



RELATIONAL VALUES

What are they and do they do work?

Wouter de Groot and Luuk Knippenberg, ISiS, Radboud University

1. What are relational values?

- There is a you and there is a me. We both have a value of our own (“intrinsic value”). We are also useful for each other (we have “instrumental value” for each other).
- We also have a relationship We are sisters! Our sisterhood has a history of its own and all other sorts of empirical features. But our sisterhood also has a *value*! We have a really *good* sisterhood, independent of whether we ourselves are good or just mediocre persons.

Relational value is the value of relationships, independent from the intrinsic and instrumental values of the *relata*.

So it is with humans and nature:

- Child playing dog
- Farmer working land
- Community caring for forest
- Government planning landscape
- Humanity struggling climate

The relationships carry “constitutive value”, as the philosophers call it.

Constitutive for what?

For the intrinsic value of the triads of the [*relata* + relationship]

For instance: good lives-with-nature (“nature-inclusive eudaimoia”)

2. Acknowledging relational values implies

- that you are (moderately) objectifying
- that you are (moderately) non-instrumental.

This in turn implies that relational values cannot be framed in terms of rational choice theory and its offsprings (e.g. standard economics and standard social psychology).

This in turn implies that relational values are hard to capture conceptually and have a low status in public discourse.

But not that relational values are *generally* hard to speak, understand and act out. “I love you!” is a totally relational statement and, rather than a belief or a preference, an act in itself.

3. Are relational values, then, widely acknowledged?

Not in economics, philosophy, public discourse (yet), ...

But very strongly in the general public:

- Visions of Nature (van den Born c.s.) in Europe: Stewardship of nature, partnership with nature are mainstream images
- in Europe
- Chan, Klain c.s. (→ IPBES) in US: relational values resonate strongly with the general public.
- Mayer, Franz c.s. in US: Connectedness with nature is a mainstream thing
- Ngoc Duong in Vietnam: “Family with nature” is the mainstream image of us-and-nature

4. Do relational values do work?

Very much so!

For instance in BIOMOT research: relational values are the prime movers of biodiversity activists. This works through the eudaimonic desire: the desire to have a meaningful life.

This contrasts with the intrinsic value of nature. Those are values 'over there' that do not themselves activate ('From Good to Ought'). Relational values imply a tie-up between subject and object (you and the other, you and nature) and are themselves engaging.

Relational value frames lead to biodiversity engagement.

And the other way around, biodiversity engagement, such as biodiversity citizen science and volunteering, pave the way to strengthen relational visions of nature: "Bonding by doing".

Literature:

L.Knippenberg et al. (2018) "Relational value, partnership, eudaimonia: a review", *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 35, pp.39-45, doi <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2018.10.022> and all other papers in that special issue.