of the newborn infant relies on the *potential* relationship it may have with its parents. If so, what grounds the potentiality of the future relation? It seems as if certain general monadic features of the infant do—which would also explain why even the abandoned newborn infant has moral status.

It seems there has to be something *more* to the entities that are in significant relations that makes them have moral worth than the mere fact that they are held in diachronic relations by others based on their unique properties ("that fetus is *my* child"), and one of those things may be that the entity has to have a soul, or life, or the capacity for being an individual.

Ultimately, the most worrying implication of DRA, is that if an entity fails to be in relationship with others or oneself, the entity's moral worth would be non-existent. Having a worthwhile existence or relations is not the same as having moral worth. Imagine someone who has no friends or family or really anyone who cares about him at all, and this person also happens to suffer from existential depression (he does not value his own life), or perhaps this person is in a coma. Such a person still seems to have moral worth in the present moment, even if his existence is not terribly worthwhile to himself or to any other entity. If we look at certain solitary animals, like bears, they too seem to have moral worth despite their near total isolation from other entities and their lack of self-referential relations.