

# Cosmopolitanism and Social Equality: Moving Beyond Deontic Relational Egalitarianism

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## **Abstract**

Relational egalitarians are wrong to assume that their theories of justice apply only to interpersonal relations and between fellow citizens. I posit that the scope of relational egalitarianism is global. To do so, I argue that the issue of scope is connected to the reasons why we consider social equality to be required or valuable. Though this issue is currently muddled, I highlight how relational egalitarians tend to assume that social equality is a deontic constraint delineating how it is permissible to interact with others. Yet, I show that this approach leads to problematic conclusions when it is applied transnationally. I contend that relational egalitarians should pay more attention to the arguments that social equality is good for persons both instrumentally and non-instrumentally. On the one hand, social equality is good for persons instrumentally in that it has beneficial effects such as safeguarding basic human rights (like freedom of conscience, rights to basic resources such as food, shelter, etc.). On the other hand, it is also non-instrumentally valuable: egalitarian social relationships can be constitutive of personal goods, such as an integral sense of self, and can be good even if they have no impact on a person's welfare. An underappreciated implication of these arguments is that social equality should, in certain circumstances, be promoted beyond borders. In other words, I argue that a cosmopolitan reading of relational egalitarianism is not only possible but desirable: relational egalitarians should aim to ensure that all are treated and regarded as equals globally.

## Résumé

Les égalitaristes relationnels se trompent lorsqu'ils présupposent que leur théorie de la justice ne s'applique qu'aux relations interpersonnelles et aux relations sociopolitiques liant des compatriotes. Au contraire, je démontre que l'égalitarisme relationnel doit s'étendre au niveau global. Pour ce faire, je souligne que la question de l'étendue de nos principes de justice est profondément liée à la question de pourquoi l'on considère que l'égalité sociale est requise ou a de la valeur. Bien que cette question soit présentement embrouillée dans la littérature contemporaine, je montre que la plupart des égalitaristes relationnels tendent à présupposer que l'égalité sociale est une contrainte déontique qui délimite les manières acceptables de traiter et de considérer les autres lorsqu'il existe une relation sociale qui nous lie à d'autres. Or, je montre que cette approche déontique mène à des conclusions problématiques lorsqu'elle est appliquée au niveau global. En réponse, je maintiens que les égalitaristes relationnels devraient porter davantage attention aux idées que l'égalité sociale est également bonne pour les individus à la fois de manière instrumentale et non-instrumentale. D'un côté, il est possible de soutenir que l'égalité sociale est instrumentalement bonne pour les individus, notamment vu qu'elle permet d'établir des protections solides pour les droits humains. De l'autre, il est également possible de défendre que l'égalité sociale est bonne de manière non-instrumentale : je montre notamment que l'égalité est constitutive de biens personnels, tel qu'une conception de soi saine, et qu'elle peut avoir de la valeur même si elle n'a pas d'impact sur le bien-être individuel. Une conséquence sous-estimée de ces deux idées est que l'égalité sociale devrait être promue globalement dans certaines situations. En d'autres mots, je défends qu'il est possible et désirable d'adopter une conception cosmopolitique de l'égalitarisme relationnel.

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## Introduction

### The Value of (Social) Equality

We live in a very unequal world. Typically, this claim is understood distributively. People are quick to present statistics presenting how unequally wealth is distributed between individuals and states. This is true by all accounts; wealth disparities between and within countries remain extreme except, perhaps, for convinced libertarians (Atkinson, Piketty, and Saez 2011; Lindert and Williamson 2016; Phillips 2021, 1). Yet, this observed inequality is also true when we consider *social* inequalities: that is, the fact that some are treated and regarded as inferior to others. Even though the Universal Declaration of Human rights declared more than 70 years ago that freedom, justice and peace ought to be founded in the recognition of the “inherent dignity of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” (UDHR 1948, Preamble) and that liberal democracy imposed itself as the ultimate way to organize a political community justly, the attainment of social equality – where all would be regarded and treated as equals – still appears very distant.

Our world is ripe with tensions and contradictions. Support for democracy is very strong and surprisingly stable: around 90 percent of the world’s population agrees that democracy is “the best form of government” (Anderson, Bol, and Ananda 2021, 15). Yet, paradoxically, the world’s population is increasingly comfortable with the thought that strong, undemocratic leaders can be a good thing (Anderson, Bol, and Ananda 2021, 17). Moreover, although equal social standing is arguably essential to democracy, homophobia, racism and sexism remain pervasive in people’s beliefs and attitudes worldwide. Same-sex relations are criminalized in at least 76 countries and punishable by death in a least five of them (UNFE 2021). As the United Nations Development Programme (2020) revealed: “91 percent of men and 86 percent of women show at least one clear bias against gender equality in areas such as politics, economics, education, intimate partner violence and women’s reproductive rights.”<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, though distributive inequalities are, of course, worrying and should be considered unjust, these contemporary trends also highlight what I take to be an issue which is surprisingly understudied by those interested in issues of global

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<sup>1</sup> These indicators include: “Men make better political leaders than women do”; “Women have the same rights as men”; “University is more important for a man than a woman”; “Men should have more right to a job than women”; and “Men make better business executives than women do.”



justice. In this dissertation, I contend that we should not only be concerned with material and distributive inequalities, but also by how individuals are treated and regarded globally.

In this dissertation, I am interested in a fundamental, yet often overlooked, question: the scope of our relational egalitarian duties of justice. Very broadly, relational egalitarians are concerned with the structure of our social and political relationships. Negatively, they are opposed to hierarchical relationships where some exploit, dominate, or oppress others; that is, social relationships where some are considered to be inferior to others and treated as such. As Fourie, Schuppert, and Wallimann-Helmer put it: “social equality is violated by, for example, slavery, class systems, hierarchies of social status based on race or gender, orders of nobility, (...) and any kind of relationships between superiors and inferiors” (Fourie, Schuppert, and Wallimann-Helmer 2015, 3). Positively, some also highlight that we should not only be opposed to inequalitarian social relations, but that social equality itself has value. On this positive view, roughly, engaging in egalitarian social relationships is desirable in itself and brings us closer to the ideal of creating a “society of equals” (Viehoff 2019, 2; see also Scheffler 2015, 21; O’Neill 2008).

However, the question of *when* obligations of justice arise if one adopts such a conception of equality remains understudied. Or, rather, one common answer is presupposed more or less uncritically in the literature: obligations of justice are created by and obtain only within the very social and political relations they aim to equalize. As Sharp succinctly puts it, a relational egalitarian argument about scope typically relies on two plausible, and intuitive, assumptions: “First, concern about relational inequality is only appropriate when persons already share a context or relationship with one another (the *relevant relationship requirement*). Second, relationships across borders are typically thinner than relationships within them” (Sharp 2022, 648, emphasis in original; see also Wellman 2011, 57-78). Yet, these assumptions, I believe, are mistaken. Of course, equal or unequal social relationships only exist when some type of social connection can be observed. To claim otherwise would be absurd. Nonetheless, I take issue with the idea that egalitarian obligations of justice only obtain *within* existing social relationships. This is a typical assumption to which some add that the relevant type of social relationships only obtains within particular nation-states. In contrast, I argue not only that some types of transnational social relations are also relevant from the point of view of egalitarian justice (a point of view now shared by many, see Ip 2016; Nath 2011; 2015; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 146-53; Sharp 2022), but also that

inegalitarian social relationships should be a general concern: (relational) egalitarians should care about whether or not people are considered and treated as equals regardless of pre-existing social and political relations. In other words, relational egalitarians should aim to ensure that all have the means to stand as equals in their respective socio-political context. In a nutshell, I argue that people not only have a duty to treat and regard others as equals when they interact, but also to promote social equality and to oppose inegalitarian social relationships generally. Accordingly, I propose a cosmopolitan understanding of relational egalitarianism.<sup>2</sup> This argument relies on the thought that relating as equals is not only the *right* type of social relations people ought to engage in, but also that equal social relations have value: a more egalitarian world is not only a world where the right types of actions are prevalent, but a better world.<sup>3</sup>

To fully make sense of these claims and to introduce the general argument of this dissertation, it is essential to briefly present the many different debates in which it intervenes. Below, I distinguish between sufficientarian and egalitarian justice; distributive and relational conceptions of equality; and finally, the ways in which (social) equality can be said to be required or valuable (which includes three positions: deontic, instrumental, and telic).

## 1. Justice in All Its Forms

A first essential distinction to underline is that throughout I will be mainly interested in issues of egalitarian, not sufficientarian or humanitarian justice. Very broadly, whereas

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<sup>2</sup> The very notion of cosmopolitanism has many different interpretations. However, by cosmopolitanism, here, I mean *moral cosmopolitanism* (as opposed to *political* cosmopolitanism). That is, I do not necessarily argue for the creation of a world state and for the abolition of closed nation-states on the global stage – which is, very broadly, the position of *political* cosmopolitans (see Bohman 2001; Held 2010; Laborde 2010). Rather, the position defended here should be consistent with a variety of political and institutional responses since *moral* cosmopolitanism relies only on the general moral commitment that our obligations of justice encompass all individual human beings (for a general, historical presentation of this idea, see Nussbaum 2019). This view simply states that we have some egalitarian duties of justice even towards distant others and people with whom we entertain no social or political relations.

<sup>3</sup> This argument brings me rather close to the position defended by Temkin. As he writes: “I don’t deny that there may be deontological constraints concerning autonomy, freedom, justice, and so on. But I firmly believe that such ideals are also relevant to the goodness of outcomes. A world where people are just, free, autonomous, and equal, where rights are respected, perfection achieved, beauty appreciated, and truth sought, is not just a world where right acts are prevalent; it is a better world in important respects than one lacking the attainment of such ideals. Moreover, this is so independently of the extent to which the attainment of such ideals promotes experienced preference-satisfaction.” (Temkin 2008, 25, emphasis in original.) I will come back to his position below. However, it is important to flag that a fundamental difference between his position and mine is that while Temkin appeals to the value of many different goods, here I focus on one particular good: social equality.

sufficientarian justice aims to ensure that everyone has enough, egalitarian justice captures comparative claims: it is concerned with the issue of whether some have more than others (in ways which are objectionable) or if some are unduly treated or regarded differently than others. As Ypi puts it, sufficientarian or humanitarian justice is concerned with issues of absolute deprivation. She writes:

Absolute deprivation usually refers to an impediment in the satisfaction of certain basic claims – such as meeting nutritional requirements, sleeping, or being in minimally good health – without providing for which an agent could not function. Claims for the relief of absolute deprivation arise from natural vulnerabilities that may be easily distinguished from subjective preferences, social requirements, and arbitrary desires to any good whatsoever. For example, the demands for calories, shelter, and minimal healthcare constitute claims to the fulfilment of basic requirements upon which every individual has a legitimate claim in order to lead a minimally adequate life. (Ypi 2012, 113)

Sufficientarian claims of justice are non-comparative in character; for example, it is unnecessary to consider the share of others to evaluate whether someone has access to a sufficient amount of food.

In contrast, egalitarian justice covers another sphere of justice-based claims. Egalitarian justice, very broadly, is concerned with how individuals or groups fare compared to one another. From there, there are two main ways of understanding these comparative claims: they could be understood distributively or relationally. However, before I consider the debate between distributive and egalitarian justice, two things are worth highlighting. First, sufficientarian and egalitarian justice are typically grounded in different considerations and, as such, they operate more or less independently from one another. Someone could recognize that we have global sufficientarian duties of justice owed to all human beings to ensure that all have *enough* to live a minimally adequate life and simultaneously argue that *egalitarian* duties of justice only obtain under specific circumstances. Indeed, a typical position is to argue that egalitarian justice only obtains within states because it is in this context that people have a claim for an egalitarian redistribution of goods or to be treated as equals (for examples of such positions, see chapters 2 and 3). Second, here, I am mainly interested in claims of *egalitarian* justice. Egalitarian justice demands that we look beyond basic human rights protection to ensure that different persons or communities are, in a sense, equal. Consequently, throughout, one can assume that I am writing about *egalitarian* justice unless specified otherwise.

Beside the distinction between egalitarian and sufficientarian justice, a second, essential distinction is between distributive and relational egalitarianism. Starting with *distributive* justice, these theories are “recipient-oriented conceptions of justice,” following an expression coined by Pogge (2003, 146). On a distributive view, being equal (or just) is a feature of distributive patterns. The objective of justice for distributive approaches is to “[find] out what people are *entitled to get*” (Schemmel 2021, 26; see also Pogge 2003, 142-3). What people are entitled to get varies: it could include currency, resources, or opportunities for welfare, among other potential candidates (for a general presentation of these debates, see Lamont and Favor 2017; O’Neill 2018; Sen 1979). Note that distributive equality can also be consistent with some actual inequalities. For instance, a theory aiming to equalize the effects of individual bad luck may tolerate distributive inequalities for which individuals can be held responsible (Dworkin 1981a; 1981b; 2000; Kymlicka 2002; Segall 2016a; 2016b). Nonetheless, they remain *egalitarian* theories of justice. As Schemmel usefully puts it, distributive theories of justice generally share three basic principles:

The first principle of equality is the abstract principle of the equal moral worth of persons: Persons, *qua* being persons, belong to the same moral category, so that differences in their entitlements of justice cannot be justified by arguing that they have intrinsically different moral status, for example, because some are born aristocrats, or into purportedly higher or lower castes. The second principle is more concrete, and mandates, in Dworkin’s famous formulation, that persons are entitled to equal concern by social and political institutions in the assignment of benefits and burdens. Finally, the third principle of equality spells out the distributive requirement according to which people are entitled to some form of equality in the distribution of a certain currency, such as resources, or opportunity for welfare. (Schemmel 2021, 25)

Distributive egalitarians aim to bring about a desirable distributive pattern. A situation is thus considered to be just, and equality is achieved, when the distributive entitlements of all are respected.

*Relational* egalitarians, however, contest this distributive focus. They typically maintain that the distributive understanding of justice is fundamentally mistaken. Egalitarianism, for them, is not about distributive patterns *per se*, but rather about the character of our social and political relations. More precisely, relational egalitarians have developed their position in response to the perceived dominance of luck egalitarianism in political philosophy. Luck egalitarians broadly endorse the following conception of justice: “[a distributive pattern] is just only if everyone’s distributive shares reflect nothing other than their comparative exercise of responsibility” (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 3; for notable defenders of luck egalitarianism see Arneson 1989; Cohen 1989;

Segall 2016b). The resulting discussion of what can, effectively, be under individual control and attributable to the exercise of a person's responsibility was anathema to relational egalitarians such as Anderson (1999), Young (1999) and Scheffler (2005; 2015).

In "What Is the Point of Equality" (1999), Anderson famously argued that this focus on individual responsibility takes our attention away from what truly matters for justice and equality (for a critical analysis of her argument, see Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 28-36). This focus on individual responsibility, for her, can be too harsh. For instance, it might follow that we could hold a firefighter responsible for the respiratory illness they develop due to their career choice. This seems to be an undesirable – or at least a rather radical – result. Similarly, Anderson contends that the inscription of a luck egalitarian conception of justice within the rationale of social policies would be extremely disrespectful. It would express that those who suffer from bad luck deserve our pity. However, her main objection to luck egalitarianism is an objection against the distributive paradigm as such. She writes:

recent egalitarian writing has lost sight of the distinctively political aims of egalitarianism. The proper negative aim of egalitarian justice is not to eliminate the impact of brute luck from human affairs, but to end oppression which by definition is socially imposed. Its proper positive aim is not to ensure that everyone gets what they morally deserve, but to create a community in which people stand in relations of equality to others. (Anderson 1999, 288-9)

She goes on to add that:

democratic equality regards two people as equal when each accepts the obligation to justify their actions by principles acceptable to the other, and in which they take mutual consultation, reciprocation, and recognition for granted. Certain patterns in the distribution of goods may be instrumental to securing such relationships, follow from them, or even be constitutive of them. But democratic egalitarians are fundamentally concerned with the relationships within which goods are distributive, not only with the distribution of goods themselves. (Anderson 1999, 313-4)

As such, she echoes Young's position who also criticized the distributive paradigm. Young argued that the distributive approach to justice and equality tends to ignore the larger question of the social structure and institutional context within which people evolve. Additionally, for her, this paradigm struggles to capture non-material goods such as power, opportunity, and self respect (Young 1990, 15-38). She consequently refocused social justice on institutional and social relations.

Similarly, Scheffler criticized luck egalitarianism and distributive conceptions of justice generally by highlighting that aiming for an equal distribution of goods is odd if this distributive approach is not first anchored in a social or political ideal of equality (Scheffler 2003: 23). He

questions the idea that distributive patterns can be objectionable in and of themselves: for him, we first need to accept a common social and political normative ideal of what equality should look like, which may then push for certain distributive patterns. To identify a desirable distributive outcome before a just social process to collectively decide which distributive patterns we should aim for amounts to putting the cart before the horse.

Consequently, relational egalitarians adopt a distinct conception of justice. They generally consider that: “A situation is just only if social relations have certain specific, desirable features” (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 5). However, it is important to underline what the disagreement between distributive and relational egalitarians is *not* about. Though relational egalitarian critiques of distributive equality sometimes sound like distributive egalitarians are unconcerned with social and political relations, this is an overhasty conclusion. Distributive egalitarians can – and many recognize that they should – pay close attention to transforming social and political relations. However, the rationale for doing so is that such transformation would bring about a desirable distributive pattern (Schemmel 2021, 27; see also Pogge 2003, 147). In other words, from a distributive standpoint social and political relations have an instrumental value to attain a desirable distributive outcome; in contrast, from a relational perspective, distributive patterns are useful to attain social equality.

*This* is where the main disagreement is situated. For relational egalitarians, social equality is not only useful to reach a desirable distributive pattern, but social relations are themselves issues of justice. Relational egalitarians are quick to highlight that certain injustices do not involve any type of distributive imbalance but rather concern how persons are treated and regarded. Similarly, some contend that a distributive imbalance can take a different meaning and character depending on the reasons why it was created. For instance, Anderson highlights that some injustices cannot be rightly captured by a focus on distributions. Feminist movements and LGBTQ+ activists do not aim for more redistribution. They aim to change and equalize social and political relations (Anderson 1999, 319-20). Another way to illustrate this point is to consider Schemmel’s nutrient V example, which he borrows from Pogge, to show that distributive disadvantages take a different character depending on how they are created (Schemmel 2012, 127-8; 2021, 27-8; Pogge 2008, 47). In this example, people need a vital nutrient – nutrient V – but they do not have access to it. He then compares cases where the lack of access to the nutrient is officially mandated, legally

authorized, foreseeably engendered (by, for instance, tolerating poverty such that people cannot afford the nutrient), or legally prohibited but not deterred. The intuition here is that it seems worse to legally prohibit people from buying the nutrient than to simply fail to redress poverty even if it leads to the very same disadvantage. A distributive conception of justice simply cannot capture this intuition: in some cases, social and political relations are themselves the source of the injustice beyond their distributive implications. Therefore, distributive and relational egalitarian approaches to equality differ in that they disagree on what, in the end, matters for justice.

## **2. Relational Egalitarianism and the Issue of Scope**

I would like to underline two main points here. First, just as distributive egalitarians do not necessarily disregard the importance of social and political relationships, relational egalitarians also do not put distributive questions aside. Depending on the position considered, distributive questions can either be subsumed under relational ones, treated as ancillary issues, or simply seen as tackling a different, though potentially compatible, area of justice (for a discussion see Miklosi 2018). For instance, Anderson sometimes seems to argue that a distributive pattern is unjust only if it undermines egalitarian social relations or if it is produced by unjust treatments or attitudes (Anderson 2010, 5). In contrast, for Scheffler, social equality is a social practice, such that a community will have to choose how to distribute opportunities, benefits and burdens through an egalitarian process (Scheffler 2005, 20). Another conceptualization again seems to be present in Schemmel's work in that, as the nutrient example shows, he does not argue that the distributive paradigm is fundamentally mistaken. Rather, it appears to be incomplete if it is not complemented by relational considerations (Schemmel 2021, 232-57).

Here, I will not be concerned with how convincing the relational critique of distributive equality is – though I do believe that it is right to a large extent – or with the exact relationship between relational and distributive equality is. One can assume simply that justice should be defined, at least in part, by the features of social and political relations that are distinct from their distributive implications. That is, some situations can be unjust due to the unequal character of certain social and political relations, regardless of the existing distributive patterns. From there, this dissertation tackles the issue of the proper scope of relational egalitarian duties of justice: that is, the question of the proper set of agents among whom principles of (egalitarian) justice apply

(Tan 2014, 1). Importantly, there seems to be a constriction of our moral horizon when one moves from distributive to relational egalitarianism. On a distributive view, since justice is a characteristic of distributive patterns, it is rather easy to argue that anyone in a position to improve the justice of the distribution has a *prima facie* duty to do so. Indeed, as will be discussed throughout, many distributive egalitarians reach this conclusion. This is true *a fortiori* for luck egalitarians. As mentioned, luck egalitarians subscribe to the idea that: “it is bad – unjust or unfair – for some to be worse off than others through no fault of their own” (Temkin 1993, 13). Intuitively, this should include one’s place of birth since it is not a matter of individual responsibility. Hence, many luck egalitarians do assume – at least implicitly – that their theory is global in scope (Angell and Huseby 2019, 179-80) and some explicitly defend this global extension (Arneson 1989; 2016; Fabre 2005; Holtug 2017; Segall 2016a; Tan 2012).

Of course, this is not to say that distributive egalitarianism is necessarily global in scope. On the contrary, many restrict the scope of distributive justice to particular social or political relations such as the nation-state; as mentioned above, a natural position is to say that we should be sufficientarians globally and egalitarians domestically (Blake 2001; Miller 2007; Nagel 2005; Rawls 1999). However, from a distributive standpoint, one needs an additional argument explaining why distributive justice is so restricted because the justice of distributive patterns is not necessarily connected to particular social or political relationships. One could be concerned with a distributive imbalance between two individuals even if they are not related in any way. To restrict the scope of distributive justice, it seems necessary to add that duties of justice are triggered by certain relations such as cultural ties (Miller 1997; 2005; 2007), unique coercive political relations (Blake 2001; Nagel 2005; Risse 2006), or social cooperation (Freeman 2006; 2007; Sangiovanni 2007; 2017). I come back to these arguments below.

However, when we move to relational egalitarianism, the issue of scope seems to change rather drastically: from a relational egalitarian perspective, the intuitive position is that duties of justice are necessarily restricted. This is how I interpret the *relevant relationship requirement* presented by Sharp, mentioned above.<sup>4</sup> Schemmel also neatly encapsulates this intuition:

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<sup>4</sup> To recall, Sharp writes that: “First, concern about relational inequality is only appropriate when persons already share a context or relationship with one another (the *relevant relationship requirement*). Second, relationships across borders are typically thinner than relationships within them” (Sharp 2022, 648; for a defense of these intuitions, see Wellman 2011, 57-78).



It is natural to think of requirements to set up significant social and political relations on an egalitarian footing as triggered primarily, or even exclusively, by patterns of already existing, non-trivial, social interactions. That is, it is natural to demand relational *content* of social justice on the basis of a relational *grounding* of it. (Schemmel 2021, 294)

Following this understanding of relational egalitarianism, justice should inherently be restricted to some relevant social or political interactions: the duty to equalize social relations follows from the fact that agents are connected to one another. In other words, duties of justice are purely internal to certain significant social relationships.

Yet, this intuitive constriction of duties of egalitarian justice can and, as I will argue here, should be questioned and ultimately rejected by relational egalitarians. My argument is that relational egalitarians should be open to the conclusion that some obligations of justice may be extrinsic to the social relationship considered. In other words, I will contend that when an agent is in a position to equalize a social relationship, they can have a reason to do so, even if they are not themselves implicated in the relationship. I thus defend a cosmopolitan reading of relational egalitarianism which entails that we have reasons to oppose social inequalities generally and work to attain a more egalitarian world overall. Consequently, the argument presented here highlights that relational egalitarianism is closer to its distributive counterpart than typically thought. That is, relational egalitarians should not only be concerned with whether persons act rightly in that they treat and regard others as equals in their existing relationships, but they should also evaluate states of affairs for their relative *relational* value. In other words, and – very – roughly, a world which contains more egalitarian relationships should be considered to be a better world. Social equality is not only a constraint delineating how persons can permissibly treat and regard others, but it is also a good that should be favoured and promoted in certain circumstances.

### **3. The Plan of the Dissertation**

To support this argument, the dissertation is separated into three broad sections which will consider the two presuppositions mentioned by Sharp in turn. In the first section, comprising chapters 2 and 3, I tackle the argument according to which international and transnational relations are “thinner” than intra-national ones. I argue that the main arguments supporting this idea fail to provide reasons why only intra-national social and political relationships trigger egalitarian duties of justice. In the second section, comprising chapters 4 to 6, I tackle the *relevant relationship requirement* to consider its normative foundations. As I argue, the question of the proper scope of

egalitarian duties of justice is ultimately connected to the question of why social equality is taken to be required or valuable. In these chapters, I push for the conclusion that social equality is not only a constraint on how people ought to relate to one another, but that egalitarian social relationships also have a deep, non-instrumental value. This, I argue, entails that we have some reasons to favour and promote the existence of social equality globally, though this cosmopolitan duty is constrained by different considerations. In the final section, chapter 7, I explore the practical implications of the position defended here.

As mentioned, there are generally three arguments that are mobilized to restrict egalitarian justice to intra-national relations: the argument from coercion, cooperation, and the cultural-conventionalist position (Ypi 2012, 72). Though these associative arguments are often mobilized by *distributive* egalitarians, they take on a particular significance when they are applied to *relational* egalitarianism. Indeed, many distributive egalitarians have tried to justify the restriction of egalitarian justice to the state by appealing to contractarian arguments positing that egalitarian duties of justice arise only in specific circumstances. When they are applied to relational egalitarianism, they underline the idea that particular social and political relationships are especially relevant to the relative social standing of individuals and trigger concerns of justice.

In chapter 2, I examine the argument from coercion. Briefly, it posits that egalitarian principles of justice aim to equalize the relations between those who are subjected to a shared system of coercive governance (Blake 2001; Blake 2011; Nagel 2005; Risse 2012). Advocates of this position argue that coercion is necessary to allow for social and political coordination but simultaneously threatens the relative standing of individuals. Therefore, individuals subjected to a shared coercive system of governance are owed egalitarian considerations to justify the very system which is necessary for their continued coordination. However, this argument fails to justify why coercion is the *only* type of relation which warrants egalitarian considerations of justice.

In chapter 3, I move to the second argument supporting a focus on intra-national relations: the argument from cooperation (Freeman 2006; 2007; Sangiovanni 2007; 2017). Roughly, this argument relies on the intuition that by cooperating with one another, individuals are owed fair consideration of their interests and thus ought to be regarded and treated as equals. Yet, this argument is also puzzling on two grounds. First, given the contemporary level of transnational and global cooperation, it is unlikely that the relevant type of cooperation is restricted to states. Second,

this argument misrepresents the normative importance of cooperation. Cooperation is sometimes not best seen as a prerequisite for egalitarian principle of justice to obtain. It may sometimes be useful to ensure that the pre-cooperative entitlements of all are treated equally. The third, and final associative argument, the cultural-conventionalist position will be considered in chapter 5.

From there, I move to the second main part of the argument, which takes a step back and considers the normative foundations of both the arguments from coercion and cooperation. The argument shared by both arguments is that egalitarian duties of justice are required when individuals are connected in socially relevant ways. Though this position, articulated in Schemmel's quote above, is intuitive, I show that it is only one of at least three different ways to answer the question of why social equality is valuable or required: the deontic, instrumental, and telic positions (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 154-77; Miklosi 2018). Note that these positions are not mutually exclusive, but it is instructive to consider them separately since they lead to different and potentially conflicting conclusions on the issue of scope. Accordingly, all three are scrutinized successively in the dissertation.

In chapter 4, I examine the deontic position. Following this approach, social equality is not valuable *per se*, but it is required when people stand in certain relationships with each other. This position is echoed in the argument from coercion and cooperation in that it raises the fundamental issue of the social and political relations that give rise to this deontic requirement. Interestingly, this approach does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that relational egalitarian obligations of justice only arise within individual states. It can accommodate the idea that a plurality of relations, which can be relatively tenuous, create egalitarian obligations of justice (Cloarec 2016; Ip 2016; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018). In other words, this approach can lead to a practice-dependent account of justice according to which relating as equals ultimately depends on the type of relationship considered. In a nutshell, to treat a friend, a compatriot, or a distant other with whom we only share tenuous economic connections as an equal will require different things.

Nonetheless, even on this broader approach to the question of what types of social relations warrant egalitarian duties of justice, there are still undesirable conclusions when it is applied globally. As I argue, this deontic approach cannot satisfactorily respond to instances of global structural injustice (Ackerly 2018; Young 2006; 2011). When confronted with an unjust social structure, a pure deontic understanding of social equality cannot differentiate between cooperating

with others to modify the unjust structure and an exit option allowing for powerful agents to avoid prospective duties to equalize the structure by putting an end to their participation in it. However, I show how this possibility should be unattractive to relational egalitarians in that it fails to resolve situations where some are left more vulnerable to exploitation and oppression. I argue that relational egalitarians should recognize that we have duties to not only maintain some relationships over time but also to create new social and political relationships to equalize certain states of affairs. Yet, the deontic approach cannot accommodate this idea on its own.

Consequently, in chapter 5 and 6 I consider alternative ways to answer the question of why social equality is required or valuable. In chapter 5, I explore the instrumental understanding of social equality. Briefly, some have highlighted that social equality is not only a deontic constraint, but that it can also be instrumentally good *for* persons or society. Indeed, it seems reasonable to argue that social equality promotes certain goods like wellbeing, self-respect, or social solidarity, or that it at least avoids the negative effects of social inequalities – which can lead to depression, anxiety, or unhealthier societies (Fourie 2012; Scheffler 2010, 227).

Applied to the context at hand, this approach can be used to argue that there exists an obligation to promote social equality and to create new egalitarian social relations when this would be instrumentally good for the individuals involved. I show that it is possible to establish a strong correlation between protecting social equality and providing effective protection of basic human rights. Consequently, I argue that if one is committed to protecting basic human rights globally, as most contemporary political theorists are, then this entails that we should promote egalitarian social relationships at the global level – at least to a certain extent. Nonetheless, though the instrumental conception of the value of social equality can lead to a very broad scope, it remains limited in its capacity to ground social equality as a distinct theory of justice. That is, to say that social equality has instrumental value cannot explain the distinctive importance typically granted to egalitarian social relations. Moreover, this line of reasoning remains rather weak in that if one were to show that some hierarchical relationships could lead to the same results, then social equality would lose its value.

This brings us to the telic conception, considered in chapter 6. On this view, social equality is not only required, but it also has non-instrumental value. Though often criticized as “mysterious” and “groundless” (Fourie 2012, 118; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 167-9; Tomlin 2014; Wolff and de-

Shalit 2007, 6), it is endorsed by some contemporary relational egalitarians (Elford 2017; O'Neill 2008; Lippert-Rasmussen 2021). In this chapter, I show how, although the telic account is intuitively closer to a distributive conception of equality, it can be adapted to relational egalitarianism and, I contend, should be adopted. To say that social equality has non-instrumental value can mean one of two things. First, social equality can be non-instrumentally good for person in that it can be constitutive of objectively personally valuable goods. In particular, social equality is a constitutive element of an integral sense of self. Second, social equality can also be seen as non-instrumentally and impersonally valuable. On this view, social equality would be good in itself even if it not good *for* anyone. I argue that the impersonal view captures an important intuition, though it remains a bit too abstract: I argue that social equality can be good for persons, in that we should be concerned by how particular individuals are treated and regarded in given states of affairs, even if social equality has no impact on individual welfare.<sup>5</sup> This position leads to the conclusion that a socially egalitarian world is not only a world where the right types of actions are prevalent, but that this world is in a sense better for individuals. This idea, to my knowledge, has not yet been explored in the relational egalitarian literature.

Finally, I consider the practical implications of this understanding of social equality in chapter 7. I show how this understanding of equality leads to more demanding conclusions than are typically attached to relational egalitarianism since it can ground a natural duty to promote social equality globally. In this final chapter, I argue that relational egalitarians should recognize that their theory of equality rests on two distinct duties of justice: 1) a natural duty to promote social equality and to oppose inegalitarian relationships generally, and 2) a deontic duty to treat and regard others as equals when we interact with them. I contend that though relational egalitarianism is distinct from distributive egalitarianism because it focuses on social relationships, political institutions, and social structures as the fundamental area of concern for justice, this does not entail that we only have egalitarian duties of justice towards those to whom we are socially connected. We can have an obligation to foster and promote egalitarian social relations even if they cannot be distributed in the same way as opportunities or goods can be. Therefore, social equality

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<sup>5</sup> Note the throughout, when I refer to welfare, I refer to both mental states and subjective-desire satisfaction accounts of welfare, not to objective-list theories (on this distinction, see chapter 6). Unfortunately, I do not have the space to provide a complete theory of welfare here, but I use welfare in this narrow sense notably because it is also in this way that it is used by Temkin and Segall, who are two major sources from which I draw to develop my own account or telic *relational* egalitarianism. This restricted meaning thus aims to minimize potential misunderstanding between the view defended here and the position of Temkin and Segall.

should not be seen as being only a constraint on how we can treat and regard others, but should also be appreciated for its non-instrumental value. In a nutshell, relational egalitarians should recognize that a more egalitarian world is a better world.

## Chapter 2

### Coercion and Social Equality

Relational egalitarians hold that social equality cannot be captured by the description of how goods are distributed among individuals. This distributive focus, relational egalitarians argue, overlooks what truly matters for justice: how to establish fair and just social relations between individuals. As argued in the introduction, however, this shift of focus from the question of how goods should be distributed to the question of how to establish and maintain just social relations raises important questions regarding the proper scope of egalitarian justice. There are two main general approaches to answer the question of scope: humanist, or humanity-centred approaches, and associativist or associational approaches (Caney 2011, 506-7; Gilabert 2012, 6).<sup>1</sup> Both provide competing answers to the question: “what features of any two persons are morally relevant for claiming that they have duties of justice toward each other?” (Gilabert 2012, 6). On the humanist side, it is sufficient for two agents to be human beings for at least some principles of justice to apply, while, on the associativist side, the agents have to be connected in some way.

As I discuss below, while distributive approaches tend to be more in line with humanist intuitions, relational egalitarians tend to implicitly subscribe to the associational approach. Distributive approaches can consider inequalities at the global level problematic in and of themselves, unless, of course, they are coupled with an argument explaining why we should focus only on certain social and political relations. In contrast, relational egalitarians tend to argue that principles of justice should apply only to individuals who are connected in morally relevant ways, though it is debated to what extent the relevant connections might exist at the transnational level.

To reach an associative argument, it is necessary to satisfy two desiderata: 1) the argument must show that egalitarian duties of justice arise if and only if some socio-political relation is shown to obtain; and 2) if one wants to restrict egalitarian justice to some socio-political context, such as individual states, one must explain why this relation is unique to this socio-political context (Caney 2011, 522-4). In this chapter, I consider one potential contender: the argument from coercion. This argument is common in the distributive literature to try and explain why egalitarian duties of justice

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<sup>1</sup> As will become clear, this distinction should not be confused with the distinction between sufficientarian/humanitarian justice and egalitarian justice.

obtain only domestically, i.e. within individual states (Blake 2001; 2011; Nagel 2005; Risse 2006; 2012). Yet, as I show below, this argument also resonates strongly with relational egalitarianism. Roughly, following this associative argument, egalitarian principles of justice obtain only within individual states. This is so, first, because equality – be it distributive equality or relational equality – “is a demand of justice only among those who are subject to a shared system of coercive governance” (Ip 2016, 79). The underlying intuition is that coercive governance is a necessary part of our collective life and, as such, ought to be legitimated through either an equal distribution of goods or opportunities, or by the equalization of social and political standing within the political community. Moreover, as the argument goes, though some type of coercion exists beyond borders, it is qualitatively different from the one existing within individual nation states.

However, the argument from coercion fails to meet both desiderata. First, even if one accepts that coercion is essentially connected to egalitarian justice in that egalitarian principles of justice obtain only to regulate necessary coercive systems of governance, it should nonetheless be applied transnationally. Our contemporary international system exhibits a type of coercion which is relevantly similar to the type of coercion observable at the domestic level. Second, I argue that this argument fails to show that coercion is a necessary element for egalitarian considerations of justice to obtain. From a relational egalitarian perspective, though it is true that the necessity of coercion in our daily lives raises distinctive questions – notably concerning the conditions of political legitimacy – non-coercive social relations also raise issues of egalitarian justice. Therefore, the argument from coercion fails to provide reasons why egalitarianism should be limited to individual states and why it should be seen as the only ground for egalitarian duties of justice.

The argument of this chapter is divided into four sections. First, I briefly present how the move from distributive to relational equality is connected to the debate between humanist and associative conceptions of justice. Second, I show how the argument from coercion resonates with the work of some relational egalitarians. Thirdly, I consider how distributive egalitarians have theorized this argument to specify how it should be understood. I show that this argument fails to meet the second desideratum. Fourthly and finally, I argue that the argument from coercion also fails to meet the first desideratum: it cannot by itself be used to explain why egalitarian justice should be limited to coercive social and political relations.



## 1. Humanist and Associative Justice

Relational egalitarians typically distinguish themselves from distributive approaches to justice by insisting on the fundamental importance of social relations. As Fourie, Schuppert and Wallimann-Helmer put it: “although social equality could be described in distributive terms as something like equality of (the social basis of) status, social egalitarians could still object that the distributive paradigm does not capture a number of pertinent concerns” (Fourie, Schuppert and Wallimann-Helmer, 7). For relational egalitarians, to consider only how certain goods are distributed among individuals misses fundamental issues like the importance of relationships, attitudes or evaluations, and their expressions through different behaviours and institutions. According to them, these questions pertaining to social equality should be central to our conception of justice and demand that we go beyond distributive questions. Eloquently, in her criticism of luck egalitarianism, Anderson writes that:

Equality of fortune is a distributive theory of equality: it conceives of equality as a pattern of distribution. Thus, equality of fortune regards two people as equal as long as they enjoy equal amounts of some distributable good – income, resources, opportunities for welfare and so forth. (...) By contrast (...) democratic egalitarians are fundamentally concerned with the relationships within which goods are distributed, not only with the distribution of goods themselves. (Anderson 1999, 313-4)

Relational egalitarians aim to identify the conditions ensuring that everyone interacts with all others as equals. These considerations have distributive implications, but the necessary distribution of goods which follows from social equality or is a precondition for it are only one part of a larger issue.<sup>2</sup> Authors differ on the question of why social inequalities should be opposed (a question that will be considered throughout) and about the necessary conditions ensuring equal social relations. However, a central question all relational egalitarians must address concerns the scope of relational egalitarianism: they have to specify the set of agents to which their principles apply. Given the nature of their project, relational egalitarians tend to presuppose a focus on individual societies or states. Consequently, the typical scope of relational egalitarianism is the equalization of relations between fellow citizens (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 146).

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<sup>2</sup> On the question of the relation between relational and distributive justice, see Schemmel (2011).

However, it would be too quick to say that relational egalitarians are only interested by domestic relationships. Some relational egalitarians do explicitly consider the global context. For example, Scheffler argues that relational egalitarian principles could apply globally to regulate some of the new forms of human practices and institutional arrangements which connect individuals across nations, though these principles may not be norms of distributive justice (Scheffler 2012, 170-1). Other authors like Cloarec (2016) and Nath (2011; 2015) also argue that individuals and groups relate to one another in morally relevant ways beyond national borders and that relational egalitarianism should capture these relations. Similarly, Lippert-Rasmussen points out that relational egalitarianism is a fundamentally contextual account of justice<sup>3</sup>; for him, what it means to relate as equals varies and ultimately depends on the type of relation connecting different agents (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 150). To relate as equals in a family or with co-citizens requires different things from relating as equals with distant others to whom one is only connected through more or less tenuous economic or diplomatic relations.

It is important to note from the start that *relational* and *associational* accounts of justice are not identical, though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably in the global justice literature. Relational egalitarians aim to provide a full conception of justice by specifying the content, scope, and justification of some substantive principles of justice based on their conception of social equality. Associational accounts, however, are concerned only with the question of scope (Caney 2011, 507). They are not necessarily committed to any particular substantive conception of justice. However, relational egalitarians tend to implicitly subscribe to the associational account. For most relational egalitarians, agents who are connected in some ways are seen as having a duty to treat and regard one another as equals. The existence of social relations is what grounds the existence of duties of justice. Hence, though the positions of Scheffler, Cloarec, Nath and Lippert-Rasmussen differ, they share an associational conception of justice: principles of egalitarian justice apply to existing or potential relations between individuals to ensure that all effectively relate to one another as equals.

Of course, associativist approaches are not original to relational egalitarianism, but they are intuitively connected to it. On an associativist view, some social or political relation must exist

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<sup>3</sup> I come back to this contextual understanding of equality in more detail in chapter 4.

between two agents for any egalitarian principles of justice to apply. This is particularly clear in the position of Schemmel. As mentioned in the introduction, for him, the demands of egalitarian justice are grounded in our existing social and political relations.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, many *distributive* egalitarians also try to restrict the scope of egalitarian justice by appealing to associativist intuitions. For example, some distributive authors argue that social and economic relationships, shared institutional schemes, or the “basic structure” are the only grounds justifying the application of egalitarian principles of justice. As noted above, however, the scope of egalitarian justice which follows can be more or less restrictive. Though some do use this argument to limit egalitarian justice to the state, it can also be used to extend it to transnational and even global social relations *if* the proper type of socio-political relation also obtains at this level.

Accordingly, the comparison between relational and distributive justice is particularly interesting and informative here. The distributive conception of justice is much less straightforwardly connected to an associational approach to justice, although, as mentioned above, to defend an associational distributive position, one needs to provide an additional argument explaining why some distributive inequality is only relevant within a certain pre-identified social or political context. This is informative for two main reasons. First, it shows that another, *completely non-associative*, response to the scope question is possible. Second, distributive egalitarians have given more attention to the question of why the scope of egalitarian justice should be restricted to certain social relations, whereas this restriction is typically presupposed by relational egalitarians. Given that one’s answer to the question of scope can be more or less independent from one’s larger substantive view of justice, the associational answers *distributive* egalitarians have developed can thus be analyzed to shed light on why *relational* egalitarians might restrict the scope of justice for the same or similar reasons.

First, from a *distributive* standpoint, it may be easier to develop a humanist answer to the question of scope – though, in this dissertation, I show that a humanist, *relational* position is also possible. For humanists, at least some egalitarian principles of justice apply to all human beings as

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<sup>4</sup> To recall, he writes that: “it is natural to think of requirements to set up significant social and political relations on an egalitarian footing as triggered primarily, or even exclusively, by patterns of already existing, non-trivial, social interactions. That is, it is natural to demand relational content of social justice on the basis of a relational grounding of it.” (Schemmel 2021, 294)

human beings regardless of existing relations.<sup>5</sup> For example, following a luck egalitarian position, one could argue that the fact that some are worse off due to purely arbitrary causes that lie outside of one's control should be redressed (Gilbert 2012, 9; Segall 2016a). Accordingly, some luck egalitarians argue that a global redistribution of goods should take place because one's life opportunities or one's wellbeing should not be unduly limited by an arbitrary factor such as one's nationality (Caney 2001; Tan 2012). This argument is consistent with the humanist conception of justice since it necessarily leads to a universal scope; what matters is to equalize some distribution of goods or resources between individuals when one is unduly worse off compared to another. Justice here is not restricted to a particular socio-political context.

Nonetheless, many distributive authors are skeptical of the humanist position and share the intuition that egalitarian justice should obtain only under certain restricted circumstances. Consequently, distributive authors have extensively considered the question of how to limit the scope of egalitarian distributive justice to individual states. More precisely, two arguments stand out to justify the limitation of egalitarian principles to intra-national relations: the argument from coercion and the argument from cooperation.

In this chapter I focus on the argument from coercion. I will show first how this argument is echoed in the contemporary literature on relational egalitarianism, though it remains underdeveloped. In section 3, I analyze how distributive egalitarians have developed this argument to distinguish between domestic and transnational relations. However, I argue that this attempt is unsuccessful: even if we accept that coercive relations should restrict egalitarian principles of justice, there is no reason to reject the application of such principles beyond state borders. Finally, in section 4, I argue that the argument from coercion itself fails to explain why coercive relations are the only type of social relation giving rise to concerns of egalitarian justice.

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<sup>5</sup> It is important to mention that humanist approaches are not necessarily committed to the claim that all egalitarian principles of justice apply to all human beings; it can be consistent with the claim that though some important aspects should be equalized between all individuals, like one's life opportunities or potential well-being, some special rights and duties might arise from particular relationships and associations (Caney 2011; see also the notion of special duties as developed by Hart 1955).

## 2. Social Equality and Coercion

The argument from coercion claims that egalitarian principles of justice aim to equalize the relations between those who are unavoidably subjected to a shared system of coercive governance (Ip 2016, 79). For its main proponents, the relevant coercive relations exist only within the state. The argument from coercion should meet the two desiderata mentioned above: 1) it should identify a certain relation that is both necessary and sufficient for egalitarian considerations of justice to obtain and 2) it should capture how domestic political relationships are distinct from international ones. Different versions of this argument are defended by distributivist authors including Blake (2001; 2011), Nagel (2005) and Risse (2012). I will consider their arguments in more detail below. However, it is important to flag first that the intuition that coercive relations ground concerns of egalitarian justice resonates with the relational egalitarian literature.

As Ip highlights, coercion seems to be an essential element of any theory interested in the social and political standing of individuals. He writes:

Relational egalitarians (...) have very good reasons to be concerned about coercion and its normative implications. First, coercion is a common way in which the coercer exercises power over the coerced. Sometimes agents are coerced by others not because they are poor, unskilled, physically or emotionally weak, but because they are confronted by those who possess more resources, are more skillful, are physically or emotionally stronger, and are prepared to exploit these advantages. (Ip 2016, 80)

Certain inequalities and the capacity of some individuals to exploit these inequalities for their own advantage point towards the idea that coercive relations should at least be justifiable to those who are subjected to them. Coercion is understood generally as the capacity of an agent to intentionally eliminate significant options or courses of action which would otherwise be available to another agent (Abizadeh 2007, 346). To coerce another person is to be in a position to subject them to one's will.<sup>6</sup> Roughly, we can say that coercion has two main characteristics. As Risse points out, we can consider a relation coercive when: "First, it creates conditions under which X has no reasonable alternative but to do A. Second, it involves a threat: X has no reasonable alternative but to do A because otherwise the coercive agent will seriously worsen X's circumstances" (Risse 2006, 680).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, I do not have the space here to develop a complete theory of coercion. For a general presentation of the debates surrounding this concept, see Anderson (2011).

<sup>7</sup> As Risse points out, this definition is generally shared by him, Blake, and Nagel.

The basic intuition here is that coercion, though often immoral and unjust, may nonetheless be a necessary feature of our political lives: shared norms and rules, backed by a shared system of coercive governance, may be necessary to ensure that all can coordinate with others. Equality is thus essential to limit the negative effects of coercion.

Accordingly, it is no surprise that some relational egalitarians mention coercion to explain why egalitarian obligations of justice arise. For instance, Wellman (2011) explicitly uses coercive relations to explain why we should treat and regard our co-citizens as equals, but argues that this obligation does not extend to non-members of one's state. For him, this explains why each individual state has the right to unilaterally close its borders. According to his framework, this is morally legitimate because the relationships between citizens are more significant and profound than the ones between two persons belonging to different states. This difference relies on the idea that co-citizens are subjected to a shared system of governance. He argues that:

[States] are severely limited in how they may treat their citizens. To better understand this, it helps to reflect on why states are justified in the first place. In particular, because universal political consent is a fiction, the coercion states invariably employ is nonconsensual and, as such, is extremely difficult to justify. Nonconsensual coercion is in some instances permissible (and thus it can be legitimate), however, because of how utterly horrible life would be in the absence of political stability. Thus, states are justified insofar as they provide vitally important benefits (i.e., protecting their constituents' human rights) that would otherwise be unavailable, without requiring their citizens to make unreasonable sacrifices. (Wellman 2011, 75)

There are many things to unpack here. First, for Wellman, from a relational egalitarian perspective, it is necessary to justify collective decisions to all who are subjected to a shared system of governance. Given that effective consent is too difficult to attain in practice, the coercive state can be justified if it provides important social benefits which allow all to stand as equals and does so at an acceptable cost for the citizens. Yet, given that non-members of the state are not subjected to the same type of coercion, no relational egalitarian duties of justice towards them obtain. This does not entail however that states can treat foreigners in any way they like: there remain universal basic humanitarian duties.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On the difference between foreigners and the constituents of a given state, Wellman writes: "States are not similarly required to admit outsiders onto the land and into the community (...) for two reasons. First, because states do not nonconsensually force foreigners to contribute to the political community, they need not have the same worries about unreasonably imposing themselves on those who apply for admission. Second, even if we suppose that states have a responsibility to avoid imposing costs on any human – whether a citizen or not – there remains a morally relevant difference between denying entry to a potential immigrant and forcibly evicting a political subject, because only the

Nonetheless, Wellman's position raises more questions than it answers. Many have criticized this type of argument because immigration control does seem to be relevantly coercive since the state forcibly prevents individuals from entering its territory (Abizadeh 2008; Sharp 2022). Moreover, many have argued that the contemporary global order is also coercive to the degree required for egalitarian principles of justice to apply. Though I return to this latter position below, it is worth pointing out that relational egalitarians could appeal to the argument from coercion to justify the extension of egalitarian justice beyond borders. This is the position which seems to be adopted, at least partially, by Nath (2011, 2015).

She argues that relational egalitarianism should be global in scope because, in our contemporary, globalized world, social – and distributive – inequalities affect the ability of different states to “shape the terms of cross-border interaction” (Nath 2011, 601). Distributive inequalities and the subsequent unequal ability to occupy positions of control on the global stage entail that individuals and communities will not be able to relate as equals globally: some will be in a position to impose their will on others due to their relative advantages (Nath 2011, 601-2). This argument relies at least partially on the idea that coercive relations ought to be equalized. Accordingly, for Nath, there is no strong distinction between domestic and transnational relations. For her, what explains the importance of social equality within the state is the fact that there are dense and “unavoidable” interconnections. As she writes:

Within the context of the state, individuals are subject to the rules of background institutions that define the character of their political, social, and economic interaction. Society's institutions pervasively shape the lives of citizens by regulating their distributive entitlements, upholding their basic rights, and defining their formal political standing. Subjection to institutional terms that account for such interconnectedness is, for the most part, unavoidable and nonvoluntary. It is not as though members of a society choose for their lives to be intertwined or to participate in the aforementioned institutions. (Nath 2015, 191)

Though Nath does not directly refer to coercion, the same intuition seems to be at play here: egalitarian principles of justice obtain within the state because individuals are necessarily subjected

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latter forcibly separates a person from her homeland and deprives her of political membership.” (Wellman 2011, 76) In other words, it seems that, for Wellman, the core normative element which explains why we have a duty to treat and regard others as equals is that when we belong to a state, people are, in a sense, “forced” to obey the law of the land, while this is not true of non-members who are not directly subjected to the coercive laws of one particular state of which they are not a member. I come back to the question of whether this position is convincing below.

to “unavoidable” (coercive) social institutions that affect one’s political, social, and economic interactions and entitlements.

This relation between her remark and the argument from coercion becomes even clearer when she explains why interconnectedness matters. It is because we are unavoidably interconnected that we are vulnerable to some abusing the advantages they have over us. In her words: “individuals ought to enjoy equal standing in relation to one another under the rules and norms to which they are unavoidably subject” (Nath 2015, 195). Egalitarian concerns emerge when some relation is both unavoidable and risks creating unequal social standing for at least one participant. Thus, it seems that Nath is – at least implicitly – relying on the argument from coercion in that relational egalitarians should ensure that no one is “unavoidably” (coercively) subjected to inequalitarian relationships.

Nonetheless, for Nath, this approach entails that relational egalitarians should consider transnational social relations. As she highlights, transnational social relations can convey the idea that some are inferior to others in different ways which do not necessarily rely on the existence of a shared coercive government. Strict border control based on racist stereotypes or economic relations where one party is overwhelmingly advantaged compared to its partners are two common cases in our contemporary globalized world that convey the idea that some are inferior to others (Nath 2015, 196-7). As Nath points out, sweatshops and factories drawing on cheap labour internationally are not only instances of distributive injustice, but, more profoundly, they express the idea that the interests of some (such as the transnational companies and the consumers) should be promoted at the expense of the interests of others (notably the workers). For her, actors interacting on the global stage thus have a duty to justify their behaviour and decisions to one another (Nath 2015, 199).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> There is some vagueness in the way Nath uses the notion of “unavoidability” because she uses the term in two ways. First, she seems to want to capture social and political relations which are unavoidable in that individuals cannot extricate themselves from the web of interactions they find themselves weaved into. As such, her argument seems to rely on the empirical observation that given the contemporary extent of globalization, one cannot escape the global economy, or one will necessarily be confronted by coercive border control when one wants to emigrate. This reading is supported by some of her previous work. For instance, in her article from 2011 she writes: “due to the nature of the global community we must take seriously the duty to address extreme inequality within its bounds. (...) On the social egalitarian view, the increasingly strong, economic, and political ties we have with individuals in distant nations generate a compelling set of reasons to address global inequality” (Nath 2011, 611). This is the reading that resonates with the argument from coercion. Social equality is necessary here to ensure that no agent is in a position to impose their will on others. However, a second interpretation may be available. Nath sometimes states that we should be



Consequently, the argument from coercion resonates strongly with relational egalitarianism. It is intuitively warranted to grant particular importance to coercive relations when we aim to ensure that all stand as equals in a certain context. However, it remains debatable how the two desiderata are met here. On the one hand, it is unclear if relational egalitarians should only be concerned with domestic social and political relations. As Nath's position illustrates, it does seem intuitively warranted to consider transnational relations when we are interested in "unavoidable" (coercive) interactions. On the other, one may wonder in what sense coercion is essentially connected to egalitarian justice. That is, though it seems plausible to say that coercion raises important issues which must be addressed to ensure the equal social standing of all, it remains unclear why it is the *only* type of relationship which ought to be justified through equalization. Unfortunately, relational egalitarians seem to have given less thought as to why this type of relationships is particularly relevant. Fortunately, some distributive egalitarians have developed nuanced arguments to respond to both questions. These analyses can provide potential answers. In the next two sections, I consider both of the above questions in turn with the help of relevant associativist arguments developed by *distributive* egalitarians.

### 3. Should We Only Care About Coercion Within Individual State?

As mentioned above, many *distributive* egalitarians also defend the idea that egalitarian justice aims to equalize coercive socio-political relations. They present associativist arguments explaining why the scope of egalitarian justice should be restricted to these types of relations. What's more, this argument from coercion is often used to limit the scope of justice to relations obtaining within individual states. Though it is developed by distributive egalitarians, the argument from coercion is interestingly more or less free standing depending on the form it takes: the argument remains largely neutral about one's own conception of what egalitarian justice entails.

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concerned with social relations that "avoidably [generate] inequalitarian relations." This claim seems to be broader: to say that a relation could be organized otherwise does not entail that it is unavoidable in the sense that it is inescapable. Accordingly, it seems that for Nath even optional, voluntary interactions are subject to egalitarian claims of justice because some justification is always required when assessing competing individual claims. I return to this question in more detail below. However, even in these cases the problem seems to be that when two agents are connected, then we should ensure that no one is in a position to unilaterally impose the terms of how they should relate. As such, it does seem like Nath's argument relies on the idea that coercion explains – at least partially – why egalitarian social relationships are necessary.

This is particularly pertinent here because, as a result, it can be applied to relational egalitarianism. In this third section I consider arguments by Nagel (2005), Blake (2001; 2011), and Risse (2006; 2012), all of which aim to explain why domestic coercion is distinct from transnational coercion, thus explaining why egalitarian justice applies within the state, but not transnationally. However, I argue that all three arguments fail.

### *3.1. Coercion and the General Will*

A first potential argument which resonates strongly with the relational egalitarian conception of justice is presented by Nagel (2005). He argues that there is a deep connection between equality, coercion, and sharing a political community because when inequalities are socially and politically created within a polity, they are ultimately created in the name of the state's constituents. His argument relies on two main steps. First, state coercion is necessary and unavoidable. Second, state coercion differs from international coercion because it is done in the name of those who are subjected to the shared system of governance. This argument echoes the efforts of Wellman to explain why state coercion is special and why compatriots are connected in unique ways. However, this approach leads to extremely problematic conclusions.

First, Nagel underlines that coercion is a necessary feature of our social and political lives. He contends that the monopoly of force embodied by the state is necessary and ultimately justified by an appeal to each individual self-interest because it is essential for any type of socio-political coordination. To support this idea, he explicitly adopts a Hobbesian conception of the state (Hobbes 1994 [1651]). He writes:

What creates the link between justice and sovereignty is something common to a wide range of conception of justice: they all depend on the coordinated conduct of large numbers of people, which cannot be achieved without law backed up by a monopoly of force. Hobbes construed the principles of justice, and more broadly the moral laws, as a set of rules and practices that would serve everyone's interest if everyone conformed to them. This collective self-interest cannot be realized by the independent motivation of self-interested individuals unless each of them has the assurance that others will conform if he does. That assurance requires the external incentive provided by the sovereign, who sees to it that individual and collective self-interest coincide. (Nagel 2005, 115)

Coercive governance, according to this reading, is necessary to ensure that individuals can coordinate their conduct with one another. It provides a sufficient level of assurance that others are

likely to follow shared rules and norms. An individual thus has the necessary incentives to follow collective rules both because they have sufficient reasons to believe that others will do the same and because there is the threat of punishment if they don't do so.

However, it is rather puzzling how then transnational connections do not also fall within the purview of egalitarian justice. Of course, Nagel does not argue that no duties arise on the global level: he does recognize that all agents have at least a universal duty to respect basic human rights and some universal negative obligations (like the obligation not to harm others and not to infringe on another's freedom of expression or freedom of religion) (Nagel 2005, 126-7). However, for him, egalitarian justice only obtains within the state since it is only in this context that individuals can be held responsible for the social, political, or economic inequalities that are created by the "general will." To explain his thought, Nagel argues that:

[the presumption against arbitrary inequalities] comes from a special involvement of agency or the will that is inseparable from membership in a political society. Not the will to become or remain a member, for most people have no choice in that regard, but the engagement of the will that is essential to life inside a society, in the dual role each member plays both as one of the society's subjects and as one of those in whose name its authority is exercised. One might even say that we are all participants in the general will. (...) A sovereign state is not just a cooperative enterprise for mutual advantage. The societal rules determining its basic structure are coercively imposed: it is not a voluntary association. I submit that it is this complex fact – that we are both putative joint authors of the coercively imposed system, and subject to its norms (...) – that creates the special presumption against arbitrary inequalities in our treatment of the system. (Nagel 2005, 128-9)

Though Nagel is concerned with socio-economic inequalities, it is possible to extend this argument to cover socio-political relationships. From a relational standpoint, the argument here would be that the state coercively maintains a shared framework defining the social, political, and economic entitlements of all in society which will consequently either establish the equal social standing of all or work against it. Consequently, an adapted relational egalitarian reading of Nagel's argument leads to the idea that compatriots are under the duty to justify the inequalities created by their shared system of governance. In other words, any inequalities created by the system should presumptively be acceptable and justifiable to all. This imperative of justification is necessary to ensure that the coercive system, which is unavoidable, is itself legitimate (Nagel 2005, 129). This is so for two reasons: 1) there is a coercive actor which 2) acts in the name of those subject to its norms (Nagel 2005, 129; Caney 2011, 518). Accordingly, domestic inequalities are distinct from

global or international inequalities because there is no coercive actor on the global stage which acts in the name of all persons alive or of all (or many) individual societies (Nagel 2005, 129-30). Consequently, no claim of (relational) egalitarian justice arises globally.

However, this approach is ultimately unconvincing because it follows that a state could avoid any issues of justification by engaging in pure coercion that is not done in the name of those subjected to it. This is especially clear when we consider his approach to immigration law. On this point Nagel writes:

Immigration policies are simply enforced against the nationals of other states; the laws are not imposed in their name, nor are they asked to accept and uphold those laws. Since no acceptance is demanded of them, no justification is required that explains why they should accept such discriminatory policies, or why their interests have been given equal consideration. It is sufficient justification to claim that the policies do not violate their prepolitical human rights. (Nagel 2005, 129-30).

Despite the precision that states still ought to protect and respect basic human rights and negative entitlements (Nagel explicitly mentions bodily inviolability, freedom of expression, and freedom of religion), this nonetheless leaves a wide array of problematic attitudes or behaviours which would be legitimate if they were simply imposed on others without being imposed in their name. Nagel's position leads to the conclusion that a tyrant who imposes their will on others without ever claiming or aiming to do so in the name of the persons subjected to their power could not be considered to be unjust, as long as they respect basic human rights (Abizadeh 2007, 352; Julius 2006). Hence, it seems possible to escape our obligations of justice simply by denying that the other over whom norms and rules are imposed is someone who has standing to ask for a justification of such norms and rules. Of course, the implication is that then acceptance of the norms and rules cannot be demanded on the part of the subject. Yet, they might still be imposed unilaterally if the imbalance of power between the tyrant and the subject is sufficiently great.

This, I take it, should be an unattractive result to any relational egalitarians since it is deeply problematic to be able to avoid duties of justice by denying the position of some as social equals who are owed a justification of the rules and norms that are coercively imposed upon them. From there, it seems that three options could be explored. First, one could find another way of distinguishing domestic and transnational coercion. Second, some could agree with Nagel's position and recognize that transnational relations are also coercive and thus accept that egalitarian

principles of justice obtain globally. Or, finally, someone could reject the idea that coercion itself is what grounds our egalitarian obligations of justice. Though I will ultimately argue for the final option, some have pursued the first option. I now turn to their arguments.

### *3.2. Coercion, the State, and Transnational relations*

A first response to the problems inherent in Nagel's view would be to drop the requirement that justice aims to equalize coercive relations imposed *in the name of those subjected to that very coercion*. That is, it is possible to argue that coercion itself gives rise to egalitarian duties of justice. Yet, from there, it is then unclear how the distinction between domestic and transnational coercion can be maintained. As Nath's position highlighted above, given the current state of global interdependence, some transnational relations are relevantly coercive. Nonetheless, this claim is disputed by both Blake (2001; 2011) and Risse (2006; 2012). They both argue that coercion is what grounds egalitarian justice and that there remain relevant differences between state coercion and transnational relations. Though they both have a distributive conception of justice in mind, as I highlight below, their arguments remain consistent with a relational egalitarian view of justice.

Blake and Risse defend two distinct arguments. First, Blake argues that state coercion is necessary to protect individual autonomy. To this, he adds that there remains a qualitative distinction between state and international coercion since state coercion is "vertical" while international coercion is "horizontal", two notions to which I return below. Second, Risse argues that state coercion is also necessary because it protects individual rights. He contends that state coercion has a particular importance from the point of view of justice due to its unique "immediacy." However, both arguments fail in their task of explaining why egalitarian justice should be reserved for domestic relations.

Starting with Blake's argument, he wants to identify an impartial way of distinguishing what is owed to all human beings as human beings and what is owed to fellow citizens. He finds this distinction in the liberal conception of autonomy. For him, liberalism is fundamentally committed to the protection of individual autonomy. According to Blake: "all human beings have the moral entitlement to exist as autonomous agents, and therefore have entitlements to those circumstances and conditions under which this is possible" (Blake 2001, 267). Yet, this principle has different implications depending on whether we consider the entitlements of a compatriot or of

a distant other. For Blake, this entails sufficiency abroad and equality at home; he defends a sufficientarian position at the global level but an egalitarian position at the domestic level.

For him, this commitment to individual autonomy can ground a commitment to global sufficiency. This is essential to ensure that all have access to the necessary goods and circumstances to allow for autonomous actions and are effectively “capable of selecting and pursuing plans of life in accordance with individual conceptions of the good” (Blake 2001, 127). Accordingly, liberals should be committed to opposing famine, extreme poverty or crippling social norms such as caste hierarchies even at the global level (Blake 2001, 271). However, within a given state, Blake maintains that this commitment to individual autonomy demands more than sufficiency. He argues that state coercion constrains autonomy by limiting the number of actions available to individuals through criminal and civil laws. Yet, by doing so, the state simultaneously empowers individuals (Blake 2001, 280-2). He writes: “without some sort of state coercion, the very ability to autonomously pursue our projects and plans seems impossible; settled rules of coercive adjudication seem necessary for the settled expectations without which autonomy is denied” (Blake 2001, 280). In a nutshell, since we cannot eliminate the state because it allows for the deployment of individual autonomy, liberal theories at least have to ensure that state actions are legitimate and justifiable to all those they coerce. Individual states must ensure that their laws and the fundamental principles which orient their actions are acceptable to all (at least hypothetically – as in Rawls’ original position). Questions of egalitarian justice thus arise within individual states because state laws coercively regulate how relative shares and positions are distributed in a given community and they have to justify these laws to all those to whom they apply (Blake 2001, 282).

Additionally, for Blake, it is not only that state coercion requires the application of egalitarian principles of justice, but more strongly that these principles arise *only* in the domestic context. To support this restriction of egalitarian justice, Blake argues that even though the international arena is coercive, it is not coercive in a way which creates egalitarian obligations of justice (Blake 2001, 265). His point is not that coercion does not exist at the global level. It certainly does, as Blake himself recognizes. Rather, he argues that the coercion that exists within the state is sufficiently different from the one existing at the global level to restrict the application of egalitarian principles of justice to intra-national relations.

Blake argues that while state coercion is vertical, transnational coercion is horizontal. For him, vertical coercion, which is paradigmatically illustrated by state coercion, happens when different parties establish a common agent who has coercive authority to regulate their common relations (Blake 2011, 566). In contrast, in a way which echoes Nath's position presented above, he defines horizontal coercion as a situation where the relevant parties act both as the coercers and the coerced. He writes:

they coerce one another with reference to the norms and principles inherent in the association itself. There is no agent to whom coercive agency can be ascribed, except to the participants themselves. The association, instead, acts as a set of norms and principles invoked to justify the coercive acts in question. (Blake 2011, 566-7)

This echoes Nath's position since it allows us to distinguish two types of coercion which seem to be implied in her position. There is coercion first when people are situated under a shared coercive agent – like a state – and, second, when people are, in a sense, forced to interact with one another. The second case would be an instance of horizontal coercion in which the participants potentially impose a particular decision on others. This is especially problematic when the two agents do not have the same bargaining power. As Blake recognizes, it is necessary to consider both types of coercion. Yet, he contends that there remains an essential difference between the two. While the state bears an important moral responsibility as a collective agent necessarily imposing laws on its constituents, transnational interactions while they can be fundamentally unequal and coercive, are not necessary for individual autonomy. Consequently, while coercive state laws must be justified, transnational coercive norms and practices could simply be eliminated (Blake 2011, 577). From there, he concludes that we should respect the self-government of states by eliminating problematic coercive relations at the transnational level, but that this removal does not entail the application of some egalitarian principle of justice across borders. When they are voluntary and unproblematic, transnational associations should be accepted as the free contractual engagements of agents acting on the global stage.

Before I criticize this position, it is relevant to consider Risse's argument which differs slightly from Blake's but nonetheless shares important features with it. Risse also argues that state coercion is qualitatively different from coercion at the transnational level. For him, coercion at the state level warrants the application of egalitarian principles of justice because it possesses a kind of political and legal immediacy that is lacking at the supra-national level. For him:

the immediacy of the interaction between individuals and state is characterized on two dimensions, a legal one and a political one. (...) The legal aspect consists in the directness and pervasiveness of law enforcement. State enforcement agencies have direct, unmediated access to bodies and assets. (...) The political aspect consists in the significance of the environment that the state provides for the realization of basic moral rights, a significance that captures the profundity of this relationship. (Risse 2012, 25-6; see also Risse 2006, 684)

This immediacy is necessary for Risse because it protects basic human rights and individual entitlements in a given socio-political contexts. On this, he writes tellingly that:

Basic liberties depend on what happens in one's immediate environment. For me to have freedom of speech means to be able to speak my mind to those around me; it does not depend on governments elsewhere refusing to publish my views, even if this means that I cannot reach the audience I am most eager to reach. For me to have freedom of conscience means for me to be able to practice my religion where I live, not for my religion to be accepted elsewhere (...). International organizations can monitor rights violations, or set incentives for states to respect or to disregard basic rights. Yet whether individuals can exercise these rights is a function of their immediate environment. (Risse 2006, 687)

It is this immediacy which creates an obligation on the part of compatriots to justify their mutual decisions to one another; a political collective is, in a sense, "immediately" confronted with the question of how to set up shared norms, rules and laws in ways which respect the basic rights and entitlements of all. Transnational interactions lack this immediacy; the relation between a particular state and its constituents thus remains special, even in our globalized context.

Consequently, the argument from coercion defended by Blake and Risse is really two different arguments. The first is that state coercion is a necessary element of our political lives and this entails egalitarian duties of justice. And the second is that state coercion is of a different kind than transnational coercion, which should explain why egalitarian concerns arise only within the state. However, both of these points fail to limit the scope of egalitarian principles of justice to the state. Here I focus on the second point and argue that the proposed distinction between national and transnational coercion is unconvincing. Accordingly, even if we accept that coercion is essential to egalitarian justice, it cannot explain why it should be restricted to individual states.

First, against Risse's argument, it is unclear why immediacy is normatively relevant in a way that precludes the application of egalitarian principles of justice to the global level. Considering legal immediacy, as Richard Arneson remarks: "Suppose all law enforcement was executed by complex, indirect, causal chains, like Rube Goldberg machines. Would this somehow



invalidate the claim that state membership is a ground for justice?” (Arneson 2012, 481). That is not to say that laws should not conform to moral standards, but rather that it is doubtful that the application of moral standards or of principles of justice relies on the immediacy of laws. Moreover, Risse himself recognizes that there is a space at the global level to apply some principles of justice, though he remains vague about how egalitarian they should be. He considers the World Trade Organization (WTO) and recognizes that this organization has jurisdiction over a – relatively small – range of issues and possesses a dispute settlement system that is coercive (Risse 2006, 291-2). From there, Risse briefly acknowledges that the WTO has some reasons to equalize the *relations* between the members of the organization though, he says: “it should be clear that, with regard to the WTO, it will in particular be much harder to argue for extensive financial transfers of the sort that are embodied by a domestic tax system. Therefore, the kind of associative duties that arise depends on the actual nature of the association.” (Risse 2006, 692)

The problem here is that Risse’s answer opens the door to the conclusion that even if distributive justice is restricted to the state not all egalitarian obligations of justice are. Though Risse remains vague on this point, one can raise the question of what guides the equalization of the relative standing of the members of the WTO? If distributive justice is restricted to the state, is it another type of justice? Moreover, are duties of justice to be understood as a continuum or as obtaining only when a necessary “coercive threshold” is met? I will come back to the question of the practice-dependent account of social equality in chapter 4, but it is notable that a relational egalitarian conception of justice, it seems, can resolve these problems. For instance, if one accepts that questions of social equality have primacy over distributive questions, then one could argue that given that social relations at the global level are pervasive and extensive they warrant the equalization of the standing of the different relevant actors – though this equalization can have different implications depending on the context considered.

Therefore, it would be a mistake to say that *all* egalitarian principles of justice are restricted to the state. Rather, egalitarian distributive justice may be the particular form equality takes when applied nationally, but we should still ensure that individuals and communities relate and regard one another as equals transnationally – even if this might require less material redistribution than it does nationally. Consequently, we do not have a good reason to restrict egalitarian justice as such because the state possesses some kind of immediacy *vis-à-vis* its constituents. On the contrary,

transnational coercion does give rise to *relational* egalitarian concerns. The point is simply that the distributive implications of social equality may vary depending on the context considered.

Second, Blake's distinction between horizontal and vertical coercion, at least in democratic states, is questionable. In a similar fashion to Nagel, Blake appears to rely on a broadly Hobbesian conception of the state where it is conceived as a distinct sovereign agent constituted by a covenant through which the citizens waive their own sovereignty (Hobbes 1994, esp. par. XVII-XVIII). This position seems to make sense of the claim that, consequently, the state becomes a distinct agent imposing its will on its subordinates and it is this imposition of a particular will which has to be justifiable. However, it is unclear why this conception of the state should be preferred to its Kantian counterpart where the state is not a distinct agent but is best understood as being constituted by equal cooperating citizens (Ricoeur 1990, 228-33; Forst 2015). Following this second conception, the actions of the state should ideally be attributable to the united will of the People (Kant 1997 [1785], esp. par. 46-7). Here the state is not a separate agent, but the people constitute themselves as a state through their united will. It is not clear how this conception of the state is different from transnational, horizontal coercion since, here, the co-citizens act both as the coercers and the coerced; they all subscribe to some coercive norms through a mutual agreement ensuring the acceptability of the common norms. The coercion that operates within the state may be more extensive in that it concerns more aspects of the life in common, but it appears to be of the same kind as transnational coercion. Accordingly, one could argue that relational egalitarian principles of justice should also apply to coercive treatment at the global level to ensure that it is acceptable to all concerned. Moreover, it would be premature to conclude that transnational equality never entails distributive equality of some sort. In other words, vertical and horizontal equality are much closer in kind than Blake makes it seem.

Additionally, as mentioned, Nath's position is strongly echoed in Blake's distinction between vertical and horizontal coercion and yet she argues for the application of relational egalitarian principles at the global level. To recall, as she points out, the main underlying idea behind the argument from coercion is that "individuals should not be inescapably subject to terms that avoidably produce inequalitarian relations. Expressed positively, this principle states that individuals ought to enjoy equal standing in relation to one another under the rules and norms to

which they are unavoidably subject” (Nath 2015, 195). Given the current state of globalization<sup>10</sup> and interconnection at the global level, it consequently seems like there exist transnational interconnections which render equalization necessary.

Yet, Blake might not be convinced by this argument since he could argue that we should not necessarily aim to justify these coercive practices but rather to eliminate them since they are not essential to the protection of individual autonomy. The possibility of putting an end to social, political, or economic relationships is a thorny question that I will consider in more detail in chapter 4. Yet, it should be noted out that in our globalized context putting an end to a social, political or economic relation needs to be justifiable. As Nath shows, the decision *not* to interact or to *cease to* interact with others can itself convey problematic attitudes. She maintains that disengaging on the basis of racist stereotypes or the presumption that distant others are, in a sense, inferior, can itself be problematic (Nath 2015, 201). The argument here is that, at least from a relational egalitarian standpoint, there may be other grounds beside coercion itself on which to evaluate transnational relations and, in particular, dissociation may be morally problematic. Though, as highlighted above, Nath seems to lean towards a coercive conception of the grounds of relational egalitarianism – at least partially – this remark points towards the idea that there may be additional reasons to find certain behaviours morally objectionable and to apply relational egalitarian principles of justice. This is the point to which I now turn.

#### 4. Social Equality Beyond Coercion

Though Nath remains vague on this particular subject, her final argument, which can be mobilized against Blake’s position, points towards the idea that coercion, though relevant from the point of view of justice, may not be the only reason for egalitarian considerations of justice to

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<sup>10</sup> Globalization, throughout, refers to four different types of changes. As David Held neatly encapsulates it: “First, it involves a stretching of social, political and economic activities across political frontiers, regions and continents. But if these are something else than occasional or random, then something else is suggested: intensification. Thus, second, globalization is marked by the growing magnitude of networks and flows of trade, investment, finance, culture and so on. Third, globalization can be linked to a speeding up of global interactions and processes, as the evolution of worldwide systems of transport and communication increases the velocity of the diffusion of ideas, goods, information, capital and people. And fourth, it involves the deepening impact of global interactions and processes such that the effects of distant events can be highly significant elsewhere and even the most local developments can come to have enormous global consequences.” David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2010), 29.

obtain. For instance, according to the arguments of Nagel, Blake, and Risse, it follows that putting an end to a coercive relation is sufficient to meet our obligations of justice. Yet, we do blame someone who exits a relation based, for instance, on racist stereotypes. More precisely, I suggest in closing that coercion is not the only way to ground egalitarian justice.

First, the argument from coercion cannot capture the idea that egalitarian duties of justice can arise in non-coercive situations. We can see this particularly clearly when we consider the non-institutional demands of relational equality. Relational egalitarians are typically interested in both how institutions treat and regard individuals and in how individuals relate to one another socially (Voigt 2020, 4-21). Social hierarchies may not all be reducible to hierarchies of power or authority such that one agent is in a position to impose their decisions on others by backing their actions with a credible threat. For instance, Anderson distinguishes three types of social hierarchies<sup>11</sup>: 1) hierarchies of domination or command, where “those occupying inferior positions are subject to the arbitrary, unaccountable authority of social superiors and thereby made powerless”; 2) hierarchies of esteem, where “those occupying inferior positions are stigmatized – subject to publicly authoritative stereotypes that represent them as proper objects of dishonor, contempt, disgust, fear, [etc.]”; 3) hierarchies of standing, where “the interests of those occupying superior social positions are given special weight in the deliberations of others and in the normal (...) operation of social institutions” (Anderson 2012, 42-3). While hierarchies of domination or command are captured by the argument from coercion, it is at best unclear if it can be extended to the two other types of unjust social hierarchies.

To recall, coercion is here taken to mean, generally, that a person has no reasonable alternative but to do A because, otherwise, a coercive agent will worsen their circumstances (Risse 2006, 680). However, not all social hierarchies necessarily involve this pattern. Though the three types of hierarchies are often conjoined, they can come apart. For instance, we can imagine a homophobic, sexist or racist society where there are stringent anti-discrimination laws such that all have access to the same advantages and where all formally treat one another as equals, and yet a

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<sup>11</sup> She defines social hierarchies as: “durable group inequalities that are systematically sustained by laws, norms, or habits. The inequalities are durable in that they are reproduced over time by the social arrangements that embody them. They are also group based: They create *classes* of people who relate to one another as superiors to inferiors. (...) Social hierarchies are typically based on ascriptive group identities such as race, ethnicity, caste, class, gender, religion, language, citizenship status, marital status, age, and sexuality. (Anderson 2012, 42)

social hierarchy of esteem remains in that we can still observe objectionable attitudes and beliefs. Arguably, then, the situation would still be unjust even if no one is forced to perform or prevented from doing certain things. Relational egalitarians aim for a society where people *treat* and *regard* each other as equals, yet behaviours and attitudes can come apart (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 70-1; Cohen 2013, 197).

Someone could respond that the argument from coercion would allow us to identify the moment when attitudes become unjust in the proper sense: that is, someone could argue that attitudes become unjust only when they affect the behaviours of certain agents and when some are forced to behave in certain ways under the threat of having their condition worsened. However, I doubt that relational egalitarians will find this response convincing since one of the central insights of this theory of equality is to underline that some attitudes are objectionable in and of themselves regardless of how they affect material opportunities or even the welfare of individuals. As Lippert-Rasmussen points out:

relational egalitarians object to belief sets [among other things], e.g. ideologies such as racism or sexism, at least in part because of how those who subscribe to such belief sets regard others, independently of how their subscription to the relevant belief set manifests itself in the way in which they treat others. Hence, unlike oppression, domination, etc., at least some social relations to which relational egalitarians object, e.g. sexism and racism, by definition involve a certain non-egalitarian way of regarding others. (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 73)

In other words, coercive socio-political relations do raise important questions concerning social and political legitimacy: relational egalitarians should pay special attention to these types of relations to avoid hierarchies of domination and command. However, coercive relations cannot be expected to exhaust all that matters from the perspective of justice, especially when we adopt a relational egalitarian perspective. Due to its focus on behaviours and threats it pushes towards the idea that unequal attitudes would be problematic to the extent that they constitute threats influencing how agents behave. Yet, this misrepresents the reasons why relational egalitarians oppose hierarchies of esteem: some attitudes are simply objectionable in and of themselves because they rank individuals according to their supposedly unequal worth. Coercive relations do warrant special attention, but they do not capture everything which can be unjust from a relational egalitarian perspective: we should also pay attention to individual attitudes beyond how they impact individual behaviour. This aspect of social equality escapes the argument from coercion.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, though the argument from coercion does resonate with some relational egalitarian intuitions it cannot satisfactorily provide an explanation of why duties of justice should be restricted to the state or of what grounds egalitarian duties of justice. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, an associativist argument which aims to explain why egalitarian justice ought to be restricted to particular types of socio-political relations must satisfy two desiderata: 1) the argument must show that that egalitarian duties of justice arise if and only if some socio-political relation is shown to obtain; and 2) to restrict egalitarian justice to some socio-political context, such as individual states, one must explain why this relation is unique to this socio-political context.

The argument from coercion fails to meet both desiderata. First, even if one assumes that coercive relations are necessary and sufficient for egalitarian duties of justice, it cannot explain why we should only be concerned with domestic socio-political relations. Our contemporary, globalized context is sufficiently coercive to give rise to egalitarian concerns beyond borders even if these concerns do not correspond to full distributive equality. Second, though coercive relations are sufficient for relational egalitarian concerns of justice to arise, they are not necessary. Coercive relations are concerned with the behaviour of individuals and how threats affect our interactions, yet this cannot capture an essential element of social equality: inegalitarian attitudes can be objectionable in themselves independently of whether they impact individual behaviours. Therefore, the argument from coercion fails to explain why relational egalitarians should be concerned only with coercive socio-political relations.

## Chapter 3

### Cooperation and Social Equality

While the argument from coercion fails to meet the two desiderata explaining why egalitarian justice should be restricted to the state<sup>1</sup>, another influential associativist argument could have some traction when we adopt a relational egalitarian conception of justice: the argument from cooperation. This argument is, like its coercive counterpart, typically presented by distributive egalitarians to restrict the scope of egalitarian justice to the state. Roughly, following this argument, egalitarian justice arises only within individual states because they are characterized by a unique kind of social and political cooperation. This argument is developed by Freeman (2006; 2006) and Sangiovanni (2007; 2017). Though they have different ways of framing their arguments, they share the ideas that socio-political cooperation is the type of relation which grounds our egalitarian duties of justice and that states are the only institutional context where the relevant type of cooperation exists.

The argument of this chapter proceeds in a similar manner as chapter 2. First, I show how the argument from cooperation resonates strongly with relational egalitarian intuitions, despite its distributive origins, and intuitively points towards the idea that egalitarian justice should obtain globally. Second, I present the contrary intuition, put forth by both Freeman and Sangiovanni, that cooperation restricts rather than expands our egalitarian duties of justice. Third, I argue that they both fail to present convincing arguments. Even if we accept that cooperation grounds egalitarian justice, then we should extend it to capture transnational relations. Fourth and finally, I argue that we also have reasons to doubt that cooperation is the *only* type of socio-political relation which gives rise to egalitarian duties of justice. I argue that though cooperation, like coercion, does justify the conclusion that we should equalize transnational relations, it cannot explain by itself the circumstances under which we have egalitarian obligations of justice. Given that both the argument from coercion and the argument from cooperation fail in this respect, this points towards a

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<sup>1</sup> To recall, the two desiderata state that: 1) the argument must show that that egalitarian duties of justice arise if and only if some socio-political relation is shown to obtain; and 2) to restrict egalitarian justice to some socio-political context, such as individual states, one must explain why this relation is unique to this socio-political context.

pluralistic, practice-dependent understanding of the grounds of our duties of justice. I consider and criticize this pluralist approach in the next chapter.

## 1. Social Equality and Cooperation

As mentioned in the previous chapter, associativist arguments have been scrutinized more thoroughly by *distributive* egalitarians presumably because when one focuses on distributive inequalities it is intuitive to adopt a cosmopolitan approach stating that inequalities of goods or opportunities matter regardless of existing socio-political relations. An additional argument is therefore required to explain why the scope of *distributive* equality ought to be restricted to certain relations. The need for an additional argument is less evident for relational egalitarians since relational egalitarian justice seems *prima facie* limited to some socio-political context.

Some distributive egalitarians have defended the idea that social cooperation grounds egalitarian justice and, as Ip succinctly put it, this argument should be intuitively appealing to relational egalitarians. The existence of “a collective scheme of social and political cooperation which provides their members with important collective goods” does seem to support the conclusion that the members of this scheme should treat and regard one another as equals (Ip 2016, 106). Indeed, the idea that social and political cooperation triggers egalitarian duties of justice is present – at least to some extent – in the work of many relational egalitarians. Scheffler (2003; 2015), Anderson (1999) and Young (1990; 2006) implicitly appeal to this idea. Yet, from this they suggest that transnational relations should be equalized. Hence, before considering the way in which *distributive* egalitarians have defended the argument from cooperation, it is relevant to consider the role it plays for (some) relational egalitarians.

To start with, Scheffler argues that an egalitarian society should be structured around the deliberative constraint. This constraint states that:

If you and I have an egalitarian relationship, then I have a standing disposition to treat your strong interests as playing just as significant a role as mine in constraining our decisions and influencing what we do. And you have a reciprocal disposition with regard to my interests. In addition, both of us normally act on these dispositions. (Scheffler 2015, 25)

Notice that this deliberative constraint does not imply an answer to the question of scope by itself. This is important for our purposes here since Scheffler himself recognizes this and is open to the



application of relational egalitarianism beyond borders in certain situations. He remains vague, however, on what these obligations might look like. On this point, he writes:

Of course, the nation-state continues to be the most important unit of political organization in our world, and it is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, the idea that we may need new, *sui generis* norms to regulate emerging global institutions and organizations does not strike me as at all implausible. (Scheffler 2014, 34)

He adds: “Once such questions are raised with respect to some new practice, it is impossible to say *a priori* where they will lead. Novel practices present novel constellations of morally relevant features and factors, and the norms we are used to applying to older practices may not fit the new ones very well” (Scheffler 2014, 34). In other words, he recognizes that some considerations of justice arise given the “novel” transnational institutions and interactions that take place in our globalized context. One important element explaining this expansion of egalitarian justice is the growing importance of political and economic interconnections. As he points out, it is increasingly difficult to treat individual societies as “systems isolated from other societies” due to growing political, economic and technological “interdependence” (Scheffler 2001, 32-3). For Scheffler, this interdependence likely triggers the deliberative constraint; at least certain transnational institutions and relations should be equalized such that the interests of those who are interconnected be treated as equally significant.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Anderson recognizes that the global economy raises relational egalitarian concerns. In “What is the point of equality” (1999), she explicitly distinguishes between our obligations towards fellow citizens and towards fellow workers. On the one hand, Anderson argues that co-citizens should have access to the goods necessary to function as equals in society throughout their lives (Anderson 1999, 314-5). This includes not only entitlements covering basic human rights – like a right to nutrition, shelter, or basic healthcare – but also extensive social and political rights – including freedom of speech, a right to political participation, and an equal right to access public spaces. This should ensure that co-citizens have equal capabilities to function as moral agents, as political agents, and as equals in civil society.

On the other hand, however, she is also open to the idea that we could have some obligations towards persons beyond state borders when we are engaged in a common cooperative venture. While discussing systems of cooperative production her focus shifts from “citizens” to “workers”

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<sup>2</sup> Even if it is not clear what this equalization entails in practice, it at least points towards the idea that the scope of relational egalitarianism should be extended to transnational relations.

(Anderson 1999, 321n78). She argues that cooperative ventures should follow three principles. First, coworkers should be able to regard the productive system as a genuinely cooperative, joint enterprise. This means that the system of production should be organized following the principle of interjustification which states that “any consideration offered as a reason for a policy must serve to justify that policy when uttered by anyone to anyone else who participates in the economy as a worker or a consumer” (Anderson 1999, 322).<sup>3</sup> Secondly, Anderson adds that for a cooperative system of production to be fair, it should provide a general safety net to those who cannot participate in the cooperative venture and ensure that they have the means to enter the cooperative enterprise if they desire to (Anderson 1999, 325). Thirdly, it should recognize the contribution of non-wage-earning caretakers who raise “future cooperators” (i.e. children) (Anderson 1999, 325).<sup>4</sup>

Here the shift from “citizens” to “workers” is deliberate and could have far-reaching implications. She mentions that beyond universal humanitarian obligations to “relieve famine and disease, avoid fomenting or facilitating aggressive warfare, and the like”, due to the current state of the global economy, we also have transnational egalitarian duties of justice. She writes:

I shift from talk of “citizens” to talk of “workers” in part because the moral implications of regarding the economy as a system of cooperative production cross international boundaries. As the economy becomes global, we are all implicated in an international division of labor subject to assessment from an egalitarian point of view. We have obligations not only to the citizens of our country but to our fellow workers, who are now found in virtually every part of the globe. (...) Alas, I do not have the space to consider the international implications of democratic equality. (Anderson 1999, 321n78)

Even though Anderson does not flesh out what transnational social equality entails, this passage at least points towards two main conclusions: 1) we have a duty to equalize (some)

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<sup>3</sup> On this, Anderson follows the position of G. A. Cohen (1991, 280). This principle of interjustification differs from Scheffler’s deliberative constraint in that it does not necessitate an actual inclusion in a deliberative process. Rather, it relies on the weaker desideratum that common rules and norms be at least justifiable and acceptable to all concerned parties. Consequently, Scheffler’s and Anderson’s positions should not be conflated. Though their positions are not necessarily incompatible, both authors have different conceptions of what counts as an egalitarian relationship. While Scheffler focuses on the deliberative constraint stating that in an egalitarian relationship the strong interests of those connected should play an equally significant role in reaching a common decision, Anderson develops a more expansive approach stating that individuals should not be disrespected, that relational egalitarians should oppose social hierarchies where individual are ranked according to their intrinsic worth, and that we should guarantee the necessary capabilities to function as equals to all those with whom we share a common society. For a comparison of the two positions, see Lippert-Rasmussen (2018, 57–9).

<sup>4</sup> More precisely, for Anderson, we should ensure that non-wage-earning caretakers are not vulnerable to domination and exploitation. This may require extensive revision of social norms to ensure that caretaking responsibilities are equally distributed.

transnational relations and 2) this duty is grounded – at least in part – in the fact that the global economy relies on an international “system of cooperative production.”

Moreover, it is telling that Anderson mentions Young explicitly as a precursor of relational egalitarianism (Anderson 1999, 312). Yet, Young’s five faces of oppression – exploitation, marginalization, domination, cultural imperialism, and status hierarchy – are all structural concepts which can cross international boundaries (Young 1990, 39–65). As she argues in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*: “Oppression (...) is structural, rather than the result of a few people’s choices or policies. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules” (Young 1990, 41). For Young, oppression in this structural sense is sometimes a consequence of unconscious assumptions and actions of otherwise well-meaning individuals and it can arise in several contexts from interpersonal interactions to the global economy. Her analysis of sweatshop work, presented in more detail below, shows how global commerce can lead to the oppression of distant others in such a way that the responsibility to equalize social and political relations can fall on all those connected (Young 2006; 2011, 95-122).

Therefore, the work of Scheffler, Anderson, and Young point towards the conclusion that cooperation – economic cooperation in particular – requires to broaden the scope of relational egalitarianism to capture transnational interactions. Yet, this result is surprising because cooperation is often presented as a concept that *restricts* the scope of egalitarian justice to the state. In the following section, I consider and criticize two authors who defend this restricted focus.

## **2. The Argument From Cooperation: the (Alleged) Differences Between the Domestic and the Global Contexts**

The argument from cooperation, as developed by Freeman and Sangiovanni, relies on the core idea that the state is characterized by a “special form of social and political cooperation among its members” (Ip 2016, 105). This, in turn, should explain why egalitarian principles of justice arise within the state and *only* within the state. Note that Freeman and Sangiovanni do not deny that transnational cooperation exists, but they argue that transnational *egalitarianism* is not required because transnational cooperation ought to be regulated by different, sufficientarian principles of justice.

Sangiovanni argues that principles of egalitarian justice obtain only when there is a special kind of reciprocal relationship; that is, when individuals cooperate to maintain the institutions that provide the basic resources necessary to develop and act on a plan of life (Sangiovanni 2007). Further, according to him, this type of reciprocity currently only exists within individual states. Freeman, on his part, develops a more principled argument stating that all peoples are entitled to collective, political autonomy (Freeman 2006; 2007).<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, any type of egalitarian conception of justice applied globally would violate a principle of respect for the autonomy of peoples. Though neither Freeman nor Sangiovanni argue that it is permissible to exploit or dominate distant others, it remains that no egalitarian obligations of justice arise globally. Only more minimal, sufficientarian obligations to protect basic human rights obtain for them. In this section, I consider both of their arguments in turn and conclude that even if we accept the claim that cooperation grounds our egalitarian duties of justice there is no reason not to extend them beyond state borders. In the third and final section, I argue that the argument from cooperation fails to explain why only cooperation grounds egalitarian duties of justice.

### *2.1. Sangiovanni on Cooperation and Reciprocity*

Sangiovanni argues that individual states are characterized by special relations where co-citizens cooperate to allow for the mutual provision of the goods necessary to develop and act on a plan of life. Sangiovanni argues that distributive equality should be pursued domestically because: “others are owed a fair return for what they have given you, just as you are owed a fair return for what you have given others” (Sangiovanni 2007, 26-7). Egalitarian distributive justice is a requirement of reciprocity in this mutual provision of the three basic goods that he identifies: protection from physical attack, access to a legally regulated market, and a stable system of property rights (Sangiovanni 2007, 4 and 19-20).

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<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, I use collective autonomy, national autonomy and national self-determination to refer to the capacity of individual states to take collective decisions without undue interference from external agents. I avoid the expression “state sovereignty” as it typically includes the right to go to war or the right of states to treat their own populations on their own terms. This understanding of state sovereignty is at odds with a commitment to universal human rights (even following a sufficientarian conception of rights) and with the necessity of putting some limits on the right to go to war beyond a right to self-defence. Yet, the self-determination of peoples is not hindered by these limits since decent peoples should willingly accept these reasonable restrictions. This distinction is used by Rawls in *Law of Peoples* (Rawls 1999, 25–7) and by both Sangiovanni (2007) and Freeman (2006; 2007).

For Sangiovanni, states are characterized by special relations of reciprocity: other persons are owed equal consideration insofar as they contribute to the production of the three basic goods, which can only be produced through collective institutional schemes. Yet, he maintains that egalitarian duties of justice only obtain within the state. To make this case, Sangiovanni does not deny that global cooperation exists, but he argues that it is not currently sufficient to ground egalitarian obligations of justice. He contends that even if it is conceivable that global institutions eventually become so important that they trigger egalitarian duties, in our context, states remain the only organizational forms which are relevant in that regard (Sangiovanni 2007, 38).

He appeals to two main reasons to justify this distinction between the global and domestic context. First, even if global and transnational institutions exist, the range over which they have authority is very narrow when compared to domestic institutions. Taking the example of the European Union, Sangiovanni argues that even this relatively important institution functions with a limited budget and a civil service about the size of a medium-sized European city, possesses no independent police or army, and its competences are strictly circumscribed and limited compared to that of a modern state (Sangiovanni 2007, 21fn30).

Second, Sangiovanni argues that transnational institutions depend on the existence of states to function. The global order<sup>6</sup> itself depends on states which accept to delegate some power to it (Sangiovanni 2007, 21). He writes: “the global order does not have the financial, legal, administrative, or socio-logical means to provide and guarantee the goods and services necessary to sustain and reproduce a stable market and legal system, indeed to sustain (on its own) any kind of society at all” (Sangiovanni 2007, 21). For him, until the global order acquires these powers, equality ought to be circumscribed to intra-national relations (Sangiovanni 2007, 44).

Nonetheless, this position does not entail that states should be able to exploit or dominate non-members. His conception of human rights is fleshed out in detail in *Humanity Without Dignity* (2017). For Sangiovanni, all states have a duty to develop and support a system of international human rights designed to protect all individuals from systematic violations of their moral status such as “genocide, slavery, inhuman and degrading treatment, invidious discrimination, retroactive punishment, avoidable mass starvation, indefinite detention without due process of law, religious

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<sup>6</sup> By “global order” Sangiovanni means: “both the institutions of the international order as well as transnational, transgovernmental, and supranational, formal and informal, networks and institutions that mediate relations among public and nonpublic agents beyond the state. Examples include the Basle Committee, NGS, transnational regulatory networks, and so on.” (Sangiovanni 2007, 4n4)

persecution, war crimes, and so on” (Sangiovanni 2017, 207 and 254). This duty is also grounded in a type of international reciprocity. As Sangiovanni points out, the state system can only exist and be sustained through a cooperative endeavour where all states mutually recognize one another and structure their interactions around mutually acceptable norms and rules (Sangiovanni 2017, 230). Otherwise, the state system would collapse under a constant threat of pre-emptive and preventive strikes, domination, and exploitation. Yet, Sangiovanni maintains that this reciprocity leads to very minimal norms. It only requires: “noninterference, the possibility of mutually advantageous cooperation, and internal control” (Sangiovanni 2017, 230).

The main problem with this position – acknowledged by Sangiovanni – is that this state system then risks tolerating unaccountable governments which violate the basic rights of their constituents. Consequently, all states collectively ought to establish a system of international human rights designed to protect individuals from cruel and dehumanizing treatment (Sangiovanni 2017, 231-2).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, although Sangiovanni’s position does limit the scope of egalitarian justice to individual states, it still requires protecting the basic human rights of all globally and entails negative duties *not* to interfere within the internal affairs of other states – at least when the state respects the basic human rights of all. Nonetheless, as I discuss below, his approach misrepresents the importance of the global economy and relies on an overly narrow conception of reciprocity.

## 2.2. *Transnational Social Structures and Reciprocity*

Sangiovanni consequently offers empirical arguments that explains why egalitarian duties of justice obtain domestically only. Roughly, for Sangiovanni, egalitarian principles of justice could arise at the global level *if* global institutions and agents had an essential role to play in the reciprocal provision of fundamental basic goods. Yet, so the argument goes, only states currently play this role. However, in this section, I argue that even if we accept the premise of his reciprocity-based argument, restricting egalitarian principles of justice to domestic relations is unconvincing.

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<sup>7</sup> In other words, when a particular government systematically violates the basic rights of some of its citizens and significantly disregards their equal moral status, it loses legitimacy in that it can no longer claim to represent and act on behalf of the people it is supposed to represent and protect. However, it is important to see that though a particular government can lose its legitimacy, the state itself remains; human rights violations might legitimize outside intervention to pressure or, in extreme cases, to dissolve the government, but it does not entail that the state itself should be dissolved or that it does not exist as a potential people.

Sangiovanni's empirical arguments both fail to present an accurate portrait of contemporary transnational cooperation.

First, against Sangiovanni's position, it is important to highlight that social inequalities can not only frame the way individuals and transnational agents cooperate at the global level and allow an unequal redistribution of the burdens and benefits of transnational cooperation, but these cooperative schemes can do so by constraining the autonomy of states. Accordingly, focusing on relations within single states only and on the preeminent role of states as the main institutions from the point of view of egalitarian justice is arbitrary, especially when we consider global social structures.

The work of Iris Marion Young on global social structures forcefully illustrates this point. Here I follow her understanding of social structures as objective constraints that can create positions of vulnerability to domination or exploitation. They are created and sustained through the interconnection of individual actions and yet they escape individual control since structures emerge from the "accumulated outcomes of the actions of the masses of individuals enacting their own projects, often uncoordinated with many others" (Young 2011, 62). A social structure, understood as this complex web of interactions between individual choices and actions, can have significant and unintended consequences for others; some can be significantly disadvantaged by social structures even if no one directly intends to harm or disadvantage them. Pockets of vulnerability to domination or exploitation can be created even if all actors follow accepted norms and rules to pursue their individual perceived interests (Young 2011, 52-63; see also Young 2006, 102-30).

Young's concept of social structure illustrates how individuals and collective agents can significantly affect the lives of others beyond borders by participating in complex schemes of cooperation. Young's analysis of sweatshops is particularly illustrative of this point. In this case, the global economic order coordinates the behaviour of many dispersed actors including consumers, workers, contract manufacturers, and multinational companies. Yet, the well-off (that is, consumers and companies) are disproportionately advantaged compared to those who are comparatively worse off (i.e. workers and contract manufacturers, among others) (on this point see also Nath 2011, 63-4). The collapse of the Rana Plaza building has highlighted the dark side of the global economy and the ready-made garments industry. This Bangladeshi building, which housed a clothes sweatshop, was condemned by governmental authorities after it was found unsafe by inspectors and police (Ackerly 2018, 7). Yet, workers were forced to keep working in the building.

It collapsed on them in April 2013, killing 1,134 and injuring an estimated 2,215 (BBC 2013). To fully understand this tragedy, it is necessary to highlight how it is the result of chronic injustices and power inequalities.

The Bangladeshi state has ratified all the International Labour Organization's conventions on workers' rights (Ackerly 2018, 36). Yet, the Bangladeshi government does not apply these conventions consistently in practice and in its labour laws. Some inconsistencies exist between existing labour laws and the letter and spirit of the conventions (Ackerly 2018, 35-8; Human Rights Watch 2013). Further, even though the country does have some formal labour laws which should apply, informally employers and contract manufacturers were able to curb these laws, since workers are not in a position to raise concerns about their working conditions safely (Ackerly 2018, 36). Nonetheless, it is necessary to resist simple or straightforward explanations focusing only on the role of the state as the main provider of essential primary goods to see how other agents can have a significant impact on the lives of others beyond borders (Young 2011, 125-35).

To do so, one should focus on the different power relations that are the source of the injustice. Concerning the Rana Plaza building collapse, Ackerly insists on the important role corporations play in sustaining the unequal structures which allow for these tragedies (Ackerly 2018, 7-8 and 36).<sup>8</sup> She writes:

The supply chain is a metaphor that follows too closely the industry's economics rather than its politics. It is a concept developed in business and used to extract efficiencies from sourcing, production, transport, inventory, and sales in order to increase profit. While economically the links in the chain are connected, the political control over the supply chain is not linear; rather, *corporations seek to control the entire chain*. Companies develop supply chain management and information expertise in order to improve customer satisfaction and increase margins. Consequently, each link in the chain is a potential point of extraction in the supply chain. Each link (...) is a potential site of pressure on workers to increase efficiency and decrease costs. (Ackerly 2018, 37, my emphasis)

The main point here is that we observe the emergence of a fundamental imbalance in power between the corporations and the other actors implicated in the supply chain. Most importantly, this pressure is not only exerted on the workers and on contract manufacturers at the bottom of the chain, but also on states.

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<sup>8</sup> It may be important to flag that the Rana Plaza building collapse cannot be treated as an exception which stands alone and is not representative of the structures that unite different agents transnationally, though it is a particularly tragic case. For example, five months prior to the building collapse, a factory fire killed 112 and seven months earlier another fire killed approximately 260 workers. Additionally, the number of workers who work in similar precarious conditions remains high today: Approximately 4 million workers (mostly young women) are employed in Bangladesh by the garment industry while working conditions are still precarious in this country. Ackerly 2018, 7 and 35-8.



These points highlight the shortcomings of Sangiovanni's empirical argument from cooperation by underlining the significant impacts of social structures. Following his argument, the state, via the cooperation of its constituents, should be in a position to provide fundamental basic goods to its members. Yet, this picture is too simple. In the case presented above, it is too quick to simply blame the state for failing to protect its constituents. Though the state can be blamed for failing to actualize its labour laws and to respect the international conventions to which it officially subscribes, it is also important to consider the structural influence of transnational corporations and the global economy on state actions. States must subscribe to economic imperatives to remain afloat. Contemporary capital mobility entails that states must remain attractive to foreign investments and prevent capital flight, two imperatives which limit their autonomy. Dryzek writes forcefully on this point:

the international mobility of capital simply reinforces the capitalist market's constraints on the state, its policies, and its institutional forms (...). One kind of disinvestment in a society is the transfer of investment to another society. Thus if a state is pursuing policies that a business does not like, be it excessive corporate taxation, social spending, labor market regulation, or pollution control, that business can simply move elsewhere. This possibility has been present as long as there has been a capitalist international political economy. (Dryzek 1996, 77)

In other words, states have to meet their constituents' expectations, but they also have to comply with transnational market imperatives. Considering that the garments industry is a key component of Bangladesh's economy since it amounts to around 80% of its export earnings and represent approximately 20% of its GDP (IFC 2014), one can see how this country is torn between different objectives: guaranteeing a stable internal market and employment opportunities by remaining competitive at the global level, and simultaneously protecting the rights of its constituents. Therefore, Sangiovanni's argument according to which the global order is secondary because sovereign states accept to delegate some power to it is unconvincing once state actions are properly situated within the global context. In our current globalized context, it is doubtful that we can expect the state to act on its own to provide the basic goods for citizens to be able to develop and act on a plan of life without also equalizing transnational relations.

Yet, this insistence on global social structures does not necessarily address all of Sangiovanni's argument. In response, someone defending his position might highlight that we can understand his arguments in either one of two ways. First, one could read Sangiovanni's argument as stating that, effectively, the state is the only institution with the capacity to provide basic goods. Yet, as shown, when we consider global social structures, it appears clearly that the lives of

individuals are enmeshed to such a degree that people ought to equalize their relations to ensure that the interests of all are treated equally on the global stage. That is, ensuring that all have access to basic goods demands to equalize transnational relations.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, someone could highlight that there is another, more principled way of understanding Sangiovanni's argument. One could read his argument as saying that individual states are *tasked* with providing basic goods to their constituents and, consequently, ought to treat and regard their constituents as equals. Following this reading, claims of egalitarian justice do not apply beyond borders because there are no equivalent institutions who can claim to fulfill these goals.

This would be a more normative way of understanding Sangiovanni's position: it states that it is only within the states that egalitarian demands of reciprocity arise because it is responsible for providing basic goods. Consequently, even if some empirical hurdles exist, it remains that transnational relations are distinct in kind from intra-national relations. However, I doubt that this more principled argument is available to someone who wants to defend Sangiovanni's position.<sup>10</sup> As stated above, the core intuition behind his argument from cooperation is that the citizens who are better-off have some obligations of justice towards others because their being well-off is partly made possible by their cooperation with others who are worse off. Considering that the global economy does distribute goods and opportunities, and further affects individual access to fundamental basic goods like security and social or economic advantages, it does seem warranted to say that the participants in the global cooperative venture should treat and regard others as equals. A relational egalitarian approach provides important insights on the matter since the fundamental injustice affecting the workers in the case of sweatshop work presented above is not simply a distributive one that could be redressed with more redistribution of goods or by compensating the victims of abuse or exploitation. This global structure contains a fundamentally relational aspect since the workers' needs, interests and perspectives are systematically disregarded in favour of the interests and perspectives of the (relatively) better-off. Rules of transnational cooperation are unjustifiable when they are skewed in favor of the interests of the transnational companies and of the consumers at the expense of the fundamental interests of the workers.

This observation holds *a fortiori* for Sangiovanni since, as mentioned, he does not want to say that egalitarian global justice would never be imaginable. On the contrary, he only appeals to

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<sup>9</sup> I come back to this intuition in chapter 5 below.

<sup>10</sup> However, this position echoes the argument defended by Freeman, considered below.

the weaker claim that transnational institutions and relations *could* be relevant to egalitarian justice *if* they were “responsible” for the provision of the basic collective goods (Sangiovanni 2007, 38). Responsibility here seems to be relative to the position one holds in a cooperative scheme. One is “responsible” to treat another as an equals *if* some cooperative relation exists between them and another one. In other words, it seems that Sangiovanni believes that we should consider existing relations first to then consider what duties are imposed on agents and institutions. Following this line of thought, relations come first, not the institutions created to fulfill a certain task or to discharge the obligations created by the cooperative scheme.

This intuition is particularly clear in his 2017 book where he argues that, ultimately, duties of reciprocity rely on a cost-sharing principle. This principle states that: “we have an obligation not only to share the benefits but also to share the costs involved in producing those benefits, especially in cases where the costs are very high and the benefits important (or morally mandatory)” (Sangiovanni 2017, 228). Following a relational egalitarian reading, this entails that we should look at existing social relations, how benefits and burdens are produced in practice, and then consider what is necessary to ensure that these benefits and burdens are divided in justifiable ways. Consequently, Sangiovanni does seem to underestimate the significance and depth of contemporary transnational relations. The global economy comes with numerous benefits including increased productivity and the creation of economic opportunities. However, this also comes at extremely high costs including a systemic threat to the basic human rights of some at the global level. Therefore, following this basic principle at the heart of Sangiovanni’s argument, it seems warranted to equalize the global economy so that the costs and benefits of this cooperative venture are distributed ways that are justifiable to all involved. This is necessary to ensure that all are treated and regarded as equals in this cooperative venture.

### **3. Freeman and the Fundamental Importance of Political Autonomy**

Nonetheless, a proponent of the argument from cooperation may remain unmoved by the above considerations. They could retort that the heart of the argument is not empirical but normative. It is not only that, empirically, the state is the only significant actor which can provide basic goods to its constituents – an argument that falls short as argued above – but rather that the state is the only legitimate actor which can claim to be entitled to act in the name of its constituents. Non-interference at the global level would thus be a matter of respecting the collective decisions

of collective, political agents. This second argument from cooperation is advanced by Freeman. He defends Rawls' argument, developed in *Political Liberalism* and in *The Law of Peoples*, that the difference principle should not be applied between states (Freeman 2007, 297). Following Freeman's reading, Rawls does not significantly change his initial position defended in *A Theory of Justice* (1971) in either *Political Liberalism* (1993) or *The Law of Peoples* (1999). While Rawls defines the standard for domestic justice in *A Theory of Justice*, crystallized in the difference principle<sup>11</sup>, *Political Liberalism* shifts the focus from the question of ideal justice to the question of liberal legitimacy (thus recognizing that laws and economic institutions could be legitimate without being fully just) (Rawls 1993; Freeman 2007, 297-8). In the same breath, in *The Law of Peoples* Rawls considers the question of what principles should govern the foreign policy of a reasonably just liberal people (Rawls 1999, 83).

Rawls' position is particularly interesting because he is perhaps not best understood as a luck egalitarian – though this position is sometimes presented as an intuitive reading of his theory – but as an early relational egalitarian (Scheffler 2003, 26). The latter interpretation of Rawls seems to be supported by Freeman's reading, though he remains focused on the distributive implications of this approach (Freeman 2007, 309-10).<sup>12</sup> Following the relational reading of Rawls, material inequalities are indefensible beyond a certain point because they are “incongruous with people's status as equals” (Scheffler 2003, 26). Respecting others as equals in society entails allowing all to evolve in an institutional scheme where they can carry out their life plans without being unduly restrained by natural and social contingencies.

The strength of Rawls' argument in *The Law of Peoples* is to point out that minimal principles of justice are required globally to allow for the autonomy of peoples.<sup>13</sup> Non-intervention

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<sup>11</sup> The final formulation of his two principles of justice, arranged in a lexical order, is: “First Principle: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all. Second Principle: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.” (Rawls, 1971, p. 302)

<sup>12</sup> As Freeman writes: “Rather than trying to devise a conception of justice that will minimize the effects of brute luck, Rawls aims to identify the most reasonable conception of justice to regulate the basic structure of a modern democratic society. For the purposes of this enterprise, a society is conceived of as a fair system of cooperation among free and equal people, each of whom is taken to have the capacity for a sense of justice and the capacity to develop and pursue a rational plan of life which is constitutive of his or her good.” (Freeman 2007, 309–310)

<sup>13</sup> For Rawls, liberal peoples have three basic features: they possess a reasonably just democratic government, the citizens share common sympathies, and they possess a moral nature (Rawls, 1999, p. 23–25). By contrast, a people can be considered decent if they are guided by a common good idea of justice, and is organized around a decent consultation hierarchy which, even if it is not democratic, allow for some procedures of consultation ensuring that citizens can minimally participate to common political decision (Rawls 1999, 71–7). Further, they should respect

and restraint in foreign policy is a matter of respecting the political agency of other political communities. Accordingly, for Rawls, only minimal, sufficientarian principles of justice apply between states, as exemplified by his defence of human rights, his defence of a duty of assistance towards burdened societies, his criticism of outlaw states<sup>14</sup>, and his 8 principles of the law of peoples regulating international relations.<sup>15</sup>

As Freeman shows, to support this conclusion, Rawls' position relies on a distinction between the nature of the domestic and global contexts. Domestically, peoples should autonomously decide how to organize their internal affairs and their external relations – within certain minimal parameters – and, globally, interactions should be the product of free, non-coerced choices. This distinction does not deny that global cooperation exists, but Freeman maintains that it is secondary compared to domestic cooperation. He writes:

Of course, there is global cooperation and there are some global institutions, but these are not *basic* institutions. Rather, global political, legal, and economic arrangements are *secondary* institutions and practices: they are largely the product of agreements among peoples and are supervenient upon the multiplicity of basic social institutions constituting the basic structures of many different societies. (Freeman 2007, 246, emphasis in original)

Global institutions are secondary because their origin should be traceable to preeminent domestic institutions that allow global institutions to exist. Freeman pushes this argument further to argue that this distinction between secondary and basic institutions is normatively relevant from the point of view of justice:

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human rights, which ensure that national institutions are minimally decent. They include a right to life (and, consequently, a right to the means of subsistence and security), a right to liberty (that is, “freedom from slavery, serfdom, and forced occupation, and to a sufficient measure of liberty of conscience to ensure freedom of religion and thought”), a right to personal property and, finally, a right to formal equality (that is, that “similar cases be treated similarly”) (Rawls 1999, 65).

<sup>14</sup>For Rawls, burdened societies are societies which “lack the political and cultural traditions, the human capital and know-how, and, often, the material and technological resources needed to be well-ordered”. (Rawls 1999, 106) The concept of a well-ordered society is, in turn, a society which is either liberal or decent. Rawls defines outlaw, or criminal, states as noncompliant states which refuse to adhere to the reasonable law of peoples: “these regimes think a sufficient reason to engage in war is that war advances, or might advance, the regime’s rational (not reasonable) interests”. (Rawls 1999, 90). When confronted with such warmongering regimes, the society of peoples has a right to act in self-defence and to intervene in the internal affairs of the outlaw state by using different coercive mechanisms (such as economic and political sanctions) until it becomes a member of the Society of Peoples. In other words, the goal of these interventions should be to ensure that the outlaw states eventually become decent societies.

<sup>15</sup> For Rawls, these 8 principles are: “1. Peoples are free and independent, and their freedom and independence are to be respected by other peoples; 2. Peoples are to observe treaties and undertakings; 3. Peoples are equal and are parties to the agreements that bind them; 4. Peoples are to observe a duty of non-intervention; 5. Peoples have the right of self-defence but no right to instigate war for reasons other than self-defence; 6. Peoples are to honor human rights; 7. Peoples are to observe certain specified restrictions in the conduct of war; 8. Peoples have a duty to assist other peoples living under unfavorable conditions that prevent their having a just or decent political and social regime.” (Rawls 1999, 37).

the difference is not simply of the (far) greater degree to which domestic institutions affect people's lives. Nor is it simply that international institutions are supervenient upon national ones (...). Rather, it is also that these international institutions are the product of independent people's exercise of the original political jurisdiction as members of the Society of Peoples, which they agree to in order to maintain their own basic structure of society, over which they exercise political autonomy. (Freeman 2006, 61)

People ought to restrain their foreign policy and keep intervention in other people's affairs to a minimum to ensure that they respect their political autonomy. For Freeman, who follows Rawls on this point, this restraint is especially important since non-liberal decent people can be reasonable. Only some limited, non-egalitarian, principles of justice should apply at the global level because different peoples should respect one another as independent and reasonable political entities which can sincerely commit to a conception of the common good (that may not be liberal in nature) and simultaneously respect both basic human rights and the principles of the law of Peoples (Freeman 2007, 303; Rawls 1999, 61-2, 89, and 117-8).

Accordingly, egalitarianism should obtain domestically, but, globally, one should only aim to protect the political independence of peoples, within some reasonable limits, by ensuring that they have the necessary means to be autonomous. Beyond this minimal threshold, we should simply recognize the autonomous decisions of peoples who can decide to enter into contractual agreements with others or not. As long as individual peoples have the opportunity to be autonomous, other agents should not intervene to coercively change their choices. Accordingly, the main difference between Freeman's and Sangiovanni's arguments is that, for Sangiovanni, in our contemporary context, only individual states reach the necessary level of interdependence to trigger egalitarian obligations of justice. In contrast, Freeman develops a principled argument starting from the value of collective political autonomy.

### *3.3. Freeman, Rawls, and Respect Beyond Borders*

Despite its strengths, Freeman's argument is unconvincing. The main issue with his argument is that it incorrectly grounds egalitarian obligations of justice in a shared domestic basic structure while the value of this structure is itself best understood as instrumental: it is sometimes necessary to establish or work to establish a basic structure to redress an unjust situation (Abizadeh 2007; Ronzoni 2009). To recall, Freeman contends that a duty of non-intervention is necessary at

the global level, except when confronted with burdened or criminal states, to ensure that we respect the capacity of other peoples to develop and protect their collective conception of the good life.

This could provide a forceful response to the argument developed against Sangiovanni's position. Freeman could respond that the case of sweatshop work might be subject to principles of restorative justice, to correct the past and ongoing exploitation of the workers, but that this does not entail that principles of justice demanding more than non-interference and respect of voluntary associations should obtain globally. He argues that:

just as liberal societies will not permit economic exploitation of their own citizens since it presumably makes them worse off than many alternative terms of cooperation, so a decent society that domestically enforces a common-good conception of justice will not allow foreign or multinational corporations to take advantage of its members in exploitative ways. (...) Just because Rawls does not provide a principle of global distributive justice does not mean that unmitigated laissez-faire is the general rule of economic interaction within the Society of Peoples. (Freeman 2006, 32)

In relational egalitarian terms, I take Freeman to argue that we have egalitarian obligations towards fellow citizens and a duty to respect the autonomous decisions of other peoples, which itself restricts how it is permissible to behave on the global stage. Ensuring that one does not exploit or dominate others is an obligation of justice globally and could justify the application of some remedies to transnational exploitative relations. However, it remains that his position does not entail that any kind of *egalitarian* norm should obtain beyond restorative justice and negative requirements of non-exploitation and non-domination. This position, I believe, still underestimates the significance of existing transnational relations and misrepresents the role of a basic structure in a theory of justice.

To flesh out this point, it is necessary to mention that there are at least two different ways of understanding Freeman's argument about the fundamental importance of domestic institutions (Forst 2015, 163). The first, institutional interpretation, insists on the importance of the state as the central context of justice. Following this interpretation, principles of justice are concerned with "fairly designing the system of basic legal institutions and social norms that make production, exchange, distribution, and consumption possible among free and equal persons" (Freeman 2007, 305-6). Here, egalitarian principles of justice are necessary to ensure the equal respect and treatment of all those who are engaged in a common scheme of cooperation. Following this institutional understanding of Freeman's argument, egalitarian principles of justice are more than principles protecting individuals or groups from domination or exploitation: they are the

fundamental principles governing how shared institutions and social structures distribute the main benefits and burdens of social life – this position echoes Rawls’ position (Rawls 1999, 158-62).

However, following what was argued above, this argument, akin to the position of Sangiovanni, does not justify the restriction of the scope of egalitarian principles of justice to the state. Given the existing level of cooperation at the global level and its impact on individual lives, it seems arbitrary to focus on domestic institutions only. Considering that some aspects of transnational cooperation and some social structures deployed at the global level do affect how the main benefits and burdens of social life are distributed globally then egalitarian principles of justice ensuring the protection of all the cooperators’ equal moral status should be applied beyond borders.<sup>16</sup> The protection of social, political, and economic rights appears to be a global rather than a domestic question; protecting only minimal human rights such as the ones identified by Rawls – a right to life, liberty<sup>17</sup>, personal property and formal equality – and ensuring that countries have the necessary resources to sustain minimally decent political and social institutions is not sufficient to ensure that all persons are treated as they deserve to be (Rawls 1999, 65).

Yet, in response, Rawlsians such as Freeman could dig in their heels and argue that the existence of basic legal and political institutions is a necessary precondition for principles of justice to obtain. Following this second, political interpretation, one could argue that, in the absence of a world state, egalitarian principles of justice are not applicable at the global level. The main intuition behind this argument seems to be that egalitarian principles of justice should apply only to social and political contexts where individuals are situated under the authority of a collectively authorized and controlled source of legal and political power. Under this understanding, individuals who cooperate politically within a given state can control it themselves and pursue the share ends that they will collectively. This would explain why Freeman insists on the idea that social cooperation presupposes political cooperation:

Basic social institutions and legal norms that make production, exchange, and use and consumption possible are *political products*, one of the primary subjects of political governance. It is not just fiscal policies, taxation, public goods, and welfare policies that are involved here; more basically it is political decisions about the many property rules and economic institutions that make these policies – and economic and social cooperation as well – possible. (Freeman 2007, 246)

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<sup>16</sup>A similar position is defended by Buchanan (2000). Buchanan also argues that a certain basic structure exists at the global and that this warrants the application of egalitarian principles of justice.

<sup>17</sup> This right to liberty is defined minimally as “freedom from slavery, serfdom, and forced occupation, and to a sufficient measure of liberty of conscience to ensure freedom of religion and thought”. (Rawls 1999, 65)



In other words, political cooperation for Freeman is a necessary precondition for egalitarian obligations of justice to arise. When no global state exists and political cooperation is restricted to states, no egalitarian principles of justice should obtain globally to avoid the imperialist imposition of particular conceptions of the good.

Yet, this political argument is also unconvincing once we consider one of Iris Marion Young's fundamental insights, that is also captured by Ronzoni's analysis of the basic structure: we should consider social relations and injustice first and value institutions instrumentally to equalize our relations. Affirming that the global order relies on the existence of states and that global and transnational institutions are relatively narrow in scope may be true on some matters, but it fails to grasp other dimensions of global interdependence that are not reducible to interactions through official and purely voluntary institutions.

For instance, climate change or global pandemics illustrate the fact that some global collective problems will significantly affect the lives of individuals and yet cannot be solved by any individual state. Alternatively, it is increasingly necessary to consider transnational interactions to explain the resurgence and frequency of financial crises (Maffettone 2014). The main problem with the political interpretation of Freeman's argument is that it focuses on institutions over social relations and thus has it backward: we should focus on relations first and then establish the necessary institutions to equalize them. As Young writes:

Ontologically and morally, though not necessarily temporally, social connection is prior to political institutions. (...) A society consists in connected or mutually influencing institutions and practices through which people enact their projects and seek their happiness, and in doing so affect the conditions under which others act, often profoundly. (...) [The] need and desire for political institutions arises because socially connected persons with multiple and sometimes conflicting institutional commitments recognize that their relationships are liable to conflict and inequalities of power that can lead to mistrust, violence, exploitation and domination. *The moral status of political institutions arises from the obligations of justice generated by social connection: such institutions are instruments through which these obligations can be discharged.* (Young 2006, 105, my emphasis)

It then appears clearly how Rawls and Young, two often cited precursors of relational egalitarianism, diverge on one central aspect and how Young properly identifies Rawls' main mistake in *The Law of Peoples*, which is replicated by both Freeman's political interpretation and by Sangioanni's approach: to assume that egalitarian principles of justice are constrained to particular institutions is arbitrary. To ensure that all persons are treated and regarded as equals, one should instead focus on existing social relations that create or sustain unjust hierarchies and pockets of vulnerability to exploitation and oppression. Political, social, and economic institutions are then

useful to equalize these relations rather than being the proper locus of theories of justice in and of themselves.

This point is also forcefully captured by the work of Abizadeh (2007) and Ronzoni (2009). As they point out, social cooperation entails political cooperation rather than the other way around. The basic structure plays a central role in guaranteeing the just background conditions allowing for fair transactions and agreements. However, the point is that a basic structure is necessary for the realization of justice, not that justice only arises within already existing basic structures. Given that some important kinds of social interactions exist at the global level and significantly affect individual lives, the establishment of an egalitarian basic structure should be a necessary consequence of this state of affairs to ensure that these social interactions are framed by egalitarian norms. On this point, Ronzoni offers a differing reading of Rawls which explains why we have reasons to create a basic structure in certain circumstances to correct instances of “background injustice”:

We begin with an account of when agreements between individuals or other noninstitutional actors are free, and when the social circumstances under which they are reached are fair. Moreover, all we care about normatively is the freedom of agreements and the fairness of the relevant background social circumstances, that is, *we do not think that the content and outcome of those agreements should also be assessed through an independent account of substantive fairness.* (...) Rawls’s point at this juncture is that, in the absence of regulatory institutions of the right kind, the conditions for free and fair agreements will be eroded over time through the uncoordinated interaction of agents. (Ronzoni 2009, 238, emphasis in original)

Ronzoni’s reading of Rawls thus brings him much closer to Young than Freeman. The point is that we need to establish certain institutions to ensure that interactions between moral equals are and remain fair. We need to create a settled institutional background that establishes the necessary conditions to ensure that all relate as equals over time. It might be necessary to create new institutions with the goal of establishing a basic structure at the global level since the basic structure is not, in and of itself, a precondition of the possibility of claims of justice to arise.

I will come back to the question of whether we can aim to promote egalitarian justice and simultaneously respect the equal standing of political communities globally in more detail in chapter 7. However, here I only want to highlight that political cooperation by itself cannot restrict the scope of egalitarian justice to the state. Worries about respect and imperialism, though legitimate, are ancillary to the main question of whether there can be certain egalitarian concerns of justice which obtain beyond borders. Even if we accept the premise of the argument from cooperation, in that some type of cooperation grounds egalitarian duties of justice, then it appears

that egalitarian justice should be extended transnationally. In the next and final section, I move from this question to the issue of whether cooperation is the only type of social relation which grounds egalitarian justice. In a manner akin to the preceding chapter, I highlight that though socio-political cooperation has a particular importance from the point of view of justice, it cannot capture the whole domain of justice.

#### **4. Justice Beyond Cooperation**

Indeed, it is possible to build on this insight that the basic structure and socio-political institutions have instrumental value to equalize social relations to point out that then cooperation is not best conceived as an existential condition for principles of justice to obtain, but merely as a means to attain justice. It is possible to push this observation to argue that egalitarian concerns can obtain in situations where cooperation does not yet exist: it may be necessary to enter into a certain relation with others to ensure that individuals treat and regard one another as equals. An example from Nath can be useful to illustrate this point. She presents the following scenario:

Imagine two separate societies that do not interact with one another who become aware of the fact that they both draw water from the same river. Individuals from each society depend vitally on the river for their everyday activities. One day, the two societies decide that they need to devise a scheme to ensure equitable use of the river – implementing rules on pollution, damming, and the like. (Nath 2011, 597)

This scenario is interesting because it raises the question of at what point egalitarian concerns of justice arise. There seem to be at least two potential answers. First, following the argument from cooperation properly expanded to capture transnational relations, it seems that egalitarian considerations of justice arise only when the two societies decided to cooperate with one another and to regulate their use of the river. If we accept the first premise of the argument from cooperation, according to which some type of socio-political cooperation is essential for egalitarian duties of justice to obtain, then egalitarian justice only appears once the two societies agree to create a shared institution. However, this representation of the case, I believe, misrepresents the two societies' reasons for creating a cooperative institution that will regulate how they use the river: both societies and their constituents are owed egalitarian considerations by the other society given that they both depend on a shared resource. They have a reason to treat and regard the constituents of the other society as equals to ensure that they both give the proper weight to their shared interest in the continued use of the river. Of course, this does not necessarily entail that both societies should use the river in the exact same way. For instance, if one of the two societies is significantly more

populous than the other one, then relating as equals might entail that both societies use only what they need – which may amount to a differential use of the river.

Nonetheless, the point remains that cooperation may be only instrumentally useful to respect pre-existing duties of justice and entitlements. Of course, this does not preclude the idea that relations of cooperation warrant special considerations of justice or special duties which are owed only to those to whom we are relevantly connected. However, even if we accept that “special duties” exist, it does not support the conclusion that cooperation – like coercion – exhausts the realm of egalitarian justice. This point is captured by Caney in his criticism of the argument from cooperation. Though he criticizes Sangiovanni’s argument in particular, as argued above, this argument can also be extended to Freeman’s position. Caney writes:

[the argument from cooperation] simply tells us that *when* people engage in a cooperative venture then they are entitled – as a matter of justice – to a fair return from their coparticipants and that this fair return should be defined in egalitarian terms. As such, it is silent on what principles should specify their entitlements to the resources that they employ in this process. [This reasoning], therefore, does not give us any reason to think that equality does not also guide the pre-cooperation set of entitlements. For aught that it shows, a humanity-centered cosmopolitan egalitarianism should define this set of entitlements. (Caney 2011, 517)

Though Caney remains focused on a distributive conception of justice, Nath’s river scenario illustrates how it remains relevant from a relational egalitarian perspective. Assuming that people ought to treat and regard one another as equals, at least when they are related in some way, it seems unclear why we should accept the argument that only socio-political cooperation triggers egalitarian duties of justice. Reliance on a shared resource, even if there exists no other type of social, political, or economic interaction between the two societies, seems sufficient to warrant relational egalitarian concerns: if one society were to build a dam on the river and thus deprive the other one from access to fresh water, it would seem warranted to argue that the first society failed to treat the constituents of the other society as equals in that it at least failed to give proper weight to their interests. Moreover, this conclusion goes beyond a concern for basic human rights because it applies even assuming that the second society has access to another source of fresh water so that the basic rights of its citizens would not be threatened. The point remains that it seems legitimate for the members of both societies to expect the other to take their interests into account when using the river. Otherwise, they would fail to treat and regard them as equals.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter has established two main conclusions. First, even if we accept the premise of the argument from cooperation that some type of socio-political relation of cooperation ought to exist for egalitarian principles of justice to obtain, it cannot support the idea that egalitarian justice obtains only within the state. This is so for two main reasons. Firstly, in our contemporary globalized context we can no longer expect to consider the actions of individual states independently of the international context in which they are embedded. Transnational and international interconnections highlight that individual states have to contend with the influence of international forces which constrain their internal autonomy. This effective international cooperation provides a strong reason to equalize transnational relations to ensure that no state is unduly limited in its capacity to provide basic goods to its constituents and that no one is unduly rendered vulnerable to domination or exploitation by global social structures. Secondly, even if we consider Freeman's principled argument in favour of conceptualizing political cooperation as a necessary condition for egalitarian principles of justice to obtain, this argument misrepresents the place a basic structure should play in a theory of justice. Creating socio-political institutions regulating how the main benefits and burdens of social life are distributed among a given set of agents is not an essential condition for questions of justice to obtain.

Accordingly, the second conclusion established by this chapter is that though cooperation may ground some special duties, it should also be recognized for its instrumental value. The creation of a basic structure may be necessary in certain circumstances. In other words, it seems mistaken to posit that cooperation is essential for egalitarian duties of justice to obtain; on the contrary, cooperation may be useful to ensure that the pre-cooperative entitlements and rights of all are treated equally. This, in turn, highlights that though cooperation may be important from the point of view of justice, it does not exhaust the domain of egalitarian justice.

## Chapter 4

### The Limits of Deontic Relational Egalitarianism

In the previous chapters, I argued that relational egalitarians tend to presuppose an associativist approach to define the scope of relational egalitarianism. Following this approach, principles of egalitarian justice obtain when individuals are socially connected in morally relevant ways (Caney 2011, 507). This conception of justice is opposed to a cosmopolitan view according to which at least some egalitarian principle of justice extends to all human beings. As stated in the introduction, in this dissertation, I propose that a cosmopolitan understanding of relational egalitarianism is not only possible, but preferable over an associativist position. Yet, to fully defend this claim, it is necessary to consider if the associativist position does indeed capture something essential to our understanding of justice.

As argued in the two previous chapters, the two main associativist arguments – the arguments from coercion and from cooperation – both capture important issues from the point of view of relational egalitarianism.<sup>1</sup> Yet, neither succeeds in explaining why the scope of justice should be limited to specific kinds of social relations. In the present chapter, I move to a more general argument which captures the intuition at the heart of the associativist approach: deontic egalitarianism. Briefly, a deontic conception of justice posits that we should aim for egalitarian justice not because equality has a particular value *per se* or because it makes an outcome better for some reason, but rather because equality is required for other reasons: for instance, because it is a demand of fairness or arises from rights, claims or entitlements that individuals have when they are situated in a given socio-political context (Segall 2016b, 3; see also Parfit 2000).

When it is applied to relational egalitarianism, this position supports the idea that social equality is not valuable *per se*. Social equality is a constraint delineating how it is permissible to treat and regard others, though what social equality demands in practice can vary, depending on the type of relation considered. To treat a compatriot, a family member, or a distant other as an equal is thus instantiated through different types of behaviours and attitudes. On this view, we have

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, there is another important associativist argument – the cultural-conventionalist position – according to which requirements of egalitarian justice only apply within individual nations because claims of justice can only arise against a shared cultural background (Miller 1997; 2005; 2007). This argument will be considered and criticized in chapter 5 below.

no egalitarian obligations towards non-related others beyond either negative requirements not to exploit or dominate them *if* we enter into contact with them. In this important sense, the deontic conception of social equality is an associative conception of egalitarian justice. Relational egalitarian principles of justice obtain only when two persons are connected by a certain social or political relation. However, as I discuss below, the relevant relations can be plural and tenuous.

This could provide an elegant way out of the problems associated with the arguments from coercion and from cooperation. It supports a pluralist, practice-dependent account of justice according to which what social equality entails can change depending on the situation considered and encompass a wide variety of socio-political relations. Nonetheless, I argue that even this more extensive approach to the issue of scope is problematic and leads to undesirable conclusions. I build on the argument developed in the previous chapters to argue that it struggles to provide compelling conclusions when we consider global structural injustices. In particular, it cannot explain situations where there is an element of impersonal harm due to pockets of vulnerability created by loosely connected, (presumably) well-meaning individuals (Ackerly 2018; Lu 2017; 2018; Young 2006; 2011).

More precisely, there are two main problems with this approach. The first is that relational egalitarians subscribing to the deontic account tend to underestimate the complexity of existing global relations. It is not always easy, or possible, to know exactly how we are related to distant others in our globalized world. Though this is not a takedown objection, it nonetheless highlights that it may be more difficult to assign duties of justice than typically thought. Second, the deontic view cannot properly resolve instances of structural injustice because it leaves open the possibility for powerful actors to exit the unjust structure, which leads to results that are undesirable from a relational egalitarian perspective. Consequently, I argue that we should complement the deontic view with a different valuing of equality. In the next three chapters, I argue that relational egalitarians should be open to a cosmopolitan understanding of equality grounded in a telic conception of its value.

The chapter is divided into six sections. First, I outline the deontic understanding of relational egalitarianism. Second, I present how some authors have developed a practice-dependent approach to transnational justice based on this deontic view. In sections 3-5, I argue that this approach faces the two problems outlined in the above paragraphs. Finally, I propose a way out of

this problem. I argue that this problem does not necessitate that we abandon the relational understanding of justice nor the practice-dependent account. However, it does require that we dissociate this latter account from a pure deontic conception of equality. I explore this avenue in the rest of the dissertation.

## 1. Why is Social Equality Required?

The issue of the scope of egalitarian justice is deeply connected to the question of why we think that equality itself is required or valuable. So far, I have considered particular associativist answers to the question of scope. However, both the argument from coercion and the argument from cooperation rely on the same fundamental intuition: egalitarian duties of justice obtain only when two individuals are related in a morally relevant way. Thus, the two associativist arguments considered until now have simply proposed different ways to understand the morally relevant social relations that ought to be covered by egalitarian justice. Yet, these are not necessarily the only possible positions and a pluralist, practice-dependent answer could be developed. Roughly, the deontic position relies on the fundamental idea that social equality is not valuable *per se*, but is a requirement that arises because humans are moral equals. What is particularly important for our purposes here is that this position has important implications for the scope of relational egalitarianism; i.e. the proper set of agents among whom principles of justice apply (Tan 2014, 1). The deontic conception of justice necessarily leads to an association-based approach according to which equality should apply only within pre-existing social and political associations.

Deontic egalitarianism – including deontic *relational* egalitarianism (DRE) – relies on the position that the right focus for egalitarians is on whether persons are *treated* or *regarded* differently from others rather than on whether a certain outcome is bad (Parfit 2000, 88-9). Applied to a relational egalitarian conception of justice, this view entails that social equality is a norm constraining how persons should regard and relate to one another. As Lippert-Rasmussen writes, following this perspective: “As a matter of fact, we are one another’s moral equals and in relating as equals we honour that fact, and this is what grounds the ideal of relational equality” (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 170). Social equality is morally required because we owe to others *not* to treat them unequally.<sup>2</sup> This view is adopted, at least partially and oftentimes implicitly, by many

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<sup>2</sup> For further analysis of this deontic view see also Zoltan Miklosi, “Varieties of Relational Egalitarianism,” in *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, ed. David Sobel, Peter Vallentyne, and Steven Wall (Oxford: Oxford University Press,



contemporary relational egalitarians including Anderson (1999, 313; 2010), Wolff (1998; 2010), and Lippert-Rasmussen (2018 170; 2021)<sup>3</sup>, but it is perhaps defended most clearly by Schemmel (2011, 366; 2015; 2021).<sup>4</sup> For him:

it is natural to think of requirements to set up significant social and political relations on an egalitarian footing as triggered primarily, or even exclusively, by patterns of already existing, non-trivial, social interactions. That is, it is natural to demand relational *content* of social justice on the basis of a relational *grounding* of it. (Schemmel 2021, 294)

Social equality is thus a normative, deontic requirement constraining how it is permissible to treat others in our existing, non-trivial relationships. Deontic relational egalitarianism can consequently be understood as encompassing the views which adhere to the following claim:

*Deontic Relational Egalitarianism* (DRE): social equality is a normative requirement stating that agents ought to regard each other as equals and to treat them as such *when* they interact.

Two elements are worth emphasizing here. First, following DRE, social equality is necessarily an associativist position. Following this account, agents should treat others as equals insofar as they are socially connected, but there is no requirement to promote social equality or to establish new egalitarian relations with others.<sup>5</sup> Second, the question arises of what types of social relations generate relational egalitarian obligations. This is the question to which I now turn. I highlight that instead of insisting only on cooperation or coercion only, many relational egalitarians adopt a pluralist, practice-dependent position.

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2018), 131; Niko Kolodny. 2014. "Rule Over None II: Social Equality and the Justification of Democracy," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42 (2014): 299-303; Tomlin, "What is the point of egalitarian social relationships?": 165-168.

<sup>3</sup> It may be important to flag that Lippert-Rasmussen's position has evolved. In his 2021 paper, he seems much more open to the possibility of combining a deontic and a telic conception of social equality than in his 2018 book.

<sup>4</sup> Here I add the precision "at least partially" because some also tend to highlight the instrumental value of egalitarian social relations. However, the deontic understanding of equality remains predominant in their conception of why social equality is required.

<sup>5</sup> This is perhaps most clearly illustrated when Zoltan Miklosi writes while discussing the deontic approach: "on this view we owe it to others that *if* we relate to them at all, we do so on egalitarian terms, but we do not owe it to them to *establish* egalitarian social relationships with them in the first place. On [this] view, that is, it is not necessarily better (personally or impersonally) if more egalitarian relating occurs, but it is *wrong* to relate to others in inegalitarian ways." (Miklosi 2018, 131-2)

## 2. DRE and the Practice-Dependent Account of Justice

Though DRE is necessarily an associativist view of justice, one's answer to the second question can be more or less restrictive and it does not necessarily entail that relational equality should be circumscribed to states – though this statist focus tends to be presupposed by many relational egalitarians. As we have seen, it is possible to distinguish two main ways of answering the question. First, some have highlighted the unique character of certain institutions – these approaches typically highlight the uniqueness of the cooperative or coercive nature of nation-states (Blake 2001; 2011; Nagel 2005; Risse 2012; Freeman 2006; 2007; Sangiovanni 2007; 2017). However, as argued above, both arguments fail to explain why egalitarian justice should be concerned only with these socio-political relations.

Accordingly, here, I am more interested in the second strategy, namely to develop a practice-dependent account of justice. This position is defended explicitly by Cloarec (2016), Ip (2016), and Lippert-Rasmussen (2018).<sup>6</sup> For them, relational egalitarians should adopt a broad view encompassing all types of relations in which someone can be said to treat another unequally, though what it means to relate as equals can vary depending on the type of relation considered.

To illustrate, consider the position of Cloarec. He clearly adopts a deontic conception of social equality. Most clearly, he writes:

Although social egalitarians do assert the equal moral worth of persons, their view is not to be applied to persons who stand in no relation at all. They may believe, rightly in my view, that some distant human-like Aliens ought to be considered as our equals, but since we do not stand in any relation to such Aliens, there is no basis on which we could (be said to) treat them as equals or fail to do so. To that extent, *social egalitarianism is restricted in scope to the persons who do stand in relations that make claims of egalitarian treatment relevant*. (Cloarec 2016, 546, my emphasis)

This position clearly relies on a deontic conception of equality and is thus an associativist view: what does the normative work is that two persons are connected in such a way that renders “claims of egalitarian treatment relevant.” However, Cloarec adopts a very broad conception of what the relevant social relations are: for him, the relevant relations can be either direct or indirect. For direct

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<sup>6</sup> Other authors defending a practice-dependent account of justice also include James (2005), Sangiovanni (2008) and Meckled-Garcia (2008). However, here I focus on the positions of Cloarec, Ip and Lippert-Rasmussen because they all explicitly deploy a *relational* approach to global justice. Scheffler (2008) could also be included in this list. However, he remains rather vague on the practical implications of his view, at least when it is applied beyond borders, as discussed in chapter 3.

relations he includes trade, friendship and academic relations, among others, while indirect relations also include more tenuous connections like reliance on a shared resource or commonly faced risks (like climate change or a pandemic) (Cloarec 2016, 548). This account of justice is “practice-dependent” because, as Ronzoni puts it: “the appropriate principles of justice for specific practices depend on the nature of those very practices” (Ronzoni 2009, 231). To equalize trade relationships or friendships in the end require different types of principles – for instance it may not be necessary for me to care about the personal life of coworkers to treat them as equals, but it may be required when I interact with a close friend – but these very principles all appeal to the same normative foundation: I ought to treat others as equals when I interact with them.

Similar positions are also adopted by Ip and Lippert-Rasmussen. Ip argues that there are at least four different grounds to human relationships: sharing a common attribute like a culture, interpersonal interactions, joint participation in or common subjection to a particular institution, and interdependence to achieve a common goal (Ip 2016, 17-8). Lippert-Rasmussen, like Cloarec and Ip, also argues that “what it is to relate to one another as an equal varies from context to context, e.g. what it is for citizens to relate to one another as equals is different from what it is to relate as equals when the people involved are not co-citizens” (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 150). Importantly, he specifies that this practice-dependent approach can be used to defend a type of cosmopolitanism if three premises are shown to obtain. Lippert-Rasmussen defends a type of “contextualist cosmopolitanism” relying on the following argument:

- (1) All persons are one another’s moral equals.
- (2) All persons, irrespective of citizenship, are socially related to one another.
- (3) If (1) and (2), then irrespective of citizenship, all persons should relate to one another as equals.
- (4) Thus, irrespective of citizenship, all persons should relate to one another as equals.

(Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 150-1)

Though this argument remains associative in nature – after all, it relies on the observation that all persons are connected globally – it can still be said to be cosmopolitan in a certain sense since it applies to all persons alive today. Though some might want to deny the second premise, Lippert-Rasmussen maintains that even if not all persons are directly connected globally, there are at least some indirect relations which connect us all. We are subjected to international treaties signed by our governments, transnational institutions affect national and local contexts (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 151) and, at the limit, one could add that the shared ownership of the earth itself grounds

certain obligations, like not to excessively produce greenhouse gases since this would put one's individual interests before the equally relevant interests of all in a sustainable environment (Risse 2012, 89-206).

However, this position is rather puzzling in that it is unclear how *egalitarian* this practice-dependent position is. For instance, Cloarec, who fleshes out the international implications of this position, identifies surprisingly minimal constraints. He argues that the global community should aim to establish a just "background order" that, as he writes: "makes it possible for states (...) to enact the conception of justice they favor and to shape their own institutional schemes likewise" (Cloarec 2016, 561).<sup>7</sup> This should ensure that all polities globally have the necessary tools to be autonomous and relate to one another through relations that are not characterized by domination or exploitation.<sup>8</sup> In other words, no state should be forced to enter into a particular relation or enact particular policies. Nonetheless, though this might come with limited distributive implications, it remains a *relational* egalitarian position; social equality is attained when states collectively establish a just background order, treat and regard persons as equals when they interact with them beyond borders, and respect the decisions of individual states concerning how to organize their social and political relations internally. Though more demanding positions are possible (such as the one defended by Ip (2016), discussed in the fifth section), I will focus on Cloarec's position for now.<sup>9</sup>

In what follows, I argue that his type of practice-dependent DRE faces two main problems. A first, epistemological problem is that the move from premises (2) to (3) is trickier than it might seem at first due to the difficulty of clearly identifying in what ways persons are related to one another globally. Though this problem is not unsolvable, it does raise the question of how to assign

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<sup>7</sup> This position brings him rather close to the position of Freeman (2006; 2007), Miller (2007) or Rawls (1999), as Cloarec himself recognizes. However, his position is unique because to support this argument he does not appeal to a particular conception of why nations are valuable or why political autonomy is essential for equality to become necessary, but rather on the fact of pluralism concerning acceptable conceptions of justice. Accordingly, a certain restraint and a certain respect for collective autonomy should characterize the global realm. See Miller, *National Responsibility and Global Justice*, 28, and Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*.

<sup>8</sup> This echoes the position of Rekha Nath who also argues that relational egalitarianism should be applied beyond borders to ensure that: "individuals should not be inescapably subject to terms that avoidably produce unequal relations. Expressed positively, this principle states that individuals ought to enjoy equal standing in relation to one another under the rules and norms to which they are unavoidably subject" (Nath 2011, 603-4; 2015). Yet, he extracts less demanding conclusion from this observation.

<sup>9</sup> Lippert-Rasmussen, for his part, remains elusive on what his practice-dependent cosmopolitanism entails. He argues that relational egalitarianism should be global in scope, but he does not flesh out the practical and institutional implications of this extension (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 146-53).

duties of justice under conditions of deep uncertainty. Second, a more significant problem arises once we consider the question of what it means to end relations of exploitation or domination globally. I argue that when confronted with an unjust social structure, it follows from DRE that it could then be acceptable for powerful actors to step away from the structure to avoid certain duties of justice. This, however, leads to undesirable results since to end particular problematic social relations does little to correct an unjust social structure.

### **3. An Epistemic Problem: In What Ways Are We Connected Globally?**

A first issue that the practice-dependent approach must tackle is that, given the current state of globalization, it is not always clear how individuals are connected globally. Further, these connections sometimes arise in such a way that it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand how agents are interconnected. The boundaries of the local, national, transnational, and global levels are increasingly porous. This can represent a problem for advocates of a practice-dependent account of relational egalitarianism. A typical way to approach an agent's responsibilities is to try and distinguish between negative and positive duties, where negative duties not to treat others unequally are typically seen as more demanding and more constraining than positive duties, such as a positive duty to promote social equality (Scheffler 2002, 36-7). This conception of responsibility follows directly from DRE: what matters for egalitarian justice is the negative constraints to avoid and end unequal social relations, but it does not necessitate actively creating new, egalitarian relationships, which would be supererogatory acts – if such acts are legitimate at all. However, this typical portrait of an agent's duties of justice comes under significant pressure when we take globalization into account. It is increasingly difficult to pinpoint when someone is responsible for disregarding the equal status of another or when they simply fail to intervene to prevent an unjust situation.

This point is forcefully captured by Scheffler (2002).<sup>10</sup> In a way that prefigures Young's work on social structures,<sup>11</sup> he highlights that even if we generally experience our causal influence

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<sup>10</sup> Pogge's work also comes to mind here, though his position remains closer to a distributive conception of global justice than a relational one. See especially Pogge (2002).

<sup>11</sup> Here I follow Young's definition of a social structure which is also adopted by Ackerly and which was introduced in the previous chapter. To recall, in her work, Young defines structural injustice in this way: "Structural injustice exists when social processes put large categories of persons under a systematic threat of domination or deprivation of

on others as inversely related to spatial and temporal distance, global interconnections should not be underestimated even if they do not fit neatly with this general experience (Scheffler 2002, 38-9). As Scheffler writes:

the global perspective highlights the importance of various large-scale causal processes and patterns of activity that the individual agent cannot in general control, but within which individual behaviour is nevertheless subsumed in ways that the individual is, at any given time, unlikely to fully appreciate. (Scheffler 2002, 43; see also Bohman 2004, 338-40)

This represents a challenge to a practice-dependent account of justice precisely because, as a result, it is often unclear in what sense individuals fail to treat others as equals globally. As the work of Young has also demonstrated, this is so because global outcomes can be produced by the accumulation of individual actions in such a way that some unjust outcomes are produced impersonally by individuals simply pursuing their perceived self-interests (Young 2006, 114). In other words, some unjust situations can be produced even if no one intends to harm others or acts wrongly.

Recently, the work of Ackerly has provided empirical support to back this point. The example of the Rana Plaza building collapse in 2013 is particularly illustrative of these global structures. Ackerly also presents the 2008 food crisis, where retail food prices spiked globally although there was no shortage of supply (Ackerly 2018, 30-8). In both cases, though some criminal activities can be observed in the production of the injustice, it would be too simple to argue either that only specific actors are responsible for the whole of the wrongdoing or that the injustice is a result of brute bad luck. It is also necessary to consider the complex causality which led to a situation where some were made vulnerable to these injustices.

To fully understand these cases, it is thus necessary to consider both transnational and local relations to see how power relations can produce certain pockets of vulnerability to exploitation and domination (Ackerly 2018, 85). Focusing only on how some agents are directly responsible for treating others unequally is insufficient since it is also necessary to consider how these relations are made possible or are supported by broader social inequalities, both global and local. For

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the means to develop and exercise their capacities. Structural injustice is a kind of moral wrong, distinct from the wrongful action of an individual agent or the willfully repressive policies of a state. Structural injustice occurs as a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting in pursuit of their particular goals and interests, within given institutional rules and accepted norms. All the persons who participate by their actions in the ongoing schemes are responsible for them, in the sense that they are part of the process that causes them.” (Young 2006, 114)

instance, as discussed, to fully understand the collapse of the Rana Plaza, it is necessary to consider global rules of commerce and the pressure transnational companies put on contract manufacturers and states to diminish production costs. It would be too simple to blame Bangladeshi authorities only, though it is true that they played a role in discouraging unionization and fail to effectively implement workers' rights. Similarly, the 2008 food crisis cannot be fully understood without highlighting the increasing role global actors play in deciding for which market agricultural production is destined, and how this tends to take decision power away from local producers (Ackerly 2018, 35; Doss, Summerfield, and Tsikata 2014). To concentrate only on local socio-political relations is too limited to fully capture the structural context which allows for unequal treatment.

Yet, it is not always easy nor possible to excavate all the relations that produce a given structure. In many cases, global structures are so complex that they become invisible and are no longer perceived as webs of interactions. Some inequalities thus appear to be natural or produced by pure bad luck instead of being the product of political and social interactions. As Ackerly shows, processes of normalization through habituation, misinterpretation, and fragmentation tend to hide injustice from view (Ackerly 2018, 91-101). Habituation, first, through the repetition of familiar situations and narratives, tends to support simplistic explanations which brackets the complex causality leading to harm. For instance, during the 2008 food crisis, some narratives concentrated only on the harm it caused for those living in or close to poverty and presented this case as an instance of brute bad luck created by unfortunate market speculations. Yet this explanation misses how many causes, including political decisions, intersected to create this crisis (Ackerly 2018, 96). Similarly, individuals tend to misinterpret the constrained choices of individuals as free choices; for instance, to maintain that the workers chose to work in dangerous conditions oversimplifies the context of sweatshop work in Bangladesh (Ackerly 2016, 97).<sup>12</sup> Finally, the very complexity of global social structures can lead to a problematic insistence on locally distinctive forces which are more readily identifiable. This tends to create a fragmented picture which easily leads to the identification of those who are victims of harm as "having made bad choices or surviving bad luck" (Ackerly 2018, 98).

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<sup>12</sup> For an argument that focuses on the worker's autonomy to accept the conditions of their employment see Matt Zwolinski, "Sweatshops, Choice, and Exploitation," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 17 (2007): 689-727. However, to address his argument in detail here would take us too far from the main argument defended in this chapter.

Consequently, practice-dependent DRE faces at least two interrelated problems. First, it is unclear how some persons who are only tenuously related to others through large, complex social relations can be said to fail to treat them as equals. This is so because unjust results can be attained even when no persons act wrongly. Second, to fully see how persons are effectively connected globally, it is necessary to resist the normalization of the injustice by highlighting these complex, sometimes tenuous, social and political connections which create pockets of vulnerability. These problems, as Scheffler's position highlighted, point to the fact that it is increasingly difficult to distinguish clearly between negative and positive duties at the global level. Even if some injustice could seem to belong to the category of supererogatory acts to help distant others, in practice they might be closer to our negative duty not treat them as inferiors. Yet, the complex causal forces leading to oppression and exploitation, in which individuals may unknowingly participate, are often hidden from view. Of course, deontic, practice-dependent relational egalitarians can try and answer this epistemic problem. However, as discussed in the next section, this then leads them to a problematic position.

#### **4. Equality and Social Structures: the Democratic Impulse**

These epistemic challenges, though real, are not insurmountable. It seems that they could be solved in one of two ways. First, someone could aim to uncover the mechanisms at play and then highlight how unjust socio-political structures are normalized.<sup>13</sup> After all, this is what was done in the above section. Second, someone could maintain that agents can and should take political responsibility to correct an injustice even absent such knowledge. Though the first route may be attractive and important to some degree, I believe that the virtues of the second route should also be recognized. To expect agents to comprehend all existing global connections and their effects is too high a bar because a tidy narrative of how a structure functions is likely to be unattainable in many cases. Therefore, it should not be a necessary condition for taking responsibility for injustice at the global level (Ackerly 2018, 105-6).

The second route demands that we look beyond knowledge and voluntariness to ground a type of political responsibility which should be shared by all agents acting on the global stage. That

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<sup>13</sup> The work of Amartya Sen on famine is a paradigmatic example of this approach. See Sen (1983).



is, though some actors can and should be held responsible or liable to correct the past harms associated with their actions, the type of political responsibility necessary to tackle structural injustice is a cosmopolitan duty of justice to develop increasingly inclusive political and social networks. As Ackerly puts it:

Critically, the political responsibility for injustice itself is a responsibility always to inquire into exploitable power inequalities and norms (regardless of a measure of their impact through an observation of ‘consequences’ or the violation of particular human rights entitlements). Constructively, the political responsibility for injustice itself is a responsibility to develop inclusive political community by transforming exploitable power inequalities and norms and strengthening our individual and collective capacity to reveal and to think critically about them. (Ackerly 2018, 12)<sup>14</sup>

In sum, one could aim to effectively uncover how agents are connected to others in such ways that they fail to treat distant others as equals, or one could adopt a more cosmopolitan route and defend a type of political responsibility to both inquire critically into the different ways in which agents are structurally connected globally *and* create new political and social ties to effectively protect individuals from potential abuses of power even absent such knowledge. The problem for DRE here is that the first route is unlikely to be feasible and the deontic constraint is too weak to support the second, cosmopolitan route.

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<sup>14</sup> In this way, her position strongly echoes the position of Young who also maintains that agents have a type of political responsibility based on her social connection model. For her, to aptly respond to these types of global chains and power structures, it is necessary to adopt a forward-looking approach that is not only focused on past harms, but also acknowledges that all the agents connected through the structure share the responsibility to modify and equalize the structure. In the case of sweatshops, this responsibility would thus fall on multinational companies, workers, contract-manufacturers, consumers, and governments who should be tasked with taking responsibility together to ensure that the structure becomes just, even if they are not equally liable or blameworthy for the harms produced by the structure. However, she adds that though all connected actors are equally responsible for the unjust structure, this does not mean that all should participate equally in the effort to correct the injustice. We can still consider the agents’ liability and blameworthiness, and the relative resources and positions within the structure and agents occupy – since some will inevitably be in a better position to influence and eventually change the structure. In other words, though all persons connected by the structure are equally responsible to take responsibility together to change it, different parameters should be taken into account to establish how this responsibility ought to be carried out by particular agents (Young, 2006, 119-25). The main difference between Ackerly’s and Young’s approach is that they differ on the question of how particular actors should actualize their political responsibility to modify the structure. While Young insists more on public discussion, publicizing harms, and criticizing powerful actors, Ackerly insists more on the constructive goal of creating new and inclusive political and social ties. As such, though Ackerly agrees with Young’s diagnostic, they differ on the proper prognostic (Ackerly 2018, 48-9). Consequently, the argument developed in this paper also holds for Young’s social connection model of liability: to explain why agents have a political responsibility to change the unjust structure, it seems necessary to complement the deontic conception of social equality. To state simply that people ought to treat others as equals when they interact seems to be too weak to explain why this political responsibility is a duty of justice proper.

Ackerly highlights explicitly that her position is grounded in a type of egalitarian, democratic impulse. For her:

Just responsibility follows a democratic impulse toward making any political community more inclusive and a global impulse of recognizing that the boundaries between political communities are increasingly dynamic and porous. The impulse to take responsibility for injustice is an extension of the impulse to hear and associate with others. The impulse to take responsibility for injustice exhibits a valuing of the integrity, dignity, freedom, and humanity of others. When people take responsibility in the ways prescribed by just responsibility, they expand the boundaries of political community, rendering these more fluid in ways that some will interpret with cosmopolitan impulses. (Ackerly 2018, 21)<sup>15</sup>

However, DRE, taken by itself, struggles to explain why we should create new political or social relationships to combat injustice since this goes beyond its negative goal of avoiding to treat others unequally. This “democratic impulse” is not simply a normative constraint delineating how it is permissible to treat others, but it is an impulse to engage with others and to develop more inclusive and democratic relations both within and between the different political units that exist on the global stage; its goal is also to combat exploitation and domination globally by creating new social and political ties to effectively support groups and individuals who fight against social inequalities in their own context.

This goes far beyond the deontic, practice-dependent relational egalitarianism proposed by Cloarec (2016). As discussed above, Cloarec wants to ensure that all political units evolve against a just background order and treat and regard others equally when they interact. However, following Cloarec’s position, to attain a just global order, it is only necessary to ensure that individual states are free and autonomous. That is, they should not be forced to enter into particular contractual agreements or to enact particular policies (Cloarec 2016, 561). Yet, even if this position requires us to take into account past actions of particular agents like transnational companies or other actors who put pressure on states and requires that they compensate for past harms, this conception of transnational justice provides no support for the democratic impulse. Moreover, Cloarec is explicitly skeptical of the possibility of tackling inequalities within individual states. On this subject he writes:

It could hardly be denied that some governments fall far short of being responsive to their population, and adopt clearly unjust (authoritarian, oppressive, racist, and so on) policies. (...) Yet, intervening in their domestic affairs may not be attractive, however that intervention is

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, this democratic, cosmopolitan impulse is not unique to Ackerly’s position. It can be taken to capture a general orientation shared by many cosmopolitan authors. For a general overview, see Kleingeld and Brown (2019).

conceived. This is undoubtedly a difficulty for any view that leaves room for states to act as they see fit. (Cloarec 2016, 560)

He goes on to reject the legitimacy of the type of cosmopolitanism defended by Ackerly and prefers to rely on the hope that developing just international relations should push states to organise their internal relations justly. However, this position fails to fully capture the extent to which local, national, transnational, and global levels are effectively interconnected. It is necessary to move beyond a view that tries to limit our moral world to international relations to also consider how unjust local and national contexts can compound transnational inequalities. Cloarec's account of international justice struggles with the idea that the disempowerment of local producers in the Global South, or the fact that unionization is actively discouraged in Bangladesh, are essential aspects of explaining and correcting global structural injustices. To correct and equalize these structures it is necessary that we look at both the local and the global.

However, someone could doubt that this requires a cosmopolitan position based on a "democratic impulse." After all, this argument still appears to rely on an associativist view stating that we only have obligations of justice towards others because we are effectively connected to them. The idea that we cannot know exactly in what ways we are interconnected globally or that creating new social and political connections are effective ways to end oppression and exploitation does not erase the fact that these obligations might only arise because some agents can be said to be responsible, even only structurally, for affecting the relative social standing of distant others. However, as I argue in the next section, even a more nuanced deontic position cannot satisfactorily respond to structural injustices. DRE cannot properly distinguish between two options when confronted with such cases: it could either ground this democratic, cosmopolitan impulse or legitimize an exit option stating that one can simply exit the structure, under certain conditions. In the next section, I argue that this exit option is unjust when adopted by powerful agents with significant influence on the structure.

## **5. DRE and the Exit Option**

The cosmopolitan route demands that we go beyond DRE. To support this argument, it is relevant to consider a more demanding conception of what transnational equality requires. Such a position is defended by Ip (2016). Contrary to Cloarec, Ip argues that relational egalitarianism,

applied at the global level, should not focus only on how states interact, but should also consider the relative responsibility of all relevant agents, including states, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector firms, and private individuals (Ip 2016, 163-6). For him, when relational egalitarianism is applied at the global level, it entails four types of duties: 1) duties of due care, to avoid subjecting others to unequal relationships or to contribute to such relationships; 2) duties of protection, to structure our interactions with others around institutions which protect every individual's status and justice-based entitlements; 3) duties of redress, to create and support institutions empowering vulnerable agents and to provide aid to those whose deprivation "is caused by failures in the performance of [the two preceding duties]"; 4) duties of assistance, to provide aid to those affected by morally neutral causes such as natural disasters (Ip 2016, 166-72).<sup>16</sup> For Ip, the burdens and costs associated with these duties should be distributed by the following three principles:

1. *The causal-responsibility principle*: those who cause the problem should pay for its remedy.
2. *The benefit-from-injustice principle*: those who have benefited from the problem should bear the burdens of addressing it.
3. *The ability-to-pay principle*: those who have the capacity to address the problem should bear the burdens and their responsibilities should increase with their capacity. (Ip 2016, 172)

The causal principle ensures that agents are held responsible when they act wrongly, when they are liable, or when they contribute to unjust outcomes – even if they are excusably ignorant. This primary principle is complemented with the benefit from injustice principle which ensures that the principles capture injustices caused by earlier generations. Finally, the third, ability-to-pay principle is introduced to ensure that no one is held responsible for burdens which would impose unacceptable costs on them (Ip 2016, 172-5).

This seems to provide an elegant solution to the issue of structural injustice. By adopting this more expansive position that considers both more agents beyond states and the relative responsibility of different actors, it could be possible to develop a nuanced position. For instance, following the collapse of the Rana Plaza, some could say that companies, the Bangladeshi state, contract manufacturers, and transnational institutions bear a more direct, causal responsibility in creating the conditions enabling these kinds of tragedies. Yet, the second principle could also be used to argue that consumers benefiting from the power inequalities at the global level also bear

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<sup>16</sup> Notice that the fourth obligation is not relational in nature and relies on a samaritan duty to protect the basic human rights of all. This duty is consequently a sufficientarian duty of justice.

some responsibility. Both principles can be used to say that many dispersed actors have a duty of redress, within reasonable limits. This duty, for Ip, interestingly goes beyond simply compensating victims for past harms; the duty of redress also comes with a “duty to support or create institutions that would enable the vulnerable persons or groups to make claims of justice on powerful agents” (Ip 2016, 171). For him, it is important to have a backward-looking position looking at past harms and liability, and a forward-looking position that also aims to modify transnational institutions to empower vulnerable groups and individuals to equalize global relations. Moreover, it requires looking at how some groups and individuals are subjected to unequal relations in their own local or national context. On this point, Ip writes:

Sometimes people are under systematic threat of deprivation because some other agents have failed to fulfill their type I and/or type II duties. (...) Domination and exploitation may seriously undermine one’s capacity to secure his or her own basic needs. Under such circumstances, some other agents would have the responsibility to provide resources for these victims so the goal of relational equality can be achieved. (Ip 2016, 171)<sup>17</sup>

Accordingly, the position proposed by Ip is akin to the position proposed by Ackerly in that they both recognize that agents acting on the global stage can have a duty to create new social relationships and provide aid to others globally to foster the “goal of relational equality.” However, an important distinction between the two authors is that while for Ackerly these duties are based on a cosmopolitan, democratic impulse, for Ip they remain grounded in a deontic conception of social equality. For him, this duty to help those who are subjected to exploitation or oppression holds only to the extent that agents remain connected to one another – at least so long as this exploitation or oppression does not significantly affect their basic human rights, in which case humanitarian, sufficientarian duties of justice can arise.

His deontic approach can be seen clearly in the use he makes of the ability-to-pay principle. Ip argues that though this principle is non-associative in nature; it only applies to limit the application of the two other principles (i.e. the causal-responsibility principle and the benefit-from-injustice principle). To support this point, he imagines a case where a previously unknown island populated by very wealthy individuals is discovered. Further, the inhabitants of this island are not connected to anyone outside of the island and they are not affected by climate change. In this case, Ip writes:

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<sup>17</sup> By type I and type II duties here, Ip means the duties of due care and protection mentioned above.

It seems unfair to hold these islanders responsible for promoting global justice if they cannot expect to benefit from a just global order, but a relational egalitarian does not have to hold that the ability-to-pay principle applies to these islanders regardless of the relation they stand to foreigners. From the standpoint of relational egalitarianism, *these islanders do not owe any egalitarian obligations of justice to outsiders because, by hypothesis, they do not stand in any justice-triggering relations to people living outside their island*. Of course, if these islanders decide to enter into economic cooperation with other societies, they are still bound by the responsibilities of global justice (...). (Ip 2016, 175, my emphasis)

Ip's deontic commitments appear clearly here: agents on the global stage only have egalitarian duties towards one another to the extent that they are socially and politically connected. Though this might seem to be an appealing, intuitive position, it is problematic once we consider its contraposition: the right to exit some relations and thus avoid the duty to equalize our social and political relations. This is especially relevant once we consider the question of structural injustice where it is not sufficient to protect basic human rights or to compensate for past wrongs: it is also necessary to profoundly modify the status quo. This forward-looking element requires engaging with others, modifying existing institutions and creating novel social and political connections. This, however, demands more than a deontic commitment not to treat others unjustly. In a word, the problem is that this leaves open the possibility for powerful and influential actors to step away from problematic relationships, and consequently fail to properly modify the status quo to ensure that no one is unduly vulnerable to domination or exploitation.<sup>18</sup>

Ip is aware of this potential problem. However, he responds that dissociation is not necessarily illegitimate. First, he highlights that dissociation is sometimes morally permissible when one is treated unfairly, subjected to a morally objectionable relationship, or when the relationship harms non-participants (Ip 2016, 40). I do not contest these points. It is legitimate to end relationships in these cases. One can think of a purely unilateral friendship where one friend consistently fails to express concern for the other, participation in illegal groups, or abusive relationships. However, as Ip points out, advantaged and powerful actors cannot typically appeal to these reasons. Yet, he maintains that they can still dissociate from others unilaterally if three conditions are met. First, even if by dissociating some agents can abandon their egalitarian duties, it does not erase their humanitarian duties. Accordingly, all agents still have some humanitarian duties to redress extreme poverty and deprivation. Second, they should still ensure that their new

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<sup>18</sup> A similar objection is presented by Simon Caney against associativist approaches to justice. However, he focuses on global poverty and on the institutional account of human rights rather than on structural injustice and relational egalitarianism. See Caney (2007, 284-6).

activities do not harm others. Finally, before the dissociation, the agents are responsible for the causal harms or wrongs they have already produced. Consequently, they should compensate others for past abuses and wrongdoings (Ip 2016, 40-1).

The problem is that this then opens a door for powerful agents to dissociate from others and fail to play their part in redressing instances of structural injustice. In some cases, it is not sufficient to compensate others for past wrongdoing, it is also necessary to associate with others to correct unjust states of affairs. Yet, DRE cannot by itself explain why it is desirable to stand in solidarity with others to effectively promote social equality. Importantly, this point is not purely abstract in that it only applies to bountiful islands emerging from the seas, but it has important consequences in real-life situations. To illustrate, it is enlightening to consider how the Disney Corporation has reacted to sweatshop labour in Bangladesh. In November 2012, a fire in a garment factory killed 112 persons and, in response, the Disney Corporation stopped production and sourcing of their products in Bangladesh (Disney Company 2019; Lu 2013, 64). Even assuming that the Disney Corporation is sincerely committed to respecting human rights globally and even if they fairly compensate the victims of past harms, such as the families of those affected by the fire, it remains a backward-looking approach. In other words, Disney considered only half of the story: the question of how some pockets of vulnerability are created and sustained structurally by the accumulated effects of actions by many dispersed actors remains unaddressed.

Accordingly, dissociation, in this case, should arguably count as unjust from a relational egalitarian perspective because it leaves the social structure intact: the fact that one powerful actor acts singly, according to their own perceived interest, does little to affect the whole complex web of interactions. Following DRE, a forward-looking approach aiming to address this web of interactions is only, at best, one option among others since the possibility of dissociation remains acceptable – at least under certain conditions. If we understand social equality as a deontic constraint stating that agents ought to treat and regard each other as equals *when* they interact, then putting an end to the relation seems sufficient to end one's egalitarian obligation of justice towards others.<sup>19</sup> This, I take it, should be an unattractive result for relational egalitarians: if relational

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<sup>19</sup> One may wonder if an even more demanding account of DRE could be designed to respond to this objection. For instance, a deontic relational egalitarian may retort that to stand as equals in our existing social relationships demands to act in reciprocally justifiable ways. This position is well encapsulated by the position of Anderson. As she states: "Social equals enjoy *equal standing in discussion aimed at defining the terms of their interactions*. All accept that all are entitled to a serious hearing and a publicly acceptable justification for denial of their claim, that everyone's interests

egalitarianism is concerned with relations where some are not treated and regarded as equals, and if they consider oppressive or exploitative relations antithetical to social equality, then measures ensuring that social structures are modified to erase pockets of vulnerability should be a central issue. However, DRE struggles, at best, to respond adequately to unjust social structures.

## 6. Conclusion

The deontic approach to social equality leads to what I take to be unattractive conclusions for relational egalitarians. Given that social equality is undermined by relations of exploitation and domination, the question of how to effectively correct unjust social structures should be a central concern for relational egalitarians. Yet, DRE, though it is not necessarily mistaken, nonetheless proves to be too weak on its own to resolve this challenge. A conception of social equality that relies on the idea that egalitarian obligations of justice only constrain how it is permissible to treat others when we are connected to them fails to address two main problems. First, given the current state of globalization, it is not always clear how agents are connected to one another globally. This is so because different mechanisms such as habituation, misinterpretation, and fragmentation tend to hide these connections from view. This unduly complicates how to assign duties of justice in practice. Second, even if one adopts a more nuanced, practice-dependent deontic account of justice which considers all these points, it remains that a deontic position cannot effectively explain why actors should aim to support the struggles of distant others and create new socio-political relations and institutions to modify structural norms. A deontic position remains consistent with a right of exit. Even when this right is restricted by some conditions, it can still lead to problematic conclusions.

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and claims must be consulted, that everyone counts for one and no one for more than one. Social equals live on terms of *reciprocity* with one another, none imposing conditions on others that they would reject for themselves” (Anderson 2007, 265, emphasis in original). Yet, it seems that this only moves the question to what counts as an acceptable reason to justify one’s actions. Following the deontic account, it appears that we should equalize our relationships only to the extent that we are socially and political connected. Thus, accepting backwards-looking responsibility and dissociating under the conditions presented by Ip would reasonably count as justifiable individual behaviour from a deontic standpoint, even if it leads to an unjust result from a collective perspective. Accordingly, something more must be added to explain why it is not justifiable: this is the main contribution of instrumental relational egalitarianism and telic relational egalitarianism, discussed in the next chapters. It is necessary to also consider how certain states of affairs are justifiable beyond evaluating how individual agents effectively relate to one another. Therefore, I do not think that a deontic position could be convincingly designed to respond to this objection; something must be added to complement the deontic constraint.



Nonetheless, I do not believe that it is necessary to abandon relational egalitarianism altogether. Notice that the practice-dependent deontic account relies on two main ideas which do not necessarily follow from one another. First, the deontic position states that it is necessary to treat someone else as an equal *when* a significant socio-political relation connects us. Second, the practice-dependent account states, more minimally, that “the content, scope, and justification of a conception of justice depends on the structure and form of the practices that the conception is intended to govern” (Sangiovanni 2008, 138). Though the deontic position is necessarily an associativist view, as highlighted in section 1, the practice-dependent account need not be. The idea that the specification of what justice demands depends on the type of socio-political relation considered says nothing about the reasons why obligations of justice arise in the first place (Ronzoni 2009). Accordingly, to explain why it is valuable to not only treat others equally but also to create new social and political relations to support the struggle of some against exploitation in their own context, something more than the deontic account is needed. However, the practice-dependent approach itself is not the problem and could be compatible with the democratic impulse discussed above.

In the next chapters, I explore two different ways of complementing DRE. First, it is possible to argue that social equality is not only required, but also instrumentally useful because it promotes valuable outcomes. For instance, in the case of the Rana Plaza, one argument is that social equality and promoting egalitarian relationships globally is useful because it would provide strong protections for the basic human rights of all. Alternatively, one could offer a non-instrumental defence of the value of social equality, namely that we have a reason to promote a more egalitarian world because this world would be, in a sense, better than the imperfect, inegalitarian world which exists now. The latter approach would highlight how the exit option would be bad because it would fail to correct an inegalitarian social structure. Below, I argue that relational egalitarians have strong reasons to complement DRE with the idea that social equality is non-instrumentally valuable.

## Chapter 5

### Instrumental Relational Egalitarianism and Humanitarian Duties of Justice

At the end of the previous chapter, I reached the conclusion that a deontic conception of relational egalitarianism cannot deal with cases of structural injustice satisfactorily. DRE, which defines equality as a normative requirement, runs into two main problems. First, it faces the epistemic problem of distributing duties of justice in situations when we do not know how we are connected to distant others. Second, and more problematically, it cannot differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate instances of dissociation. It can allow for powerful actors to exit exploitative relations in such a way that they can refuse to play their part to redress unjust structures. In this chapter, I consider an alternative way of valuing social equality which may be used to complement and hopefully resolve the problems of deontic relational egalitarianism (DRE): the instrumental approach. Following this latter view, equality is instrumentally useful either positively – because it is causally connected to the promotion of intrinsically valuable goods such as welfare – or negatively – because it avoids the ill-effects of harmful social inequalities. As I point out below, this instrumental approach can have important repercussions for the question of the proper scope of our obligations of justice. In a word, if social equality is instrumentally valuable and causally connected to a good that ought to be universally promoted, then the scope of relational egalitarianism would be global. Yet, despite the instrumental approach appearing to be a promising response to the weaknesses of DRE, I argue that it is an unattractive solution because it amounts to a very weak defense of social equality.

To support this point, the argument is divided into two main steps. First, I discuss how instrumental relational egalitarianism (IRE) is intuitively promising to solve the problems associated with DRE. The most promising argument, to my mind, would be to show that social equality is strongly connected to the protection of basic needs such as nutrition, sleep, access to shelter, or basic medical care. Importantly, this claim has more far-reaching implications than typically thought. Many egalitarians, including *relational* egalitarians, tend to distinguish between *egalitarian* obligations of justice, which typically apply only within certain social associations, and *humanitarian* obligations of justice, which are owed to all human beings (Anderson 2010; Blake 2001; 2011; Cloarec 2016; Rawls 1999; Risse 2012). The distinction between the two is particularly clear in the work of Miller (1997; 2000; 2007). It entails that justice is not exhausted

by our deontic egalitarian obligations to treat and regards others as equals because justice also encompasses humanitarian obligations to ensure that all can meet the threshold sufficient to live a minimally good life. I show how inegalitarian social relations tend to be causally connected to violations of basic human entitlements. Consequently, social equality provides strong safeguards to protect the basic rights of all. Interestingly, this could entail that relational egalitarianism has basic, global distributive implications.<sup>1</sup> This argument supports the claim that egalitarians should be concerned with how individuals are treated and regarded in their own context and aim to promote egalitarian social relations at least to the threshold necessary to guarantee the protection of basic human rights.

This could provide an interesting way to resolve the problems associated with DRE. Going back to the case of sweatshop work and of the collapse of the Rana Plaza, one could argue that once we recognize the instrumental value of social equality, we should equalize transnational commerce and aim to tackle unjust social structures because they threaten the basic rights of those who are made vulnerable to exploitation or domination. However, despite the promises and intuitive appeal of this line of thought, in the second step of my argument, I argue that the instrumental view comes with an important drawback. Even though the instrumental view significantly extends the scope of relational egalitarianism, it cannot ground the distinctive value of social equality. To the extent that equality matters instrumentally to promote other goods, it cannot be the kind of fundamental value that relational egalitarians typically take it to be. Accordingly, though the instrumental view has significant implications for transnational obligations of justice, it is too limited to provide a compelling solution to the question of the proper grounds of relational egalitarianism.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first, I present how the instrumental view has been developed in the literature and connect it with the issue of scope. Second, I discuss Miller's position. His position is particularly relevant here because he develops a relational conception of justice and clearly distinguishes between egalitarian and humanitarian duties. Third, I will argue that this strong distinction between egalitarian and humanitarian justice, though conceptually attractive, does not hold in practice because these forms of justice are causally connected – at least to a certain extent. Fourth and finally, I suggest that, despite this connection

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<sup>1</sup> On the distribution implications of relational egalitarianism see Schemmel (2011a; 2021, 22-54).

between egalitarian and sufficientarian justice the instrumental view is unable to provide solid grounding for cosmopolitan relational egalitarianism.

### 1. Instrumental Relational Egalitarianism

Many relational egalitarians recognize that social equality is not only a deontic constraint delineating how it is permissible to treat and regard others, but is also instrumentally valuable because it improves individual lives or society. In other words, egalitarian social relations are sometimes presented not only as being *required* but also as being good *for* persons and groups. Following this approach, taken on its own, the value of egalitarian and inegalitarian social relations is relative to whether they are useful to promote other intrinsically valuable goods.

To specify this idea, two distinctions ought to be underlined. Equal social relations could be instrumentally valuable either positively or negatively, and they could be instrumentally valuable either for individuals or society. On the first, positive/negative distinction, social equality could either positively promote certain goods or, negatively, it could avoid the ill-effects of social inequality. For instance, Scheffler insists that equality is not only a deontic requirement but that it is also instrumentally valuable because unequal social relations can negatively affect how a person perceive themselves or stifle individual autonomy:

When the relationships among a society's members are structured by rigid hierarchical distinctions (...) the resulting patterns of deference and privilege exert a stifling effect on human freedom and inhibit the possibilities of human exchange. Because of the profound and formative influence of basic political institutions, moreover, patterns of deference and privilege that are politically entrenched spill over into personal relationships of all kinds. They distort people's attitudes toward themselves, undermining the self-respect of some and encouraging an insidious sense of superiority in others. (Scheffler 2010, 227)

Similar arguments are presented by Pettit (1997) and Fourie (2012). Pettit maintains that domination can have damaging consequences for individual wellbeing. For him, the knowledge that someone can arbitrarily interfere with your choices can impact you, even if no one *actually* interferes. This knowledge can produce a high level of uncertainty, anxiety, loss of integrity, or fear (Pettit 1997, 85-6). Fourie (2012, 118-21) emphasizes the harmful impacts of social inequalities. She argues that they can be harmful to both those who are treated as inferiors and as superiors – note that this is not to say that the harm is identical or commensurate in both cases. When someone is treated as an inferior, it can compromise their ability to “form [their] conception of the good” (Fourie 2012, 118-9; on this point see also Rawls 1999, 386-7; Honneth 1992;

Kernohan 1998). Additionally, for her, those treated as superiors could see their moral capacity impaired – since it could foster “cruelty, a lack of empathy and inhumanity” – and social inequality can have “severe emotional costs including heightened stress, anxiety and aggression” (Fourie 2012, 118-20). Consequently, though she recognizes that those treated as superiors are better off in terms of welfare and resources, social inequalities lead to situations where even they are not in an ideal position. Therefore, considering that it is likely that social inequalities tend to have these negative effects, one could argue that social equality is valuable at least in avoiding them.

More positively, however, it is also possible to claim that social equality has beneficial effects beyond avoiding the negative impacts of social inequality. It seems reasonable to assume that egalitarian relations could promote individual well-being or even social relations of solidarity.<sup>2</sup> This last point addresses the second distinction mentioned above. As Nagel points out, egalitarian relations are not only good for individuals, but they can also be good for society as a whole. For him, egalitarian social relations are both the “right kind of relations” that co-citizens ought to entertain and they actively promote the formation “of healthy fraternal attitudes, desires, and sympathies” in society (Nagel 1991, 108). Negatively, it is also possible to show that social inequalities are linked to unhealthier societies and higher crime rates (Fourie 2012, 119; Marmot and Wilkinson 2006). Accordingly, social equality may be good negatively or positively, and may be good – or social inequality may be bad – for individuals or for society as a whole.

Consequently, the instrumental conception of the value of social equality can be summarized by the following claim:

*Instrumental Relational Egalitarianism (IRE)*: social equality is valuable because it is useful to attain X, where X is itself an intrinsically valuable social or individual good, or because it is useful to avoid the negative effects of social inequality, either for individuals or the collective.

It is also important to notice that although many relational egalitarians highlight the instrumental benefits attached to social equality, few argue that it is *only* instrumentally valuable. A pure instrumental view would entail that egalitarian relations are only valuable due to their effects. Yet most relational egalitarians consider that social equality is required also because it is

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, these are empirical claims which should be subjected to empirical investigations.

the proper way to treat others (as discussed in the previous chapter). Nonetheless, these remarks do not erase the fact that the value of relational equality is at least *partly* instrumental. This aspect has far-reaching implications when we consider the question of the scope of relational egalitarianism.

### *1.1. The Issue of Scope: Egalitarian and Sufficientarian Justice*

On an instrumental approach, relational egalitarians would not be committed to any predefined answer to the question of scope. It could be either limited to one's society or cosmopolitan. This question ultimately depends on the good that is being promoted by social equality. For instance, if one connects social equality and individual autonomy, the question then becomes: who can be held responsible for promoting individual autonomy? In this case, an associativist position, such as the one defended by Sangiovanni (2007; 2017), may be used to restrict the scope of equality. However, here, I want to push the instrumental position as far as it can go to see if it can support a cosmopolitan conception of justice. Recall that following the argument developed in the previous chapter, it seems necessary to adopt a cosmopolitan position supporting a democratic impulse to properly respond to global structural injustice. I argue that IRE does point towards a cosmopolitan approach to justice by showing that there is a global duty to promote egalitarian relations because they protect basic human rights. Yet, below, I also argue that even this generous reading of IRE ultimately fails to solve the problems we inherited from DRE.

A cosmopolitan reading of IRE could appeal to the claim that justice is not only concerned with how to organize and design joint social and political relations. On the contrary, though this is an essential aspect of justice, many also recognize that justice encompasses humanitarian concerns which go beyond associative justice. This point is interestingly recognized by some relational egalitarians. Though relational egalitarians tend to adopt an association-based view of *egalitarian* justice, they also tend to recognize the existence of global *humanitarian* duties of justice which are not associative in nature. The main distinction here is that while egalitarian justice should be concerned with equalizing the social standing of co-members of certain associations, humanitarian or sufficientarian justice aims to ensure that everyone has enough globally (Ypi 2012, 112).

For instance, Anderson, who adopts a mainly deontic, associativist view of egalitarian justice, implicitly recognizes that agents also have humanitarian duties of justice. She argues that

a justice claim is a “complaint addressed to an agent, who is held accountable to the person making the complaint, about that agent’s failure to comply with valid demands that the agent serve or pay due regard to the interests of the claimant” (Anderson 2010, 36; see also Darwall 2006). Yet, though this statement could seem to lead to an associativist view of justice – where an injustice can only be the result of wrongdoing – Anderson is careful to recognize that a situation can be unjust even if no one is responsible for the *creation* of the situation. What matters is that at least one agent can be held responsible for *correcting* it. To support this idea, she presents the following scenario:

Orphans suffer an injustice if society has not organized an agency to take care of them. [...] But that complaint must be addressed to another agent – the state, or members of society at large. Were an epidemic to kill everyone in a position to help the orphans, they would not be suffering an injustice. They would be suffering a calamity. (Anderson 2012, 24n13)

This scenario demonstrates that for Anderson some states of affairs can be nonderivatively bad – i.e. they can be morally bad regardless of whether they are the result of failures on the part of agents. These states of affairs can thus provide some reasons to correct a situation even if one did not cause it, or even if no one caused it. In these circumstances, a failure to help constitutes an injustice (Miklosi 2018, 128-30). This is essential because it underlines the fact that individuals are entitled to some things in all contexts and that, under certain circumstances, *any* agent in a position to help should do so. In other words, despite Anderson’s strong criticism of distributive egalitarian justice, it seems that there remains sufficientarian, distributive obligations of justice to provide basic goods to all even on her account.

Consequently, though relational egalitarians do typically adopt an associativist view to explain why *egalitarian* principles of justice obtain, this does not necessarily exhaust the domain of justice: other, *humanitarian* duties to provide some basic goods to others in need when one can do so at an acceptable cost to oneself also exist. The main intuition I want to explore throughout this chapter is that, in practice, it seems that we cannot strongly separate egalitarian and sufficientarian justice when we adopt an instrumental perspective. In a word, if we recognize that we have humanitarian duties of justice and that social equality is instrumental in properly achieving these duties, then it follows that we have a duty to promote social equality globally, at least to the extent necessary to provide strong protections of basic human rights. This is an underrecognized implication of IRE. Below, I argue that IRE connects sufficientarian obligations of justice and relational egalitarian concern: protection from domination and the promotion of social equality are effective ways to protect the basic entitlements of all.

## 2. Can We Separate Sufficientarian and Egalitarian Duties of Justice?

This proposition might seem surprising since egalitarian and sufficientarian obligations of justice are typically presented as two very distinct sets of obligations. A relational egalitarian argument to this effect was explicitly developed by Miller. He defends a relational egalitarian position that distinguishes between egalitarian obligations, which, for him, only apply in the domestic context, sufficientarian obligations of justice, which are owed to all human beings, and general mechanisms of non-domination which should regulate international relations. In the next section, I argue that this view is ultimately untenable because it underestimates the connection between egalitarian and sufficientarian justice.

Miller's argument relies on two main distinctions: first, between distributive justice and social equality, and, second, between egalitarian and sufficientarian justice. Concerning the first distinction, Miller argues that there are two valuable kinds of equality: distributive justice and equality of status (Miller 1997, 224). While the first is concerned with how certain benefits – such as resources, welfare, opportunities, or capacities – are distributed between individuals, the second “identifies a social ideal, the ideal of a society in which people regard and treat one another as equals” (Miller 1997, 224). For him, both types of equality are valuable, though for different reasons. He maintains that distributive equality is desirable or required in at least three cases: when no one has a particular claim to certain goods (i.e. manna-from-heaven cases), when equality is the best way to minimise potential unjust distributions in conditions of uncertainty about people's respective claims, and, finally, when an equal distribution of goods is required by membership in a shared association (1997, 225-32). This last scenario is particularly important to clarify how Miller conceives of the relation between social and distributive equality.

For Miller:

there are certain social groups whose members are entitled to equal treatment by virtue of membership. The claim to equality flows from the very fact of membership. To recognize someone as a member and yet to deny her an equal share of advantages with other members is to treat her unjustly. (Miller 1997, 229)

This remark applies to various kinds of associations from tennis clubs – which should ensure that all members have an equal chance to book courts – all the way to liberal, democratic countries, where citizens are typically guaranteed equal protection under the law, equal voting rights, equal rights to welfare, etc. Distributive equality or fairness is here relative to the status accorded to the



members. This status can be equal or hierarchical in nature. For instance, Miller mentions that the tennis club could adopt a hierarchical method to assign tennis courts by adopting a seniority-based rule for instance. His point here is that a distributive approach cannot by itself explain why we should prefer an egalitarian or a hierarchical method to distribute access to tennis courts; the answer depends on what type of status (egalitarian or hierarchical) the tennis club assigns to its members.

This (perhaps trivial) example is very instructive because, similarly, political communities can rely on hierarchical or egalitarian social organizations. Miller points out that though many communities subscribe to equality of status, this is a particular, historical characteristic rather than a universal, ahistorical necessity. As he writes:

Associating as equals provides us with a kind of recognition that is essential to the modern self. It is not a universal truth about human beings that they need recognition in this form (...). But for people like us recognition must take this form, and so we insist that our most important memberships – above all membership of the nation-state – should be on the basis of equality. (Miller 231-2)

Social equality of course goes beyond the question of how to distribute rights and entitlements to also tackle questions of how individuals should regard and relate to one another (Miller 1997, 232-3). It identifies a certain form of life that goes beyond the specification of how certain advantages should be distributed.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, in the end, the desirability of equal social standing is a social ideal that is grounded in a particular socio-historical context. It is not grounded in the “inherent dignity of persons” for Miller, but more modestly in a certain egalitarian habitus. Thus, for him, we simply cannot adequately compare ranked – or hierarchical – societies, where one gains respect and recognition by behaving in a manner appropriate to one’s social position, and egalitarian societies aiming for an egalitarian status.

These aspects of his thought are pertinent to make sense of his second distinction between egalitarian and sufficientarian justice (Miller 2000, 172-4). He gives different reasons to subscribe to this distinction, though here I will focus on what he calls the *metric problem*.<sup>4</sup> The *metric*

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<sup>3</sup> Miller explicitly states, as mentioned above, that social equality entails that “our most important associations should be formed on the basis of equality”, and that it can help to choose between different distributive alternatives, even if they are not egalitarian, strictly speaking. He takes the example of the different salaries attached to different positions in a private company. Though, for him, it seems reasonable from a distributive perspective to attach a higher pay to the positions connected to more responsibilities, social egalitarian concerns might provide good reasons to reduce the difference between the highest and the lowest paid position. (Miller 1997, 234-5)

<sup>4</sup> Miller also identifies a *dynamic problem* according to which global egalitarian distributive justice is at odds with the idea that states should be held responsible for past choices. That is, for Miller, state autonomy will inevitably lead to inequalities depending on the values a collective decides to pursue. For instance, it is likely that the country that decides

*problem* emerges from the idea that equality is contextually determined since to say that some have an equal share of a resource, or are treated fairly in a process, it is necessary to refer to a pre-existing cultural background allowing for comparisons between individuals. The desire to equalize the distributive shares of all globally is doomed to fail because, for Miller, questions of egalitarian treatment are necessarily contextual and will vary depending on the nation considered.<sup>5</sup> To fully make sense of this problem, I think it is necessary to underline that is not a measurement problem but a substantive, relational one. While discussing equality of opportunity, which Miller considers to be a likely candidate to support global distributive egalitarianism, he writes:

it is not that we lack the data that would enable us to compare societies in terms of the opportunities they provide for work, leisure, mobility, and so forth. It is essentially the problem of saying what equality of opportunity *means* in a culturally plural world in which different societies will construct goods in different ways and also rank them in different ways. (Miller 2007, 67, emphasis in original)

This is in line with his distinction between relational and distributive equality: just like the meaning of proper social relations is, in the end, grounded in a particular socio-historical context, the question of egalitarian treatment and what constitutes an egalitarian distribution of opportunities can only be made sensible against a given cultural background. What goods, resources, opportunities and the like signify in a particular context ultimately depends on their contextual meaning and value. Just like one society could decide to prioritise leisure over economic development, another could decide the inverse without jeopardizing the equal social standing of their constituents. Accordingly, since the desirability of distributive patterns is relative to the values held by a national community, Miller considers that we cannot define a global metric to compare individual positions globally.

Hence, for Miller, there is a strong connection between why social equality is valuable – i.e. because it is deeply connected to a modern worldview – and why it cannot be globalized.<sup>6</sup>

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to prioritise leisure over work will produce less wealth than the country that chooses the inverse. However, this argument, and the discussion of collective responsibility it entails goes beyond the scope of the present argument. For Miller's argument see Miller (2007, 68-75). For a critical response see Ip (2016, 139-51).

<sup>5</sup> By nation, Miller means "a group of people (1) with a common identity; (2) marked off from other communities by its distinct public culture; (3) whom members recognize special obligations to one another, (4) regard the continued existence of the nation as a valuable good, and (5) aspire to be politically self-determining." The state, in contrast, refers to the set of political and social institutions which embody the national will (Miller 2007, 124-7; Miller 1995, Chap. 2).

<sup>6</sup> Though, to my knowledge, Miller has not explicitly presented this connection, I believe it is in line with the overall argument he presents against global egalitarianism.

Nations are defined by their commitments to certain values and ideals which, in turn, provide a benchmark to evaluate how certain goods should be distributed among their constituents. Consequently, Miller's presents two challenges against the thought that social equality could be promoted on the global stage. First, the commitment to social equality arises with the emergence of a modern worldview characterised by a rejection of rigid social hierarchies, and, for Miller, it makes little sense to apply this commitment to societies which accept more hierarchical worldviews.<sup>7</sup> Miller's associativist argument consequently differs from the argument from coercion and the argument from cooperation since his position is not that equality is restricted to certain institutional arrangements, but rather that equality is restricted to a particular socio-cultural context which cannot be exported. Our (social) egalitarian duties of justice follow from a shared understanding of the proper way to engage with others.

Second, even between societies which are organized around a relational egalitarian worldview it is unclear if we can compare them effectively. Of course, some markers may be shared by all egalitarian societies – such as equal rights, equal protection under the law, etc. But the fine-grained meaning of what social equality entails in a particular context might vary depending on the context. Though Miller focuses on the distributive implications of culture, this could also affect our conception of social equality. For instance, if you have ever been in Montréal, Québec, you might have been greeted by the characteristic *Bonjour/Hi* in a restaurant or store. This bilingual greeting is subject to some controversy: is it an egalitarian way to signal that the store welcomes both anglophones and francophones, or is it a disrespectful way to put into question the importance of French in Québec? I will not resolve this issue here, but Miller's position can shed some light on this question: we have to take in consideration the cultural background against which the practice takes place. Given that Montréal has a historically significant English-speaking community it may be respectful to signal that francophones and anglophones are both welcome. It would be another matter if this took place in Tadoussac (which is a historically french-speaking community). Moreover, the metric problem takes on a special significance when we consider the difference between egalitarian and sufficientarian justice as discussed in the next subsection.

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<sup>7</sup> This is not only a historical claim in that it does not make sense to evaluate past societies with modern standards, but also a contemporary observation in that, given that there is no “rock-bottom” justification for social equality, it would be unacceptable to impose one society's value upon another which might not subscribe to the same social ideal. For a contemporary defense of hierarchical societies not committed to social equality see Bell and Pei (2020).

### 2.1. *From Egalitarian to Sufficiencyarian Justice*

Miller does not consider global justice a pipe dream. Global justice for him does impose important limits on national self-determination. Global justice aims to ensure that individuals have access to the necessary goods to live minimally good lives and that states have sufficient opportunities to be autonomous. He argues that global justice has three dimensions: 1) an obligation shared by all agents (individuals, states, and other collectives) to respect basic human rights; 2) an obligation to “refrain from exploiting vulnerable communities or individuals”; and 3) an obligation to “provide all political communities with the opportunity to achieve self-determination and social justice” (Miller 2000, 117; 2007, 143-59).<sup>8</sup> I will consider all three aspects in turn.

First, Miller suggests that the obligation to respect basic human rights and to refrain from exploiting others is based on a natural obligation of justice. As he writes: “it is [best] to begin by asking the basic ethical question: what do we each of us, individually, owe to other human beings, regardless of their cultural make-up, of their citizenship, or their place of residence?” (Miller 2000, 174). This entails that we should refrain from abusing others and ought to provide basic resources to all. These resources are the ones necessary to live a minimally good life – such as food, medical aid, or shelter. Interestingly, both obligations have negative and positive elements for Miller. In particular, the obligation to protect basic human rights entails that agents should refrain from injuring others or abusing them as well as provide basic resources to others when they can do so.

Second, Miller appeals to the idea of mutual recognition to ground the obligation to ensure that all political communities have the opportunity to be autonomous (Miller 2000, 176). Here there is an element of consistency stating that if a particular political community cares about its autonomy, it would be hypocritical to deny the same opportunity to others. Accordingly, Miller’s insistence on state self-determination does not come with a licence to behave freely on the global stage. On the contrary, it comes with significant restraint on state behaviour both internally (by the protection of human rights), and externally, by providing to all states the necessary conditions to at least give them the opportunity to act autonomously. This third and final obligation of justice consequently demands more than protecting basic human rights. For Miller, this requires ensuring that all states have access to sufficient resources and a “tolerable economic environment” to take

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to mention that Miller also adds a fourth obligation to redress past historical wrongs committed by one’s nation. However, I put this question aside since it would take me too far from the main subject matter.

their own decisions (Miller 2000, 176). This requires providing aid to states affected by natural disasters, for instance, and to offer some protections to states with very specialized economies and which, as a result, can be especially vulnerable to price fluctuations.<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, Miller's relational egalitarian perspective, I believe, structures his conception of global justice. On the one hand, any state should be committed to its own autonomy – otherwise they would simply not exist as a particular state – and thus they should recognize that collective political autonomy is a good that should be recognized and protected globally. On the other hand, to allow states to be autonomous also entails recognizing their capacity to determine their own future and to aim to “practice justice among their own members” (Miller 2000, 175). This, however, necessitates that we respect the internal decisions of other states, even if their autonomous decisions have “disastrous effects from the point of view of social justice” (Miller 2000, 176). That is why Miller insists only on ensuring that all states have the *opportunity* to promote justice internally instead of ensuring that all effectively achieve it: it is a matter of respecting states as politically autonomous actors. This position is further supported by his conception of equality which, as highlighted above, is contextually determined. What it means to be treated as an equal or to be treated fairly is relative – to a certain extent – to a particular society's values and commitments. Moreover, Miller does not reject the possibility of states being structured around social hierarchies. This is legitimate as long as these states respect the basic human rights of their constituents.

In what follows, I argue that this distinction between social egalitarian and humanitarian justice is unconvincing if we acknowledge that there exists a strong connection between the promotion of social justice and the effective protection of basic human rights: in order to protect basic human entitlements to shelter, food, medical care, etc. we must, in many contexts, be concerned with how individuals are treated and regarded in their own society. This instrumental connection has important and far-reaching consequences for how one should conceive of global justice, though, as I point out in the final section, it does have important limits.

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<sup>9</sup> In a nutshell, as he writes: “The guiding principle is that political communities should assume responsibility for their decisions, but should not be expected to cope with every eventuality that may arise in an interdependent world. If we value justice and self-determination, then we owe it to other political communities to create the conditions under which they too can achieve these goals.” (Miller 2000, 177)

### 3. The Instrumental Link Between Social Equality and Basic Human Entitlements

In this section, I argue that the attempt to support this three-tier conception of justice where 1) egalitarian justice is reserved to the domestic context, 2) some obligations not to exploit apply globally especially when agents are connected, and 3) all actors ought to protect universal basic human rights – and no more than that – is problematic because there is a tension between (1) and (3): in practice protecting basic human rights may require to promote social equality – at least to a certain extent. This is so because a major factor leading to violations of basic human rights is inequalitarian social relations. In other words, protecting basic human rights may require promoting egalitarian social and political relations are instrumentally linked to the establishment of stringent protection for basic human rights. This point is important to highlight because it puts into question the common assumption, illustrated by Miller's approach, that humanitarian aid is mainly relevant when distant others are affected by natural disasters or particularly cruel national governments. Yet, it is not in line with common violations of basic human rights. As I argue, many human rights violations are caused by social inequalities. Accordingly, a concern for protecting basic human rights should be complemented by a concern for how individuals stand and are regarded within their own national contexts. Even if we can distinguish between humanitarian and egalitarian in theory, in practice the distinction is much thinner.

Consider the two following scenarios. First, recall the case of the Rana Plaza. One cannot fully make sense of this situation without situating it properly within the transnational economy where the interests of some (the companies and the consumers) are structurally prioritized over the interests of others (contract manufacturers and workers). As argued above, to try and solve this situation it is necessary to consider both transnational interactions and the social standing of the workers in their own context. Their structural vulnerability to exploitation and domination is, in part, made possible by the lack of unions and by the fact that the Bangladeshi state does not consistently apply its own regulations to protect workers in the ready-made garment industry (Ackerly 2018, 35-8). In this case, the workers' basic right to safety was violated, though to correct this situation it seems necessary to revise global norms of commerce, support unionization locally and ensure that the Bangladeshi government revises its behaviour to effectively protect the workers. These two latter measures however cannot be captured by Miller's framework because it requires not to intervene in Bangladeshi internal affairs.

Similarly, consider the story of Jackline Chepngeno, 14 years old, who committed suicide after being shamed by her teacher because she had her period. After calling her teacher to alert her that her clothes were blood-stained, the teacher called her “dirty” and expelled her from the classroom (Hervey 2019; Sondarjee 2020, 160-1). Jackline Chepngeno did not know that she was having her period, and, like many in sub-Saharan Africa, did not have access to affordable menstrual products. In 2014 the UNESCO estimated that around 1 in 10 schoolgirls miss school during their period due to “menstrual cramping, insufficient menstrual hygiene materials, inadequate water and sanitation facilities in schools, unsupportive environments, and fear of a menstrual accident” (UNESCO 2014, 16). This problem is especially present in sub-Saharan Africa. Jackline Chepngeno’s case brought national attention and criticism, notably because it highlights the Kenyan’s government’s failure to implement its own law, passed in 2017, which requires the government to provide free sanitary pads to all schoolgirls. However, it is important to see that this is not only a distributive issue, but also a relational one, which brings to the fore the enduring issue of period shaming. Of course, the point is not to say that these problems exist only in sub-Saharan Africa, but rather to underline that to properly address the issue it is necessary to work on two related fronts: access to menstrual hygiene products *and* workshops aimed at tackling period shaming. What is problematic here is both the lack of access to products and the presence of enduring stereotypes and stigma.<sup>10</sup> A social inequality (the stigma) here leads to a situation where basic rights (access to basic healthcare and education) are threatened.

Both of these cases are more than anecdotal situations; they also illustrate an important point that Miller and others who distinguish between egalitarian and sufficientarian justice in practice cannot fully capture: human rights violations are often produced by widespread inegalitarian social relations which are neither the explicit product of a cruel government nor acts of God. It is necessary to consider how individuals are treated and regarded in their own context to understand how their basic human rights were violated. In the case of the Rana Plaza, support of unionization of the workers and aiming to equalize their social standing, over time, would support their right to work in safe environments. Similarly, breaking the stigma surrounding periods would protect the right to health and to education of schoolgirls. In other words, it seems

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<sup>10</sup> To respond to these situations, for instance, the *Pad Project* – an American NGO – partners with local and grassroots organizations in sub-Saharan Africa to implement pad machines that can be operated locally and pairs the distribution of menstrual hygiene products with “comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights education” <https://thepadproject.org/how-we-help/>.

that a commitment to protecting basic human rights is causally connected, in practice, to a certain commitment to promoting social equality.

This is more than an anecdotal connection. Ypi's work is illustrative of this idea, though she remains centered on a distributive conception of justice. To develop her argument which connects humanitarian and egalitarian justice, she demonstrates that relative deprivation is causally connected to absolute deprivation (Ypi 2012, 118).<sup>11</sup> As she shows, while absolute deprivation is attached to sufficientarian principles of justice – aiming to ensure that everyone has enough – egalitarian principles of justice tackle relative deprivation – they aim to equalize relative shares within a particular society or to equalize the means to access specific goods. Yet, we cannot strictly distinguish these types of deprivation because relative deprivation is a leading cause of instances of absolute deprivation.<sup>12</sup> As she shows, it is simply a mistake to treat them as separate issues in practice. To illustrate, she builds on the analysis by Sen (1983) to show that starvation and famines cannot be fully understood by adopting a purely sufficientarian perspective. As she writes:

Starvation occurs when people do not have enough to eat. But what causes starvation is not always a shortage in food supply. There may be plenty of food available but particular groups

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<sup>11</sup> Absolute deprivation is typically associated with sufficientarian justice and the protection of basic human rights. It refers to: “an impediment in the satisfaction of certain basic claims – such as meeting nutritional requirements, sleeping, or being in minimally good health – without providing for which an agent could not function.” (Ypi 2012, 113). This type of deprivation captures goods that are essential to function as a moral agent, regardless of the person or their socio-historical context. In Miller's terminology, they are the universal basic goods necessary to live a minimally good life. As Ypi points out, these basic goods are connected to natural human vulnerabilities: they are not relative to subjective preferences, social requirements, or idiosyncratic desires. It should be possible to identify a minimal threshold over which people have a sufficient amount of goods and protections to at least act as moral agents. In contrast to absolute deprivation, relative deprivation captures two types of inequalities. In the first sense, someone can be deprived of a particular good which is valuable in their particular socio-historical context. As such, a type of deprivation only appears when one is situated within a particular society with a certain culture. In the second sense, deprivation can be relative because different individuals may have unequal means to access certain social goods. Relative deprivation here refers to positional goods such as political power, trade opportunities, educational resources, employment availability, access to legal opportunities, etc. (Ypi 2012, 114). For positional goods, the value of the good in question is itself a function of how it is divided among persons. Thus, a relative disadvantage is created when inequalities affect a person's ability to obtain certain goods. For instance, an individual with less economic resources will inevitably have less purchasing power than someone who is richer, though they might both reach the threshold necessary to live minimally good lives.

<sup>12</sup> Moreover, these situations do not only arise when persons are denied opportunities but also when a group gains opportunities. In recent history, this is particularly clear in the case of the 2008 food crisis. To recall, this food crisis was created by the conjunction of many different factors: land grabbing (to convert land use to biofuel production or for speculation) (Carrington 2011; Collins 2015; Nierenberg and Ridberg 2010), market deregulation (Ibid.), subsidies to the biofuel industry (Friedman 2008; Brown 2007), the rise of meat consumption (The Economist 2007), and the impacts of climate change (Zhang et al 2011; Ackerly 2018, 30-5 and 107-10). All these factors combined and created a spike in food prices which lead to enduring food insecurity in the following years. Thus, the deepening of the relative inequalities between the Global North and the Global South are – at least in part – at the source of absolute deprivation created by the food crisis. The fact that the Global North gains influence and importance in its impact on others can consequently create instances of absolute deprivation.



in society may not have access to the means necessary to acquire food: be those means employment, educational opportunities required to access certain market benefits, or simply purchasing power. (Ypi 2012, 116)

Hence, Miller's conception of global justice is too limited. His focus on basic human rights and uncompromising respect of state autonomy prevent him from considering relative inequalities seriously. It is sometimes necessary to look at how people stand relative to others to establish solid human rights protections. Yet, this demands that we consider how states are internally organized. Nonetheless, in response, someone could wonder if these observations truly raise issues particular to a *relational* egalitarian perspective. After all, Ypi herself adopts a distributive position centered on how different positional goods are unequally distributed between persons and groups globally. I want to push Ypi's observations further to argue that it is not only a question of how positional goods are distributed, but we must also consider how people are treated and regarded in their respective socio-political contexts.

Ypi understands positional goods in purely distributive terms. She defines positional goods as: "goods the absolute value of which is determined by their relative possession. (...) How much of a positional good an agent absolutely enjoys depends on how one fares compared to others" (Ypi 2012, 114). She remains focused on how certain goods or opportunities are divided between persons such as inequality in the access to the means of production, inequality of opportunity for quality legal representation, or inequalities of political influence. Consequently, she effectively connects two types of *distributive* inequalities: one, absolute, where some do not have enough, and the other, relative, where the value of the good itself depends on how much others have. However, her observations should be extended to include relational questions because inequalities of positional goods are only half the question. This point, interestingly, is highlighted by Miller himself.

As Miller argues, it is first important to consider the question of what type of equality is necessary to then answer the question of how certain goods ought to be distributed (Miller 1997, 231-2). It is doubtful that social equality can itself be described as a positional good, or an ensemble of positional goods, though some might be tempted to understand it as such. Indeed, it might be possible to translate social equality into a certain number of distributions. After all, why

not simply define social equality as an equal distribution of social standing in a given society?<sup>13</sup> Following this intuition, it would be possible to define social equality as a positional good, or even as an ensemble of such goods (such as political and social power, status, recognition, etc.). However, I am very skeptical of this possibility because social equality is concerned about more than how certain goods are distributed, and more about what it means, substantively, to be treated and regarded as an equal. To illustrate, the point is not that all persons should have an equal distribution of social standing, recognition, or social respect – since this would be consistent with treating everyone equally badly or ensuring that all have no self-respect. In other words, social equality does not only refer to a certain *quantity* of individual access to opportunities or social goods but to a certain *quality* of social relationships which have desirable effects on people and society – when we adopt an instrumental perspective.<sup>14</sup>

To take a real-life example, recall the case of Jackline Chepnego. In her case, what creates the injustice is not a distributive inequality *per se*, but the persistence of stigma and negative stereotypes. It is the pervasiveness of negative attitudes and beliefs surrounding periods which create barriers to access education, basic healthcare, and self-respect. In this case, it would not be sufficient to equalize how stigma and stereotypes are distributed in society or equalize certain positional goods. It is rather necessary to work to eliminate negative attitudes and beliefs. Hence, promoting egalitarian social attitudes or at least dismantling negative biases, stereotypes and stigma are necessary in this case to provide strong protections to ensure a truly universal right to education and healthcare. In other words, to protect basic human rights, it is not only important to consider how positional goods are distributed and to consider relative distributive deprivations, it is also of fundamental importance to consider how individuals are treated and regarded in their own contexts. This is a question which goes beyond *distributive* issues.

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<sup>13</sup> This position is put forward by Lippert-Rasmussen in some of his texts. For instance, in *Luck Egalitarianism* (2015), he writes: “Consider the good of having social standing that is equal to that of another. Mary and John have equal amounts of this good, *ceteris paribus*, if, and only if, they relate to one another as equals. Mary has more of this good than John has *ceteris paribus*, if, and only if, John relates to Mary as a superior individual to an inferior individual and vice versa.” (Lippert-Rasmussen 2015, 195).

<sup>14</sup> If a distributive approach would be able to rise to the challenge and avoid these charges it would, I believe, erase the distinction between relational and distributive egalitarianism. However, intuitively, it seems like this can only be done by accepting much of the relational egalitarian perspective. Christian Schemmel develops a similar perspective. See Schemmel (2021, 145-51).

#### 4. Is It Possible to *Promote Social Equality*? A Potential Response by Miller

To recapitulate, the best possible argument in favour of cosmopolitan relational egalitarianism based on IRE relies on the argument that there is a strong, causal connection between social equality and effective, durable protection of basic human rights. Relational (and distributive) egalitarians who are committed to protecting basic human rights globally thus have strong reasons to accept the claim that the global community should be organized to protect and even promote egalitarian social and political relationships. Is this argument convincing? I believe this argument does capture an important implication of IRE. However, I also believe that it is problematic because it cannot account for the fundamental importance relational egalitarians assign to social equality.

However, first, it is relevant to consider if the argument developed above would be convincing to someone who, like Miller, considers that humanitarian and egalitarian justice should be distinct both conceptually and in practice. Miller might respond that the metric problem discussed above prevents anyone from aiming to promote egalitarian relationships from a position outside a certain national context because one might misinterpret what it means to stand as an equal in that context, or, worse, impose an egalitarian worldview on another nation which might not subscribe to this social ideal. In this section, I argue that the *metric* problem is not an insurmountable obstacle. Moreover, though I return to the question of whether it is possible to promote social equality globally, I also contend below that Miller's reasons explaining why we should respect hierarchical societies are unconvincing.

##### 4.1. *The Problem With the Metric Problem: the Case of Pluri-National States*

To recall, Miller suggests that the metric problem is sufficient to reject global egalitarianism because trade-offs between different goods only make sense when they are made against a shared cultural background (Miller 2007, 68-75). Consequently, when we adopt a relational egalitarian perspective, the problem is that what it means to stand as an equal might vary depending on the particular history or culture of a nation. Even if one agrees with the argument presented in the above section, there remains the practical problem of *how* to promote social equality globally.<sup>15</sup> Following the intuition underlying the metric problem, this might turn out to be impossible.

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<sup>15</sup> A similar point is made by Caney. As he points out, the metric problem is not an argument against global egalitarianism *per se*, but it only specifies that it is difficult to see precisely what equality means. In other words, it is

However, I do not believe that this argument is particularly strong against the promotion of social egalitarian relationships globally, though it does come with a particularly strong warning. It might be true that what it means to relate as equals varies culturally to a certain extent. Nonetheless, it does not entail that no one outside the nation considered can ever learn or comprehend the significance of particular behaviours, relationships or goods in that context. In other words, it might be true that one should be extremely cautious when aiming to promote egalitarian relationships globally. Yet, caution does not necessarily mean that it is impossible to do so (Ip 2016, 135).

Moreover, as many commentators have pointed out, this observation is further supported by the fact that it is at best unclear why the metric problem is a *global* issue. If Miller believes that this metric problem arises between different nations globally, then it should also apply to multinational states and liberal states that recognize the legitimacy of internal cultural diversity like Belgium, the United States, or Canada (Caney 2007, 270; Holtug 2011, 154-5; Ip 2016, 135-7; Wenar 2008, 403). While considering equality of opportunity, which is the particular target that Miller considers in his metric argument, Ip writes:

[the metric] argument rests on a mistake that the metric problem arises only at the global level. The reason is that cultural diversity exists across as well as *within* nations. For instance, sub-national cultural groups – such as religious communities and ethnic groups – may also construct and rank goods in radically different ways, and so they may disagree with one another about the significance and substitutability of certain opportunities. Thus, the ‘metric problem’ argument has indiscriminating force against global as well as domestic equality of opportunity. (Ip 2016, 135)

The force of the metric problem is consequently either extremely strong and reaches far beyond the realm of international relations to encompass multi-national and multicultural states, or it is fundamentally dubious. That is, either it means that the ideal of equality is unattainable within heterogeneous states which comprise different national groups and cultures or that it is a surmountable difficulty. The latter solution seems more likely than the other; it would be quite a bullet to bite to claim that social egalitarian justice is only attainable within culturally homogeneous states.

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not a substantive argument against global egalitarianism, but it only identifies one potential practical difficulty (Caney 2007, 271).

#### *4.2. Social Equality and the Lack of Rock-Bottom Arguments*

Though the metric problem itself is not convincing, another argument might be available to support Miller's strong distinction between egalitarian and sufficientarian justice. As mentioned above, Miller is skeptical of the possibility of providing "rock-bottom" arguments explaining why individuals ought to relate as equals (Miller 2017, 234). I will consider the question of the particular value of social equality in the next two chapters in more detail. However, it is relevant here to mention that IRE at least provides a strong instrumental reason explaining why we should favor egalitarian social relationships over non-egalitarian ones in many situations: they tend to provide strong safeguards against basic human rights violations. Yet, as will become clear with the next section, this is both an advantage and a drawback of IRE.

Nonetheless, Miller's challenge is significant for relational egalitarians. To recall, Miller explicitly denies that social equality has universal validity (Miller 1997, 232-3). For him, social equality is the product of a modern worldview which has a particular history and is not necessarily shared by all people globally. Consequently, to promote social equality beyond borders would amount to a potential imposition of a particular conception of the good life on peoples who reject this worldview. The risk here is to impose a particular conception of how social and political relationships ought to look like on others "for their own good." This is, I believe, a significant worry and I come back to it in more detail in chapter 7. However, it is worth highlighting two possible responses to Miller's worry.

First, it is curious that Miller does not really offer an argument justifying why we ought to respect non-egalitarian worldviews. It seems that he should offer an argument explaining why these worldviews are valuable. He comes close to developing such an argument in "The Limits of Cosmopolitan Justice" (Miller 1998, 164-81). In this article, Miller argues against the globalization of egalitarian justice because it is at odds with the global diversity of cultures. There, he broadly follows Scanlon's reasonable rejection test (Scanlon 2000, 195-7). Following this test, Miller posits that one can reject a proposed principle of justice if "one holds another principle that conflicts with the principle under discussion" (Miller 1998, 167). From there, he argues that different societies and national cultures worldwide hold different views about social justice, which may not align with a liberal, egalitarian view. Therefore, some could reject egalitarian principles of justice if they deeply believe in another conception of social justice such as a religious worldview requiring

hierarchical social relations. For Miller: “What it is reasonable for someone to reject depends on what other beliefs they hold, and how deeply they hold them” (Miller 1998, 178). So long as other societies respect the basic human rights of all, other societies should only ensure that every national community has the opportunity to develop its own view of social justice. In the end, it all comes down to what worldview is deeply held by a given national community.

However, this argument, though it may be appealing on the surface, is overly permissive and insufficiently critical. The fact that someone is deeply committed to a certain worldview or belief in no way entails that this worldview is reasonable or in any way defensible. After all, the strength of a certain belief is not related to it being reasonable. Someone might sincerely believe that the earth is flat, yet they would be unreasonable if they kept this belief after being presented with contrary evidence. Miller’s position here is thus insufficiently critical. We need a benchmark to first examine if the worldview is morally acceptable. The strength of the worldview or of the belief is, at best, a secondary consideration. This observation holds *a fortiori* if the worldview or the belief is harmful to persons or society.

Secondly, to say that a non-egalitarian worldview is objectionable implies nothing about the kinds of policies that should be adopted to most effectively promote social equality. To impose social equality coercively on the global stage is very unlikely to be an effective way to promote egalitarian social relations. Yet, different means can be considered to do so from the revision of the norms and rules of global commerce, to an introspective evaluation of how countries in the Global North support and foster the emergence of non-egalitarian socio-political relationships, or even the support of egalitarian social movements abroad. There is a myriad of ways to foster egalitarian relationships that can be undertaken while being respectful of the autonomy of nations and persons globally. To assume that policies that aim to promote egalitarian relationships globally necessarily leads to a coercive, colonialist position is overhasty.<sup>16</sup>

## 5. Conclusion: the Limits of Instrumental Relational Egalitarianism

Therefore, it does seem that an instrumental approach to the value of social equality could resolve the problems associated with DRE. It could explain why we may have some reasons to

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<sup>16</sup> These considerations are more fully developed in chapter 7.

promote social equality abroad in certain circumstances. Going back to the case of the Disney Corporation introduced at the end of the previous chapter, it could explain in what ways this actor acted wrongly by choosing to dissociate. By ending its implication in the unjust social structure, this actor failed to effectively protect basic human rights globally: by removing Bangladesh from its list of accepted contract manufacturers, it arguably aggravated the precarious situation of the workers. Thus, it seems possible to appeal to IRE to complement the deontic approach to explain why, in certain circumstances, it is possible to say that agents have a duty to remain connected to others and even to create novel social or political relationships to promote social equality. In the end, doing so allows the maintenance of strong safeguards of basic human rights of all.

Yet, there remain important limits to the instrumental approach which render it a dubious avenue for relational egalitarians to resolve the problems identified with DRE in chapter 4. This is so for at least two reasons: first, an instrumental view fails to account for why social equality has a particular value and, second, relational egalitarians tend to think that a situation can be unjust regardless of the effects social inequality has on particular persons. For them, certain situations are simply incompatible with the status of all as equals. Hence, even if it is reasonable to argue that social equality has instrumental value due to its effects, I do not believe it is a promising avenue to resolve the issue of scope. Moreover, in closing, I will also consider why a combination of the deontic approach and instrumental valuation of equality is unlikely to be appealing.

First, a purely instrumental view of social equality fails to account for its particular and unique value. This is so even if one accepts the argument that social equality cannot be translated into a set of positional goods, presented above. If the value of social equality is relative to how it improves a certain state of affairs (for instance, one where basic human rights are protected by strong safeguards), then IRE, taken by itself, is not distinctively concerned about social equality. This entails that if the desired final state of affairs could be attained through non-egalitarian means (imagine, for instance, a benevolent dictator who respects basic human rights), then we would have no reason to prefer social equality.

This observation should be problematic for relational egalitarians since they argue that social equality is a fundamental value which should not be easily overridden. Relational egalitarianism, as a distinct theory of justice, relies on the idea that unjust treatment is in and of itself objectionable even if it does not have any distributive impacts or even if it is not wrong for

persons *per se*. An influential example highlighting this idea is the case of the benevolent master introduced by Pettit. In this case, a benevolent master never interferes in their domestics' lives (Pettit 1999, 73-4). The master is always fair and respectful. Yet, a hierarchy remains in that the master is the domestics' superior. Here, from a relational egalitarian standpoint, there should be something wrong with this relationship even if it does not have any negative impact on the domestics. And, more deeply, relational egalitarians are likely to object to this relationship even if it turns out to be beneficial; if, for instance, the master provides their domestics with opportunities that they would not have otherwise. The point of social equality is that some relations are, in and of themselves, incompatible with the equal status of individuals. This idea cannot be captured by IRE alone since, from this standpoint, if hierarchical relationships would be beneficial for people, they would be preferable to egalitarian ones. This, I take it, should be an unattractive result for relational egalitarians. Accordingly, an important precision ought to be underlined here: though IRE does lead to rather extensive scope, it cannot explain why social equality is required or valuable in itself.

Second, in response, one possibility might be to combine the deontic and the instrumental perspectives. To recall, the deontic approach, discussed in the previous chapter, relies on the idea that individuals ought to treat others in some way to honour the fact that we are all one another's equal when some relationship exists between them. Perhaps, despite the problems outlined in the previous chapter, a combination of DRE and IRE might be promising. For instance, this would allow democratic egalitarians to claim the advantages of IRE without abandoning the idea that social equality is required to respect the equal moral status of all. It would be possible to state that people ought to relate as equals *and* that social equality simultaneously has important positive effects in practice. This might be a good strategy to acknowledge the importance of the positive impacts of egalitarian relationships on others to resolve the problems associated with the exit option, considered at the end of the previous chapter. To recall, a major problem with the deontic position appears when it is applied to cases of structural injustice. In these cases, many dispersed actors interact to create unjust situations where no one can be said to be uniquely responsible for creating the situation. In response DRE allows for two answers: roughly, one can either work with others to correct the structure or exit the structure and thus avoid the responsibility to equalize the structure. DRE, by itself, cannot explain why we should prefer one avenue over the other, though it seems like it would be much preferable to equalize the unjust structure.



As illustrated by the case of the Disney Corporation, if we add IRE, then it might provide a way out of this problem. One could argue that if DRE itself is insufficient, a combination of both DRE and IRE allows to both consider the impacts of the decisions on those concerned and to capture the unique quality of egalitarian social relations. If it turns out that those who are disadvantaged by the structure are worse off once a powerful actor exits the structure, then it provides a reason to prefer the first avenue and to avoid exiting unjust social structures. This is indeed an interesting way to try and correct the limits of both DRE and IRE. However, this might introduce more problems than it resolves. One major question arises here: what is the end state that should be promoted instrumentally by IRE then? In other words, if, in the end, one should promote certain states of affairs which are intrinsically valuable, then it is at best unclear how relational egalitarianism is more than a footnote to be added to another conception of justice. For instance, a distributive egalitarian could argue that social equality is instrumentally valuable to promote equality of fortune, welfare, or opportunity, and that DRE identifies some limits in how an equal distributive pattern can be pursued, but it remains that justice, in the end, aims for certain distributive patterns. Pushed to this limit, relational egalitarians might be tempted by the following response to preserve the distinctiveness of their approach: it might be true that IRE is aimed at promoting certain states of affairs, nonetheless these states of affairs are themselves valuable *because* they are characterized by egalitarian social relations. According to this position, social equality would not only be instrumentally valuable or a constraint on how one can treat and regard others, but it would be a valuable property of some states of affairs. Yet, this appeals to a telic approach to the value of social equality. In the next chapter, I examine and defend this approach.

## Chapter 6

### **Towards Telic Relational Egalitarianism: Defending the Non-Instrumental Value of Social Equality**

Taking stock of what has been argued so far, I argued that the scope of relational egalitarian principles of justice cannot be restricted to nation-states. Relational egalitarianism should apply beyond borders since the three main arguments justifying a domestic focus (the argument from coercion – chapter 2 – the argument from cooperation – chapter 3 – and the cultural-conventionalist argument – chapter 5) all fail to provide reasons to support this limitation. Yet, the extension of relational egalitarianism beyond borders raises important questions and, as I argued, one's answer to the question of scope ultimately depends on one's answer to the question why social equality is required or valuable.

Two answers to this latter question have been considered. First, according to the deontic position we must regard others as equals and treat them as such when some connection exists between us and them. This is required to honour the moral equality of persons (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 170-4; Miklosi 2018, 131; Schemmel 2011, 366; Schemmel 2021, 38; Tomlin 2014, 165-8). The best interpretation of deontic relational egalitarianism points towards a practice-dependent account of social equality. It states, roughly, that what it means to treat someone as an equal depends on the type of existing social relationship considered. However, as argued in chapter 4, this approach cannot satisfactorily respond to instances of global structural injustice.

Second, the instrumental position maintains that social equality is valuable because it is useful to promote other values (Schemmel 2011, 366; Fourie 2011, 107-26; Fourie 2012, 118-21; Scheffler 2003, 19). Interestingly, the instrumental account can lead to a very broad scope. This is so because it is possible to argue that there is a causal relationship between social equality and effective protections of basic human rights. This, in turn, gives us a strong reason to promote egalitarian relationships globally in the name of human rights. Nonetheless, as I showed in chapter 5, this instrumental approach remains too weak because, by itself, it cannot explain the fundamental importance typically assigned to social equality (Schemmel 2021, 26-7).

This leaves us with the third and final option concerning the value of social equality: the telic account. Roughly, on this view, social equality is non-instrumentally valuable. In this chapter

and the next, I argue that telic relational egalitarianism (TRE) avoids the problems of the two other approaches and can ground a truly cosmopolitan, humanity-centered conception of relational egalitarianism. TRE supports the conclusion that relational egalitarians should aim to combat social inequalities globally and ensure that all have the necessary means to stand as equals in their own contexts, though these goals should be constrained by practical considerations and conditions.

In the present chapter, I focus on the theoretical issues attached to developing a telic approach to relational equality. I do so in four steps. First, I consider how some authors have defended and understood telic egalitarianism. This allows me to differentiate the many forms telic egalitarianism can take as applied to relational egalitarianism and explain how it is distinct from its distributive counterpart. I show that the telic understanding of relational equality comes with a change in perspective compared to the deontic approach. On a telic view, the focus moves from a normative account centered on how to organize our existing social and political relations to an evaluative position concerned with the (dis)value of certain states of affairs. Second, I discuss how TRE can be understood in two ways: negatively or positively. Understood negatively, it states that inequalitarian relationships are disvaluable while its positive variant insists on the positive value of egalitarian relationships. Though this theoretical distinction may seem subtle, the two positions lead to distinct conclusions.

Third, I argue in favour of a combination of the negative and positive variants of TRE. To do so, I consider the issue of what grounds the non-instrumental value of social equality. This question is particularly important because telic egalitarianism is often criticized as a “groundless” or “mysterious” view (Fourie 2012, 118; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 167-9; Tomlin 2014; Wolff and de-Shalit 2007, 6). I point out that the non-instrumental value of social equality can be understood in either of two ways: personally or impersonally. When it is understood personally, it relies on the claim that equality is good *for* persons in some sense. The most natural way to understand this position is to claim that social equality is constitutive of another intrinsically valuable good (Moss 2015). Below, I suggest that social equality is constitutive of an integral sense of self. Despite its promise, this understanding of the value of social equality leads to an important problem: it cannot account for situations where social equality appears to be good beyond its constitutive role.

Consequently, in the fourth and final section, I consider the impersonal account, namely, that social equality would be good even if it is good for no one. I argue that though this position

contains an important insight, it nonetheless ignores an appealing and plausible middle-ground between the personal, constitutive view and the impersonal account: some goods can be intrinsically good *for* persons in a non-welfare affecting way.<sup>1</sup> As such, social equality can be good for persons even if it does not constitute another personal good or promotes subjective welfare. In the next chapter, I move from these theoretical considerations to more practical issues to see what this conception of telic relational egalitarianism entails in practice.

## 1. Telic Egalitarianism: From Distributive to Relational Equality

### 1.1. Telic Distributive Egalitarianism

Following a telic perspective, equality is non-instrumentally valuable.<sup>2</sup> The idea that *social equality* may be non-instrumentally valuable, though relatively rare in contemporary literature, is expressly endorsed to different degrees by Elford (2017), O'Neill (2008) and Lippert-Rasmussen (2021)<sup>3</sup>. Broadly, these views build on Parfit's distinction between deontic and telic conceptions

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, when I refer to welfare, here, I refer to both mental states and subjective-desire satisfaction accounts of welfare, not to objective-list theories (on this distinction, see chapter 6). Unfortunately, I do not have the space to provide a complete theory of welfare here, but I use welfare in this narrow sense notably because it is also in this way that it is used by Temkin and Segall, who are two major sources from which I draw to develop my own account of telic *relational* egalitarianism. This restricted meaning thus aims to minimize potential misunderstanding between the view defended here and the positions of Temkin and Segall. In other words, throughout, welfare refers to subjective welfare.

<sup>2</sup> To make sense of this idea, it is important to distinguish between two different kinds of value. As Moss succinctly puts it: "[Intrinsic] value (where what is valued is valued for its own sake because of its intrinsic properties) should be contrasted with extrinsic value (where what is valued is valued because of some other source of value), whereas final value (where what is valued is valuable for its own sake) should be contrasted with instrumental value (where what [is valued] is valued as a means)" (Moss 2017, 191; see also Korsgaard 1996; Langton 2007; and Dancy 2004). Consequently, for something to be value non-instrumentally can mean either one of two things: it can be valuable intrinsically – in the sense that it is valued due to its own, intrinsic properties – or it could be valued extrinsically but non-instrumentally. In this second sense, the source of value is external to the good in question, but the good valued extrinsically may not simply be a mean to attain another intrinsically valuable good: it can be a part of the very good we wish to attain. A common example is the value of works of art. As Moss points out, reading literature may be seen as being a part of a good life (Moss 2017, 191; see also Raz 1986, 200-3). Some may argue that engaging with literature is not only good because it promotes welfare – which would be an instrumental relationship – but also because it is part of what living a good life means. In this case, art and literature is not only instrumentally valuable, but it is valuable extrinsically – its value is relative to its connection with the good life – but non-instrumental – since it constitutes, in part, what it means to live a good life. For the time being, I simply want to highlight that something can be said to be non-instrumentally valuable and, for now, one can assume that this can mean either one of these two things.

<sup>3</sup> Note that Lippert-Rasmussen seems to have slightly changed in position towards telic relational egalitarianism between 2018 and 2021. In *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals* (2018), he appears to be skeptical of the possibility of defending a telic view. In this text, he writes: "it is far from clear [if claiming that relational equality has impersonal value] will actually be a satisfactory position for relational egalitarians to take. For one thing, it does not follow in any very direct way that people ought to relate as equals. Moreover, ascribing impersonal value to relational equality is not only consistent with, but might actually give rise to new issues in, distributive justice, in which case

of equality. However, telic egalitarianism is slightly different depending on whether one adopts a distributive or relational conception of equality. Hence, it is useful to start with the distributive understanding of this notion, notably presented by Parfit, to see how it can be adapted, and eventually adopted, by relational egalitarians.

To recall, for Parfit (2000), deontic accounts of justice are concerned with instances of wrongdoing and with what we ought to do. Following a deontic perspective, equality should be pursued not because it makes a given outcome better, but because we should treat some people in specific ways. Parfit describes the deontic perspective in this way:

such a view typically appeals to claims about justice. More exactly, it appeals to claims about *comparative* justice. Whether people are unjustly treated, in this comparative sense, depends on whether they are treated *differently* from other people. Thus it may be unfair if, in a distribution of resources, some people are denied their share. (Parfit 2000, 88, emphasis in original)

Here, equality guides decision-making to ensure that all are treated justly (see also Williams 2004, 139). Injustice entails wrongdoing since unjust situations are produced when some are unfairly treated differently than others. Though Parfit clearly adopts a distributive understanding of (deontic) equality, this conception is nonetheless strongly echoed in the deontic conception of relational egalitarianism, as discussed in chapter 4 above.

In contrast, telic accounts are not concerned with instances of wrongdoing or what we ought to do, but rather with the (dis)value of states of affairs and outcomes. For Parfit:

We may believe that inequality is *bad*. On such a view, when we should aim for equality, that is because we shall thereby make the outcome better. We can then be called *Teleological*—or, for short *Telic*—egalitarians. (...) [Telic egalitarians accept] *The Principle of Equality*: It is in itself bad if some people are worse off than others. (Parfit 2000, 84)

Following a telic perspective, inequalities are non-instrumentally bad, and inequality is a property of a distributive pattern instead of a product of a wrongful decision-making process (Parfit 2000, 94; Williams 2004, 139). Depending on whether one prefers a deontic or a telic approach, it leads to importantly differing conclusions.

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relational equality cannot be seen as an alternative to the distributive ideal, which is how relational egalitarians tend to think of their view” (2018, 170). However, as discussed below, in “Relational Egalitarianism: Telic and Deontic” (2021) he defends the relevance of this telic view.

From a telic perspective, an inequality can be non-instrumentally bad regardless of how it came about, in which community it arises, or whether anything can be done to redress it. In contrast, from a deontic perspective, none of these points make sense. Inequalities which cannot be redressed or for which we are not, in a sense, responsible, simply lie beyond the scope of the deontic understanding of equality. As Parfit succinctly puts it: “On such a view, when we are responsible for some distribution, we ought to distribute equally. But, when we are not responsible, inequality is not unjust. In such cases, there is nothing morally amiss. We have no reason to remove such inequality, by redistribution” (Parfit 2000, 95). Roughly, when there has been no wrongful treatment, there is no possible inequality in the relevant sense.

On the contrary, recognizing that an inequality is bad on a telic view can give us a reason to redress it.<sup>4</sup> Importantly, this is not only a linguistic dispute, but it indicates a different understanding of what our duties of justice are. I return to this question in more detail in the next chapter, but notice that deontic and telic approaches tackle transnational inequalities differently, for instance. From a deontic standpoint, global inequalities between political communities are not morally problematic if they are not produced by instances of wrongdoing.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, from a telic, distributive perspective, international inequalities in opportunities or welfare may be considered bad and thus give us a reason to act to equalize global opportunities even if they do not result from instances of wrongdoing.

This telic, globalist position is adopted by Temkin (1993; 2008; 2017) and Segall (2016a; 2016b). Temkin contends that:

Inequality is relevant to assessing outcomes. It is a feature of situations that makes outcomes (pro tanto) morally objectionable. Roughly, on this view, undeserved inequality is always objectionable; whether or not it is avoidable, any one is responsible for it, there is anyone for whom it is worse, or it involves different people, societies, places, or times. (Temkin 1993, 12)

Though Temkin does not adopt a purely distributive position, as discussed below, his work nonetheless highlights how deontic and telic egalitarianism differ: the telic approach evaluates states of affairs while a deontic perspective aims to capture the injustice of particular actions or

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<sup>4</sup> I come back to the connection between the telic perspective and how it can guide what we ought to do in more detail in the next chapter. For now, I simply assume that to recognize that a state of affairs is bad gives us a reason to modify this state of affairs if it were in our power to do so.

<sup>5</sup> That is, at least when these inequalities remain above a certain minimal threshold, otherwise considerations of sufficientarian justice may obtain.

behaviours. Segall clearly adopts a purely distributive outlook. He defends a telic luck egalitarian conception of justice. According to him, arbitrary inequalities which “leave some individuals worse off than others (...) through no fault of their own” are always bad (Segall 2016a, 13).<sup>6</sup> If people on the other side of the galaxy have access to fewer life opportunities than we do through no fault of their own – and through no fault of earthlings – it still gives us a reason to alleviate the inequality if it were in our power to do so. Therefore, telic egalitarianism identifies a broader range of inequalities as problematic than deontic views. Following a deontic perspective, unjust inequalities are those that arise because of wrongful treatment. The telic account considers some inequalities to be bad even if we are not responsible for them or even if they cannot be remedied. Hence, we have reasons to regret natural inequalities or condemn past inequalities even if we cannot do anything to correct them.

### 1.2. *Telic Relational Egalitarianism*

For the purpose of this chapter, I put the question of whether telic distributive egalitarianism can be legitimate or defensible aside to focus on the question of whether telic *relational* egalitarianism can make sense. After all, it may seem puzzling to connect telic egalitarianism and social equality in that social inequalities are always social artifacts. That is, given that social inequalities are always connected to some type of wrongful treatment or attitude, it may seem unclear what a telic perspective adds to a deontic conception of social equality. In response, and to clarify the issues at stake, we must distinguish between two different axes: that of personal versus impersonal value, and that of deontic versus telic egalitarianism. As Temkin puts it:

versions of egalitarianism may differ in their underlying nature or structure. For example, a *person-affecting* version would condemn inequality only insofar as it adversely affects people. An *impersonal* version would condemn inequality even if there were no one for whom it was worse. Such a view would enable one to compare any outcomes regarding inequality, including outcomes at different times or with different people. Similarly, on a *teleological* version inequality is primarily relevant to assessing outcomes, and any outcomes might be compared, even if their inequality were unavoidable and no one were responsible for it. On a *deontological* version inequality is primarily relevant to assessing agents or actions, so unavoidable inequality for which no one is responsible might not matter morally. (Temkin 1993, 11)

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<sup>6</sup> More precisely, Segall argues that egalitarians should be opposed to arbitrary inequalities. He writes: “It is the fact of being arbitrarily disadvantaged (...) that is the source of badness according to this account. It is bad for one to be arbitrarily worse-off compared with others, and consequently arbitrary inequalities are always suspect (unless otherwise excused).” (Segall 2016a, 13)

Consequently, what is puzzling when we move from a distributive to a relational theory of justice, is that while the first distinction between person affecting and impersonal versions still makes sense – though this distinction misses a third understanding, as will be discussed below – it is harder to see how the second distinction between teleological and deontological equality remains relevant. On relational egalitarianism, it seems warranted to ask if social inequalities are wrong only if they adversely affect individuals or if they are wrong even if not wrong *for* anyone. However, it is not clear how to articulate the distinction between outcomes (associated with the teleological approach) and actions (associated with a deontic perspective) precisely because social inequalities are always connected to particular actions, behaviours, or beliefs held by agents. Though it is essential to settle the debate between distributive outcomes and fairness from a distributive perspective, the question seems to disappear on a relational conception of equality. A deontic approach which insists on evaluating the activities and beliefs of agents does seem to be a more natural way to approach relational egalitarianism.

Nonetheless, some relational egalitarians still appeal to the distinction between telic and deontic egalitarianism. To do so, the distinction between deontic and telic takes on a slightly different meaning. The main distinction between assessing states of affairs and particular actions is retained, but there is now the added dimension of the non-instrumental value which may be assigned to behaviours or relations. To illustrate, it is useful to consider Temkin's own position on this issue. His position shows that the divide between deontic and telic egalitarianism may not be as strict as one may think, but the two remain distinct because they rely on different outlooks. As he writes:

I don't deny that there may be deontological constraints concerning autonomy, freedom, justice, and so on. But I firmly believe that such ideals are *also* relevant to the goodness of outcomes. A world where people are just, free, autonomous, and equal, where rights are respected, perfection achieved, beauty appreciated, and truth sought, is *not* just a world where right *acts* are prevalent; it is a *better* world in important respects than one lacking the attainment of such ideals. Moreover, this is so independently of the extent to which the attainment of such ideals promotes experienced preference-satisfaction. (Temkin 2008, 25, emphasis in original)

For our purposes, it is important to underline two main things. First, even if one focuses on behaviours and attitudes rather than distributive patterns, it does not follow that it is no longer possible to adopt a telic perspective. It simply means that one looks at behaviours and actions for their value – that is, per Temkin's quote, certain behaviours, attitudes or beliefs are non-instrumentally valuable even if they do not promote the satisfaction of individual preferences.



Second, though Temkin lists an impressive number of valuable goods including justice, freedom, equality, and truth (among other potential candidates), a relational egalitarian perspective would insist on one particular good: social equality.<sup>7</sup> Hence, telic *relational* egalitarianism does not appeal primarily to a distinction between actions and outcomes understood as a strict distinction between distributive patterns and social behaviours – as some telic *distributive* authors make it seem. TRE rather relies on the fundamental idea that social equality not only requires that we respect the equal moral status of others when we interact with them, but that egalitarian social relationships themselves have a particular, non-instrumental value.

Recall the distinction between instrumental and deontic relational egalitarianism. Instrumental relational egalitarianism (IRE) captures the following ensemble of views:

*Instrumental Relational Egalitarianism (IRE)*: social equality is valuable because it is useful to attain X, where X is itself an intrinsically valuable social or individual good, or because it is useful to avoid the negative effects of social inequality, either for individuals or the collective.

This view highlights that social equality can be useful to achieve valuable goods, such as individual welfare or social solidarity. Yet, as argued in chapter 5, this view is problematic because it cannot explain the distinct importance attached to social equality by relational egalitarians. That is, if some hierarchical relationships also led to similar levels of wellbeing or solidarity, then social equality would no longer be valuable. This conclusion should irk relational egalitarians.

Similarly, deontic relational egalitarianism (DRE), to recall, captures the following ensemble of views:

*Deontic Relational Egalitarianism (DRE)*: social equality is a normative requirement stating that agents ought to regard each other as equals and to treat them as such when they interact. This is necessary to honour the fact that human beings are moral equals.

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, this does not mean that social equality is the only non-instrumentally valuable good, though it does mean that it will have a particularly significant value, as will be made clear below.

As discussed in chapter 4, this view, though intuitive, is problematic because it cannot explain why we can have some reasons to create new social relationships or maintain some relationships over time.

Telic *relational* egalitarianism offers an alternative to IRE and DRE. It aims to capture the ensemble of views which subscribe to the following general claim:

*Telic Relational Egalitarianism (TRE)*: social equality is non-instrumentally valuable.

A state of affairs where egalitarian social relations exist is better than one where they do not.

Though this definition captures the general idea behind TRE, some important questions remain, in particular: 1) is telic relational egalitarianism mainly concerned with the positive value of egalitarian relationships or with the disvalue of inegalitarian ones? The answer to this question will clarify the different possible types of telic relational egalitarianism. And 2) what is the source of the non-instrumental (dis)value of social (in)equality? As Temkin's quote highlighted above, the (dis)value of social (in)equalities could be grounded either in their (dis)value *for* persons or they may be impersonally (dis)valuable. In the following two sections, I consider each question in turn.

## 2. Telic *Relational* Egalitarianism: Negative and Positive Interpretations

A first question is whether telic relational egalitarians should be concerned only by the disvalue of social inequalities or also by the value of egalitarian relationships. I contend that the distinction between negative and positive approaches is more important than it is typically recognized in the literature because even if these positions are not necessarily incompatible, they do rely on different intuitions.<sup>8</sup> As Lippert-Rasmussen argues, we can distinguish between two interpretations of TRE:

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<sup>8</sup> Note that the distinction between positive and negative telic egalitarianism also obtains when one adopts a distributive conception of justice as we have seen in the position of Temkin and Segall. Most clearly, Segall's position, briefly discussed above, is an instance of a negative position in that he objects to arbitrary *inequalities*. Still, he does not argue that equality is good in itself because this would lead to unpalatable conclusions. As he writes: "[my] justificatory account restricts itself to telling us when and why inequalities are bad. They are bad when they leave individuals arbitrarily disadvantaged. The account, then, speaks of the badness of inequality rather than the goodness of equality. (...) [Seeing] equality as good, as opposed to viewing inequality as bad, has some implausible implications. For example, it gives us a reason to bring about a world in which all individuals lead an equally horrible, not-worth-living,

Negative telic relational egalitarianism: It is in itself (unjust and therefore) bad if social inequality exists.

and

Positive telic relational egalitarianism: it is in itself (just and therefore) good if social equality exists. (Lippert-Rasmussen 2021, 430; see also Tomlin 2014, 158-160)

Though these definitions are rather rough and will be nuanced below, it is essential to distinguish between them because they allow us to make sense of the different positions that exist in contemporary literature and to specify what they entail. Besides Lippert-Rasmussen – who, in the end, subscribes to a version of positive telic relational egalitarianism (henceforth P-TRE) – Elford’s position (2017) also points in this direction. In contrast, O’Neill (2008) sometimes seems to favour the negative interpretation (henceforth N-TRE).

Starting with Elford, he explicitly claims that social equality is good. He maintains that the value of egalitarian relationships goes beyond their contribution to individual welfare and that they are, in a sense, valuable in and of themselves (Elford 2017, 83-6). He traces a connection between social equality and caring relations to highlight that there is something valuable with these types of relationships “over and above [their] contribution to the wellbeing of [the involved] parties” (Elford 2017, 85). Accordingly, he adopts a *positive* telic perspective according to which there is something good in creating and engaging in egalitarian social relationships.

In contrast, though O’Neill (2008) also maintains that social equality has non-instrumental value, his position oscillates between N-TRE and P-TRE. He mentions both the intrinsic value of egalitarian relationships and the disvalue of inegalitarian ones.<sup>9</sup> Consider the following passage:

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lives, which is counterintuitive.” (Segall 2015, 15; on this point see also Persson 2008, 298; Persson 2012, 296). In contrast, the positive telic *relational* approach does not seem to lead to the same problem because it does not assign value to just any type of equality, but to social equality. Social equality itself assigns a certain quality to the type of relationships that individuals should engage in. A world where everyone would treat and regard others equally badly would be equal in a sense but would remain far from the realization of *social* equality.

<sup>9</sup> Though he calls his own view “non-intrinsic egalitarianism,” it relies on a distinctively telic conception of relational egalitarianism. O’Neill recognizes that his non-intrinsic egalitarianism is a “broadly telic egalitarian view”, even if he is critical of Parfit’s own characterization of telic egalitarianism. O’Neill rejects the distributive presuppositions attached to Parfit’s definition of telic egalitarianism. On this point, O’Neill writes: “Such a view is nevertheless not the same as Parfit’s version of (what we may call) ‘pure’ Telic egalitarianism. On the pure Telic view, distributive equality is *in itself* valuable, without any need to appeal to any further reasons. On the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view, distributive equality is valuable because of its effects, and specifically by virtue of the fact that it brings about states

The reasons to which [telic relational] egalitarianism appeals are themselves generated by distinctively egalitarian concerns with *the badness of servility, exploitation, domination, and differences in status*. The badness of these outcomes can best be understood by virtue of the contrasting value of certain kinds of fraternal, egalitarian social relations. The existence of these kinds of social relations should itself be seen as intrinsically valuable, independent of the positive effects that such relations may have for individual welfare. *States of affairs in which individual self-worth and fraternal social relations are undermined by domination and stigmatizing differences in status are, we might say, offensive to the dignity and standing of human agents.* (O'Neill 2008, 130, my emphasis)

In this passage he seems to both argue for the positive value of certain types of egalitarian relationships and for the idea that inegalitarian ones are disvaluable because they are “offensive” to human dignity and standing.

Even though the two ways of understanding TRE tend to be meshed together, it is essential to distinguish the two claims, at least theoretically, since they do not necessarily follow from one another and can lead to different conclusions. As Tomlin mentions, P-TRE points towards the conclusion that social equality is “*important, good or to be promoted*” (Tomlin 2014, 158, emphasis in original). In contrast, N-TRE leads to the weaker conclusion that inegalitarian relationships are “*bad or to be avoided*” (Tomlin 2014, 158, emphasis in original). To illustrate the difference between the two positions, consider the following four cases:

Case 1: We live in a world where people are completely self-sufficient and live independently of one another. There are neither inegalitarian nor egalitarian relationships.

Case 2: We live a very inegalitarian world where many people are regarded and treated as inferiors. All in all, there are more inegalitarian relationships than egalitarian ones.

Case 3: We live in a somewhat inegalitarian world where some people are regarded and treated as inferiors. All in all, there are more egalitarian relationships than inegalitarian ones.

Case 4: We live in a perfectly egalitarian world where only egalitarian relationships exist.

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of affairs that are themselves intrinsically valuable for egalitarian reasons. On this view, however, distributive equality is not, in itself, intrinsically valuable”. (O'Neill 2008, 130) In other words, though O'Neill rejects telic *distributive* egalitarianism, he does defend a type of telic *relational* egalitarianism stating that social equality has a non-instrumental, impersonal value.

I believe that it is reasonable to assume that as we move from the second to the fourth case, the situation improves. That is, the fourth world is preferable to the third one, and the third world is preferable to the second one. Additionally, this preference seems transitive such that it is intuitively preferable to live in world 4 rather than world 2. However, some may hesitate when we compare case 1 and case 4. On N-TRE, we have no reason to prefer case 1 over 4 (or conversely). Given that neither contains inequalitarian relationships, they exhibit the exact same value according to N-TRE. On the contrary, someone subscribing to P-TRE might contend that case 4 *is* preferable to case 1: the thought here is that since egalitarian social relationships have positive, non-instrumental value, a situation where self-sufficient human beings do not entertain any kind of social relationships with one another is less valuable, at least in one respect, than a scenario where these beings actively engage in egalitarian relationships.

Two things are worth mentioning here. First, it is important to rephrase the proposed definitions of N-TRE and P-TRE to capture that the different cases improve incrementally as we move from scenario 2 to 4. It seems reasonable to modify the proposed definitions because, intuitively, a world which is almost equal seems to be better than one that is very unequal. The reason for this can be expressed in either negative or positive terms: it is better either because it has less disvalue, or because it has more positive value. This point is also highlighted by Lippert-Rasmussen, and he therefore proposes that we adopt a graded definition of P-TRE:

Graded positive relational egalitarianism: It is in itself (just and therefore) good if social equality exists. A state of affairs still contains positive relational value if it deviates somewhat from perfect social equality, but the greater the deviation the less relational value. At some threshold degree of deviation, the state of affairs imperfectly realizing social equality has zero relational value and any increase in the degree of social inequality will result in a state of affairs that has negative relational value, the greater the deviation the more negative relational value. (Lippert-Rasmussen 2021, 430)

Though he does not specify it, one could also adopt a graded view of N-TRE which would, presumably, look like the following:

Graded negative relational egalitarianism: it is in itself (unjust and therefore) bad if social inequality exists. A state of affairs contains relational disvalue if it contains inequalitarian social relationships, but the greater the inequalities the more relational disvalue. At the point where there are no inequalitarian social relationships, the state of affairs is of neutral value (at least where equality is concerned).

These formulations seem to give intuitive results in that they capture the incremental improvements between case 2 and 4; they capture the idea that a slightly imperfect world is nonetheless better

than a very inegalitarian one. However, they raise the question of whether to prefer the positive or the negative formulation. Personally, I find it unconvincing to adopt a purely negative position stating that social inequality has disvalue and does not also recognize the positive value of egalitarian relationships.<sup>10</sup> Yet, since not everyone will share this intuition, I draw on the distinction between personal and impersonal value to argue that social equality has *positive* value because egalitarian relationships are non-instrumentally good for persons.

### 3. The Grounds of TRE: Personal and Impersonal valuing

The question of whether relational equality has non-instrumental value inevitably leads to the question of whether *anything* can be non-instrumentally valuable. For many, this is an inherent problem with the telic view. An important objection that has been levied against telic egalitarianism, in both its negative and positive forms, is that it is mysterious and groundless (Fourie 2012, 118; Tomlin 2014, 174-5; Wolff and de-Shalit 2007, 6).<sup>11</sup> For instance, Tomlin rightly highlights that O'Neill never provides a reason explaining why social inequalities are bad. As he writes:

if we push O'Neill-style relational egalitarians on *why* [inegalitarian social relationships] are bad, their answer will concern the value of egalitarian social relationships. And if we push them on why *they're* so good, their answer will be (...) 'they just are.' (...) [Those] views that include claims about impersonal value seems to be destined to be abstract, mysterious, and metaphysically controversial. (Tomlin 2014, 174-5, emphasis in original.)

Indeed, though O'Neill alludes to a connection between his valuation of social equality and human dignity, this point is never fully explained.

Nonetheless, when we investigate the question of what it means for something to be valuable, i.e. to be good, it is useful to distinguish two axes (which unfortunately are rarely clearly distinguished in the literature): 1) something can be non-instrumentally good either personally or impersonally and 2) something can be good either due to its impact on individual welfare or in

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<sup>10</sup> Additionally, if one were to adopt graded N-TRE only, it leads to the conclusion that an empty world, devoid of any type of social relationships or agents, is as valuable as a world with is ripe with egalitarian relationships (Lippert-Rasmussen 2021, 430). Even if this conclusion may not appear to be a problem for some, I do personally find this to be an unattractive conclusion.

<sup>11</sup> A similar objection is also common to oppose to telic *distributive* egalitarianism. See Segall (2016b, 36-7).

ways that are not reducible to this impact (Segall 2016b, 99-101).<sup>12</sup> As will be explained throughout this section and the next, I argue that relational egalitarians should combine N-TRE and P-TRE (in their graded forms) because social equality is non-instrumentally, personally valuable in ways which are not always reducible to their impact on individual welfare.

It is first necessary to clarify the lines of the debate. First, something can be said to be non-instrumentally good personally or impersonally. Something is good impersonally when it is good in itself; that is, it is good even if it is not good for anyone in particular. In contrast, something is good personally when it is good for particular individuals. Though imperfect, Segall identifies a good litmus test to consider if something is good personally or impersonally, namely to ask whether particular individuals could ever have a complaint or a claim regarding the good in question (or lack thereof) (Segall 2016b, 100-1).<sup>13</sup> It is important to add another distinction between “person affecting” and “non-person affecting.” Things can be non-instrumentally good (or bad) because they have an impact on individual, subjective welfare – as such, it is person or welfare affecting – or even if it has no such impact – as such, it would be valuable in a non-person or non-welfare affecting way (Segall 2016b, 99).<sup>14</sup>

Objects could, theoretically, be placed in the four categories created by the combination of both distinctions. Something could be good, and thus valuable, both impersonally and in a non-person affecting way. For instance, works of arts or natural wonders arguably have value beyond the impact they have on individual welfare. The Grand Canyon is arguably valuable in itself, beyond the value it has for those who appreciate its beauty. Conversely, something could also be

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<sup>12</sup> It may be important to flag that an impersonal deontic position is imaginable though it is not an intuitive nor a very clear position. This point is highlighted by Lippert-Rasmussen (2021, 432). As he points out, the most natural reading of DRE is an agent-relative view of our obligations of justice. That is, every person in their actions should aim to treat and regard others as equals. In other words, entertaining egalitarian relations should be important for individuals themselves in their existing relationships. However, an agent-neutral view would state that an agent should aim to promote egalitarian social relations generally or, alternatively, to minimize the number of inequalitarian social relations by their actions. This means that it may be acceptable to treat one person as an inferior if this would maximize the number of egalitarian relationships overall. As I mention below however, this idea that we could sacrifice one person to maximize the number of egalitarian relationships overall should typically be unpalatable to relational egalitarians. Accordingly, one can assume that DRE always refers to the agent-relative view here.

<sup>13</sup> This test is imperfect because the notions of a claim or complaint are closer to a deontic understanding of justice than a telic evaluation of particular states of affairs. Nonetheless, this test remains informative because it allows us to see whether the good in question is good for people or independently of particular individuals. As mentioned, I come back to the connections between telic and deontic egalitarianism in the next chapter.

<sup>14</sup> Though this distinction sounds very instrumental in nature, it will be clarified throughout this chapter how this distinction is possible in non-instrumental ways.

valuable impersonally in a person affecting way. As Segall points out, utilitarians are likely to think that welfare or utility is impersonally good even if it affects individual welfare. As he puts it:

Welfare is obviously good *because* it is good for those who have it (...). But at the same time, the value of welfare might not be reducible to its contribution to subjective welfare. For example, on telic welfarism and telic utilitarianism, outcomes are better in an impersonal way. (Segall 2016b, 102)

Similarly, something can be non-instrumentally valuable personally either due to its impact on individuals or in ways that are not reducible to this impact. To illustrate the latter, for instance, slander is bad personally even if it does not have an impact on anyone's welfare. Segall takes the example of slandering a deceased person or slandering someone behind their back. It may be bad for the person in question, in a sense, even if it does not affect them (Segall 2016b, 100). For now, even if this example fails to convince, I simply want to suggest that a space exists to consider something as both personally good and non-person affecting even if this is counterintuitive. The most intuitive way to value something personally is presumably to argue that something can be good because it promotes individual, subjective welfare. As discussed in chapter 5 above, social equality is likely to promote individual welfare. However, this amounts to an instrumental valuing of equality because social equality is here only valuable as a means to attain something else – i.e. subjective welfare. As argued above, the instrumental view, though it contains important insights, is a limited view to ground the value of social equality.

In what follows, I argue that social equality is valuable personally, but in a non-welfare affecting way. To do so, I consider the two main ways to value social equality non-instrumentally in the literature. First, social equality could be said to be personally and non-instrumentally valuable since it could be good *for* persons by being constitutive of something that is good in and of itself. In what follows, I explore the idea that social equality is constitutive of one's integral sense of self – a notion to which I return below. This is, I believe, the strongest “constitutivist” argument to defend the value of social equality. However, this constitutivist understanding of the value of social equality itself leads to some problems. Most importantly, it cannot accommodate the intuition that social equality may be valuable in some situations even if it is not connected to a person's sense of self.

This conclusion seems to point towards the impersonal account. Indeed, second, equality could be valued impersonally in a non-welfare affecting way. As described above, Elford and



O'Neill contend that social equality has impersonal value. In what follows, I highlight that though the intuition is right, it misses the fact that social equality is always good or bad for particular individuals. Hence, I conclude this chapter by arguing that it is preferable to adopt the middle ground, namely that social equality can be both personally valuable even if it is not constitutive of another value. I argue that it is plausible to assume that social equality is good for persons in a non-welfare affecting way. In the next sections, I move progressively from the idea that social equality is personally valuable because it is constitutive of another intrinsically valuable good, to the idea that it is impersonally valuable, to the conclusion that social equality is personally valuable after all, though in a non-welfare affecting way.

### *3.1. The Non-Instrumental, Personal Value of Social Equality*

The first way to ground the non-instrumental value of social equality would be to appeal to the idea that it is valuable for people because it is constitutive of something which is intrinsically good for persons. Before we take this idea further, it is essential to consider how something can be simultaneously non-instrumentally *and* personally valuable. In other words, how does this account differ from an instrumentalist account? To say that something is good for persons seems to be anchored in the idea that it is *useful to promote* subjective welfare. Yet, it is possible for something to be good for individuals even if it is not only useful instrumentally to reach a desirable outcome; that something may be constitutive of the very outcome that we aim to reach.<sup>15</sup> Equality may be constitutive of another intrinsically valuable good; it is not only a means to obtain a distinct outcome, but it is part and parcel of the outcome that we should aim for.

This possibility becomes particularly clear when we notice that some things can be objectively good for individuals (Parfit 1984, 493-502; see also Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 159-66).<sup>16</sup> According to objective-list accounts, some things are good for people from a purely objective

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<sup>15</sup> This possibility is presented by Moss (2015; 2009; see also Korsgaard 1996; Raz 1986, 200-2). As he points out, there are at least three different ways of conceptualizing the value of equality: "Recent discussion of equality has valued equality in three broad ways. Equality could be valued intrinsically, in virtue of its own independent value. On this account, equality matters for its own sake independently of what else might matter. (...) The obvious alternative to valuing equality intrinsically is to value it instrumentally because it contributes to or is necessary for some other valuable outcome. (...) A third type of valuation is to understand equality as valuable because of its relation to something else of value, for instance because it is part of another intrinsic value – what I (...) call constitutive value." (Moss 2015, 187) Here, in sections 3.1 and 3.2, I consequently consider how social equality is good for individuals because it constitutive of something that should be good *for* everyone persons: our sense of self.

<sup>16</sup> Roughly there are two other ways to claim that something can be good for individuals beyond the objective accounts: mental-states accounts and preference-based accounts. However, here I put these two approaches aside since they both fail to capture the idea that something could be non-instrumentally and personally valuable. They both rely on

standpoint: they are good for persons independently of their preferences or mental states. Typical contenders of objective goods include individual autonomy, liberty, knowledge or beauty (Griffin 1986, 66-7). This account entails that some things can be good for someone even if it does not necessarily promote their subjective welfare and even if it diminishes it. In the present section, I suggest that social equality is valuable because it is a necessary component of our sense of self.<sup>17</sup> To develop this argument, I build on some insights which can be found in Sangiovanni's work (2017).

Though Sangiovanni is critical of the possibility of expanding egalitarian justice beyond national borders — as discussed in chapter 3 — and even though his (later) work mainly develops a deontic conception of relational equality, some of his insights point towards the idea that social equality possesses non-instrumental value. Consider the following passage:

Think of the most important goods in a human life, those things we have most reason to value, such as knowledge, love, friendship, pleasure, the appreciation of beauty, the raising of children, accomplishment and skill. What contribution does an integral sense of self make to the good of each of these things for us? It might seem that the contribution is solely instrumental: an integral sense of self makes it causally more likely that we will be able to enjoy each of those things. But, on reflection, I think the connection is deeper: an integral sense of self is also a *constituent* of the good of each of those things. To see this, consider that we do not only want the *benefits* that knowledge, friendship, the raising of children, solitude, pleasure,

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instrumental valuing of goods. First, mental-states accounts rely on the basic idea that what is good for people consists in pleasurable mental states. Though it is likely that egalitarian social relationships lead to pleasurable mental states in many cases, this is a purely instrumental and contingent situation. It is entirely possible to obtain pleasurable mental states through other means. Moreover, if someone were to argue that they derive pleasure from treating others as inferiors it would not count as a weighty reason to put social equality aside (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 160). Second, preference-based accounts appeal to the idea that what is good for persons is, roughly, what satisfies their preferences — which may be actual, second-order, or relevantly hypothetical preferences (i.e. the preferences a person would have if they were given access to all the relevant information) (Hansson and Grüne-Yanoff 2022). The same problem arises with these accounts: the connection between social equality and individual preferences is, at best, instrumental and rather weak. The fact that someone would prefer to be treated as a superior is not a reason to establish social hierarchies (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 160). On the contrary, relational egalitarianism, as a theory of equality, is designed to reject these types of preferences as bad since they should not inform how people relate to one another. As Lippert-Rasmussen points out, a way out of this problem would be to argue that persons should objectively prefer egalitarian relationships over non-egalitarian ones. However, this leads us to the third and final family of accounts: objective-list accounts (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 160-1).

<sup>17</sup> By “sense of self”, I follow Sangiovanni's definition of it and presume that it is objectively valuable for persons to have an integral sense of self. Here, “sense of self” means the following: “what is sometimes called one's self-conception, one's conception of the values, commitments, and concerns that are central to one's life, the relationships and roles that make one the ‘kind of person’ one is, including the qualities and defects of one's personality.” He adds, helpfully: “It is important to emphasize that an integral sense of self, in my terms, does not require that we live our lives as the protagonists of a grand, historically unified narrative, or that we wholeheartedly embrace every aspect of ourselves or our lives, or that we seek to weed out all ambivalence. The notion is much more modest and human. All it requires is that our ambivalences, regrets, dependencies, and upheavals be integrated into our evolving self-conception — but there is no embargo on their being integrated *as* ambivalences, regrets, dependencies, and upheavals.” (Sangiovanni 2017, 79–80).

skill, beauty, and so on, can bring. Their value for us is not merely in the *having* of them. *Their value for us is fully realized only when we engage and pursue them through our own endeavor, choice, and commitment.* To have value for us, to be meaningful to us, they must reflect who we are; we must be able to see ourselves *in* the pursuit and enjoyment of these goods. (...) *In laboring with a fractured sense of self, we lose the capacity to see ourselves in our pursuits, concerns, and cares and so we cannot participate in the most important goods that those pursuits, concerns, and cares make possible.* (Sangiovanni 2017, 81-2, my emphasis)

Having an integral sense of self is consequently essential in a human life. In what follows, I argue that egalitarian social relations have value because they allow us to see ourselves as an equal, worthy of pursuing the goods which are typically taken to matter in a human life (friendship, the raising of children, skill, beauty, etc.).

To defend this claim, it is relevant to start from Sangiovanni's idea that social inequalities contravene fundamental interests that all human beings share as social beings. More precisely, developing an integral sense of self requires to protect three main, basic individual interests: 1) partial control over what we choose to disclose to others to control how "we are to be recognized by others"; 2) "the presence of a sustaining social environment in which one is recognized as a member and a participant"; and 3) a partial control over "how our self-conception is presented through our body" (Sangiovanni 2017, 83-6). These basic interests obtain objectively for all sociable beings. From there, Sangiovanni develops a deontic perspective stating that these fundamental interests ground a "bundle of rights against certain kinds of inferiorizing treatment" (Sangiovanni 2017, 103).

In a nutshell, he argues that some types of inferiorizing treatment – those that constitute attacks to these three interests at the heart of our conception of self – are instances of wrongful treatment which should be prohibited. Despite this deontic orientation of his theory, it is nonetheless possible to build on this insight to argue that it is not only unequal *relationships* that are potential threats to our sense of self. Egalitarian relationships *have value* because they are constitutive of people's sense of self. This supports a telic perspective stating that egalitarian states of affairs are good because they are good for individuals, though in a non-instrumental way. Egalitarian relations are not only the right type of treatment, but they are also a good for persons, at least to the extent that they allow them to develop and sustain an integral sense of self over time.

Though Sangiovanni contends that our commitment to social equality should be understood negatively – that is, social inequalities are bad because they constitute threats to our fundamental

interests in developing and preserving an integral sense of self – one should also recognize the positive role egalitarian relationships play in this process. There is fundamental value in ensuring that a person’s sense of self is fully developed and can flourish over time. Interestingly, Sangiovanni seems to implicitly recognize this point, as the long quote on the preceding page suggests. Perhaps he does not explicitly consider the positive value of social equality because he remains too close to a deontic position. However, adopting a telic position allows us to move beyond deontic protections against wrongful social inequalities to also see that social equality has positive value: seeing oneself as an equal is necessary, at least to a certain extent, to ensure that individuals have a sufficiently strong sense of self. This integral sense of self is in part *constituted* by the assurance of our equal status provided by our shared institutions and interpersonal relationships.

A purely negative understanding of the wrongness of social inequality downplays the positive need to engage in egalitarian social relationships to develop an enduring sense of who we are as persons. This is captured by Taylor’s insistence on recognition as a “vital human need” (Taylor 1992, 26). As he points out, to be recognized by others is essential to who we are as social beings. Hence, a person’s sense of self can be diminished (or unduly inflated) not only when one is *misrecognized*, but also when there is no recognition to begin with. This is essential to us as dialogical beings because, for Taylor, our very identity is defined in dialogue with our surrounding social environment during our lifetime (Taylor 1992, 32-3). This highlights the importance of broadening our outlook to pay attention to both the deontic wrongness of direct attacks to our capacity to maintain a sense of self and the positive, telic value of engaging in egalitarian social relationships.

On this latter point, as Stoljar and Voigt (2021) have argued, experiencing egalitarian relationships throughout one’s life may be more important than typically thought to nurture one’s capacity to see oneself as an agent worthy of being regarded and treated as an equal. This capacity arguably requires both a belief in one’s equal status and experiential knowledge anchored in personal relationships (Stoljar and Voigt 2021, 152; see also Dillon 1997). This is so because our sense of self and seeing oneself as an equal has both a cognitive aspect and a deeply emotional one. They refer to Dillon’s notion of “basal self-respect” to support this claim. As Dillon writes:

Basal self-respect concerns our primordial interpretation of self and self-worth, the invisible lens through which everything connected with the self is viewed and presumed to be disclosed,

that is, experienced as real and true. The experiential understanding it constitutes develops first and sets the warp into which the threads of our experience are woven to create the layered understanding of self and self-worth in which we are always waddled. And it continually reverberates throughout the self, profoundly shaping all those aspects of cognition, valuation, affect, expectation, motivation, and reaction that bear on one's worth. In particular, it is the ground for the other kinds of self-respect, inasmuch as it serves as the interpretive medium for anything one could take as relevant to recognition and evaluation self-respect, thereby structuring their conceptual emotional, and behavioural possibilities. (Dillon 1997, 241-2)

The main takeaway here is that a person's integral sense of self is a matter of having secure basal self-respect or an experiential understanding that one is an equal. Further, seeing oneself as a person worthy of pursuits that comprise goods in a human life – such as knowledge, beauty, love, friendship – also rests on this experiential understanding. This is not only necessary during one's childhood, but throughout our lives. As Stoljar and Voigt argue, experiential self-respect cannot exist “in the absence of an adequate level of *assurance* that one has equal worth, both from institutions and other aspects of social reality” (Stoljar and Voigt 2021, 156, emphasis in original). As they write:

the affective dimension of self-respect cannot reliably be maintained in the absence of ongoing *external* assurance of one's equal status. Being assured of one's worth requires both assurance at the collective level—provided by, for instance, implementing and affirming egalitarian institutions and laws—and interpersonal assurance among citizens. (Stoljar and Voigt 2021, 157)

Taylor's dialogical conception of human lives, which resonates greatly with this conception of basal self-respect and the assurance needed to sustain it, reinforces the idea that there is positive value in engaging in egalitarian social relationships. In other words, P-TRE can be vindicated and grounded in the notion of the integral sense of self. Following the above argument, social equality is valuable because it allows individuals to see themselves as equals. This position in turn supports two further conclusions: the claim that social equality is non-instrumentally, personally valuable leads to the idea that social inequalities are disvaluable and that social equality simultaneously has positive value. Additionally, by grounding it in the individual “sense of self”, it avoids the groundlessness objection typically levied against telic relational egalitarianism. Though the above presentation of a person's sense of self and what is necessary to sustain it may be debatable, I do not think it is particularly mysterious or unintelligible.

Yet, two problems remain with the above argument. Firstly, a central issue is that social equality risks becoming one objective good among others. This, in turn, risks subjecting it to trade-offs. This potential problem is raised by Lippert-Rasmussen. As he points out, social equality may

only be *one* item on the list of what an objectively good life contains (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 165). For instance, if the list contains beauty, knowledge and social equality, someone may argue that a knowledgeable artist who treats others as inferiors may live a better life, all things considered, than someone who engages in egalitarian relationships but who is not particularly knowledgeable or artistic.<sup>18</sup>

Though this is a real problem which defenders of the personal, non-instrumental value of social equality will have to consider, it is not impossible to resolve. One approach would be to emphasize that DRE and TRE complement one another. As I consider in more detail in the next chapter, it is possible to argue that when pursuing the good life conflicts with social justice, typically, the latter should prevail (Schemmel 2021, 141-2). An appeal to the deontic constraint could limit the ways in which the good life may be pursued. Consequently, to say that a state of affairs is good or bad is, in itself, incomplete to fully flesh out our duties of justice and moral obligations towards others. This is simply the nature of a telic approach to equality.

Yet, the personal, non-instrumental approach, though it captures something right about the value of social equality, remains limited. This approach is committed to the dual claim that social equality is personally valuable in that it is good for individuals *and* that this goodness is person affecting. It follows that when it ceases to be person affecting, then it should also cease to be valuable. For instance, when a person exposed to egalitarian relationships reaches the necessary threshold to see themselves as an equal, social equality would no longer be valuable. At best, it would be of neutral value since engaging in additional egalitarian relationships would no longer be person affecting. Some may be attracted to this view, in that it could explain which types of social hierarchies are bad and when promoting social equality would be good. A state of affairs where social hierarchies have an impact on a person's sense of self may be bad, though some may say that it is not bad if there is no such impact.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> One could for instance think of the (fictionalized) account of Paul Gauguin's life presented by Williams (1981, 22). Williams considers the life of the painter who abandoned his family to pursue his art in Tahiti. Given that this move allowed him to realize his artistic genius – as per Williams reconstruction of Gauguin's life – one may wonder if this life was morally deficient or praiseworthy depending on how one balances beauty and social equality. If the objective list contains both social equality and aesthetic beauty, it may lead to the conclusion that Gauguin's life was morally praiseworthy even if he abandoned his wife and (numerous) children. This, I take it, should be an unpalatable conclusion for most relational egalitarians. This highlights another difference between the telic and deontic accounts since a deontic position would avoid these questions.

<sup>19</sup> Yet, it may still be wrong for deontic reasons of course.

However, this is a curious result. It is not difficult to imagine cases where someone enjoys a high level of assurance from their interpersonal relationships which allows them to see themselves as equals at the same time as they live in a racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise socially unequal society which, presumably, should be seen as bad even if it does not affect the person's sense of self. It seems counterintuitive to say that, in this case, the society is of neutral value. Would it not be better if there were no racist, sexist, homophobic or other social hierarchy? Many telic authors (in my opinion rightly) seem to think so. To support this idea, they tend to appeal to the *impersonal* value of social equality. In the next section, I evaluate this claim that social equality is impersonally valuable to argue that though it relies on the right intuition, it is nonetheless problematic.

#### 4. Can Social Equality Be Impersonally Valuable?

The non-instrumental, personal account examined so far cannot capture instances where social equality is valuable even if it does not affect people in the relevant ways. To capture these cases, it seems necessary to argue that social equality is non-instrumentally, impersonally good: social equality would thus be good in and of itself, “without being bad for anyone in particular” (Segall 2016b, 100). Though, as I will argue below, there are certain objections to this view, it does contain some truth: social equality can be good even if it does not affect anyone's welfare and is not constitutive of another intrinsically valuable good.

This impersonal view is presented as being mysterious and groundless because it is puzzling how social relationships can be good regardless of whether they are good for the persons involved. As Tomlin argues, impersonal value is typically associated with non-human objects:

The idea of impersonal value seems most clear when the value is completely independent of human lives. Consider, to use a well-know example, the Grand Canyon. Aside from the value that this has for people, it arguably has a value beyond that. Even if everyone in the world would be a tiny bit better off if we built a giant parking lot in the Grand Canyon, that would seem to disrespect the inherent (and impersonal) value that it holds. Another example might be biodiversity. Is the world in which a common big cat dies as bad as the one in which the last tiger dies? I think the second may well be worse (...). (Tomlin 2014, 173)

Impersonal value is assigned to things that are not necessarily valuable for people such as natural wonders, biodiversity, or even the survival of a species over time. Yet, Tomlin goes on to point out that it is much less intuitive to think impersonally about human affairs. He argues that the claim that personal and social relationships – which are necessarily deeply connected to our lives and

identities – could have value independently of the value they have for persons is very abstract and mysterious (Tomlin 2014, 173).

However, different practical cases do seem to point towards this conclusion. Even if a formal demonstration of the impersonal value of relational equality does seem difficult to develop, it may be much less abstract and mysterious than some such as Tomlin believe it to be. First, consider the following case presented by Elford to illustrate how social inequalities can be regrettable even if they do not affect a person's subjective welfare. It is possible to reach this result by highlighting that treating and regarding someone as an equal can come apart. Consequently, it is possible for me to treat someone as an equal even if I regard them as an inferior. On this point, Elford writes:

Consider (...) elitist-minded schoolboys, who as current decorum dictates treat their scouts with politeness and deference, but who nevertheless still regard them as servants. In cases such as this, perhaps being treated as an equal in this way is seen as a marker of being regarded as an equal and, as such, scouts who are so treated reasonably believe that they are regarded as equals by the (...) students they serve. Here the scouts labour under the misapprehension they are regarded as equals. (Elford 2017, 85)<sup>20</sup>

Elford takes this example to support the plausible claim that there is something bad about this situation even if it is not bad for anyone. Since the scouts have no way of knowing the actual beliefs held by the elitist students, then it cannot possibly affect their welfare or their sense of self. Nonetheless, something still seems bad with this situation.<sup>21</sup> From a telic perspective, one can argue that this state of affairs is bad at least in one respect: if we accept the claim that regarding someone else as an inferior is disvaluable because it arbitrarily and unduly ranks someone as being inferior to others, then this state of affairs is bad because the elitist students hold a disvaluable belief. Hence, Elford takes this case to point towards the idea that social equality is impersonally valuable. Social inequality here is disvaluable even if it is not bad *for* anyone for Elford (Elford 2017, 85-6).

This case is interesting because, I believe, it highlights something right about the impersonal approach: under an impersonal valuing of equality, it is possible to make sense of the

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<sup>20</sup> Note that scouts here refer to the cleaning staff of Oxford College. This is apparently what the cleaning staff is called at Oxford. Moreover, this example is itself inspired by an example presented by Cohen. See Cohen (2013, 197).

<sup>21</sup> Moreover, there is some place for debate as to how a deontic approach can explain in what ways the scouts are *wronged* here: as long as the students are respectful towards the scout it seems debatable whether they fail to respect the deontic constraint.



claim that a state of affairs in which the scouts are regarded as equals is better than one described. The value of this alternative state of affairs however would not be reducible to the impact it has on the subjective welfare or the sense of self of the persons involved. Nonetheless, the impersonal view also does not seem quite right. As the above example shows, we are not concerned with the disvalue of social inequalities in the abstract, without being concerned with the status of any particular individual.

To resolve this tension, as mentioned briefly above, there is a third possibility which, to my knowledge, has not yet been explored by relational egalitarians: social inequality is bad personally in a non-welfare affecting way.<sup>22</sup> At this point, we have reached the end of our journey and found the most plausible way to see why social equality is required or valuable: social equality is a personal good, in that it should matter to individuals and provides access to a type of relationship that has intrinsic, objective value. Its goodness is not reducible to the actual impact it has on individual welfare.

This brings us to the idea that egalitarian social relations are, in a sense, objectively valuable in a human life. It is simply a good which objectively gives meaning and substance to our lives (Griffin 1986, 66). This idea that relationships are intrinsically valuable in a human life is neither novel nor particularly revolutionary, though it has far-reaching implications for relational egalitarians. As Griffin points out, this idea is at least traceable to Aristotle in Western philosophy (Griffin 1986, 67-8; Aristotle 1999, 1155a-1156b30).<sup>23</sup> Interpersonal relationships have value “apart from the pleasure and benefit they give” (Griffin 1986, 67-8). In relational egalitarian terms, engaging in egalitarian social relationships is good in itself in a human life.<sup>24</sup> To illustrate, I borrow an example from Nozick (2013 [1974], 177). He imagines a situation where individual castaways live on separate islands – one castaway per island. Let’s assume for the purpose of this example that the resources are bountiful on each island and that all castaways have sufficient resources to live comfortably on their own. Nozick imagines that at some point they discover each other by

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<sup>22</sup> Though relational egalitarians have not explored this issue, this position is explicitly defended by at least one telic luck egalitarian. See Segall (2016b).

<sup>23</sup> Of course, here I do not intend to import all of Aristotle’s virtue ethics in my argument. The question of how relational egalitarianism and virtue ethics are connected will be a question for another time.

<sup>24</sup> One may wonder if this is not a way to come back to a constitutivist position such as the one developed above where I suggested that one could value equality because it is constitutive of our sense of self. The point here seems to be that egalitarian relationships are valuable because they are constitutive of a good human life. This is true since, in the end, this is a constitutive argument. However, it remains distinct from the argument developed in the above section.

radio communication via equipment that they find on the island, and this is the only way they can communicate with one another. At that moment, they can engage in some type of relationship even if they are too far from one another to effectively be able to transfer resources. I think that we should say that when they find the radio equipment, their situation improves. The state of affairs is better once they are in contact with one another. If one shares the intuition that social equality has intrinsic value, then this supports the conclusion that a state of affairs where the castaways effectively engage in interpersonal relationships has positive value. Moreover, the impact on individual welfare is not necessarily what explains how the situation improves. Suppose one castaway refuses to use the radio equipment they find on their island. In this case, it seems that this person is depriving themselves from an important human good: developing interpersonal relationships with others.<sup>25</sup> This idea, if plausible, clearly lies beyond deontic relational egalitarianism.

Hence, since one can argue that relationships have intrinsic value because they are a part of what gives life meaning and substance and that social inequalities are bad because they arbitrarily and unduly rank someone as being inferior to others, then it seems plausible to argue that engaging in *egalitarian* social relationships is intrinsically valuable in a human life. They are good for persons even if they do not affect individual, subjective welfare or, rather, the value of these relationships is not reducible to the pleasures and benefits they give. In a word, it leads to the conclusion that a world where people engage in egalitarian social relationships is a positively valuable state of affairs.

Yet, some, like Tomlin (2014, 174-5), may be unimpressed and object to this reasoning. *Why* are such (egalitarian) relationships valuable? Does it not simply assume in the end that (social) equality is some sort of “moral default”? There is no other way to respond than to bite the bullet. Yes, the position proposed here presumes that social equality is good, even if it does not affect individuals, and that egalitarian states of affairs are simply preferable to inegalitarian ones. However, I do not think that it is a hard bullet to bite, at least from a *relational* point of view.<sup>26</sup> As

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<sup>25</sup> A similar idea is presented by Arneson (2016, 558).

<sup>26</sup> Segall also considers whether his own telic *distributive* approach is problematic because it presumes that *distributive* equality is the moral default. He treats this objection seriously and responds by saying that distributive egalitarians should not attribute positive value to equality as such, but rather oppose certain types of bad distributive *inequalities* (Segall 2016b, 68). Yet, I believe the counter-argument takes a different significance from a relational egalitarian perspective.

stated above, the “moral default” position relies on two observations: 1) relationships are objectively valuable in a human life and 2) inegalitarian social relations are disvaluable because they arbitrarily and unduly rank someone as being inferior to others. Hence, there is positive value in engaging in egalitarian relationships with others in a human life. To reject this argument, one would have to argue either that interpersonal relationships are not objectively valuable – this is a possible line of arguments but I believe there is at least some plausibility in saying that they are objectively valuable – or, alternatively, one could argue that social inequalities are not, in fact, generally disvaluable. This latter attempt, I believe, is doomed to fail or at least would demand to adopt a very contentious position.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter discussed how it is possible to transpose telic egalitarianism from a distributive conception of justice to a relational one. As shown, telic *distributive* egalitarianism typically insists on the disvalue of certain distributive inequalities. In contrast, deontic *distributive* egalitarianism moves the focus from distributive patterns understood generally to distributive imbalances created through instances of wrongdoing. However, when this distinction between telic and deontic is applied to *relational* egalitarianism, the meaning of the distinction changes slightly to capture the difference between acting rightly and the non-instrumental value inherent in certain relationships.

From there, two different questions ought to be distinguished: 1) should telic relational egalitarians be concerned with the value of social equality or the disvalue of social inequality? and 2) Is this (dis)value understood personally or impersonally? As I argued above, there are good reasons to prefer the positive interpretation of TRE. If one is concerned with the non-instrumental, personal value of social equality then it leads to an objective-list account of what is valuable for individuals. From there, two positions are possible. Someone could argue that social equality is constitutive of another personally valuable good. For instance, by connecting social equality and our personal sense of self, it highlights that social equality plays a constitutive role in developing and sustaining an integral sense of self.

Yet, though this argument captures something important about the value of social equality, it proved to be too limited. When it is taken by itself, it leads to the conclusion that social equality

is only valuable to the extent that it constitutes another good. However, as the scouts example showed, it seems that social inequality remains bad even if it does not affect the sense of self of individuals or their welfare. However, I argued for a distinction between personal value that is person – or welfare – affecting and personal value that non-person – or non-welfare – affecting. This position is less counterintuitive than it seems. It relies on the idea that relationships are objectively valuable in a human life – which I believe is a plausible claim – and that social inequalities are generally disvaluable. This supports the conclusion that engaging in egalitarian social relationships has positive value. A state of affairs containing egalitarian social relationships is thus a positively valuable situation. In the next chapter, I move from these theoretical questions of what it means to adopt a telic conception of relational egalitarianism to consider what this approach entails in practice. I argue that this conception of social equality leads to a cosmopolitan conception of relational egalitarianism.

## Chapter 7

### Telic Relational Egalitarianism In Practice

While the previous chapter concentrated on theoretical issues, this final chapter tackles the practical implications of the telic approach to relational equality (TRE). I conclude this dissertation by identifying different tentative propositions to show that the graded, positive, telic, relational egalitarian position I propose is not simply an abstract claim about the goodness of states of affairs. It can also inform our actions and attitudes. I suggest that TRE leads to the idea that we have a cosmopolitan duty of justice to protect and promote social equality globally.

To defend this idea, I respond to three criticisms typically levied against TRE. This allows me to consider and begin to clarify its practical implications. First, some have argued that telic egalitarianism is problematic because it leads to an implausibly broad scope and counterintuitive conclusions (Norman 2002; Segall 2016). These arguments point out that if social equality is non-instrumentally valuable, this entails that we have duties of justice towards people who lived in the past and persons with whom we cannot possibly have contact such as distant human-like aliens. Since we cannot fulfil such duties, it then seems that TRE leads us to implausible conclusions. Moreover, it may be unclear how the telic position reconciles our obligations to particular individuals and our duty to bring about a good state of affairs. This problem takes two forms: 1) Does TRE not lead to the idea that we can sacrifice someone if it would lead to a more egalitarian states of affairs generally? 2) Does it not entail that we should sometimes sacrifice our own social relationships to promote the social standing of distant others? To respond to these concerns, I maintain that our humanist duty to promote social equality must be balanced with our deontic obligation to treat and regard others as equals.<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to distinguish the evaluative question

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<sup>1</sup> Another puzzle commonly linked to the telic understanding of equality is that it leads to the levelling-down objection: it leads to the idea that making persons equal would be preferable, even if all involved would be worse off in the egalitarian scenario (Parfit 2000, 97-9). However, I put this worry aside because it raises the difficult question of the relation between relational and distributive egalitarianism. For instance, a version of the levelling-down objection could state that it might be puzzling to pursue social equality at all costs even if it leads to a situation where people are, all things considered, worse off. Yet, I am not sure that this is a valid objection against relational equality since it seems reasonable to apply relational egalitarian goals precisely to limit distributive inequalities: that is, to state that a distributive inequality would lead to an objectionable social inequality does count as a strong reason to oppose this material inequality even if all would be, in a sense, better off. Moreover, the levelling-down objection does not seem to apply directly to relational egalitarianism. Indeed, to say that it would be counterintuitive to ensure that all are treated and regarded as equals is a type of levelling-down because some individuals would lose their privileges or superior

concerning the relative value of states of affairs and the normative question of what particular agents should do. However, this distinction should not be understood too stringently. Telic and deontic egalitarianism remain connected: we have a duty to promote social equality, to a certain extent, and a duty to treat and regard others as equals in our actions. This combination of duties provides a response to the objections of scope mentioned above.

The second concern is whether TRE adds anything to a sufficientarian conception of justice that protects universal human rights. And the third is that TRE seems to point towards a colonialist conception of global justice. I respond to both concerns. This allows me to specify – at least tentatively - the practical implications of TRE.

### 1. Objection 1: TRE Is Overly Demanding and Leads to Counterintuitive Conclusions

A first criticism that is addressed to the telic conception of justice is that it leads to an overly broad conception of equality and to implausible conclusions (Cloarec 2016, 546; Parfit 2000, 88; Segall 2016, 4–9). To flesh out this criticism, it is illuminating to consider the form it takes when it is levied against telic *distributive* egalitarianism. The argument that telic egalitarianism is overly broad and implausible is traceable to an argument by Parfit. Though he was more interested by distributive justice, his comment on this issue is nonetheless illuminating. As he writes:

What should be the *scope* of an egalitarian view? Who are the people who, ideally, should be equally well off? The simplest answer would be: everyone who ever lives. And, on the Telic View, this seems the natural answer. If it is in itself bad if some people are worse off than others, why should it matter where or when these people live? On such a view, it is in itself bad if there are or have been, even in unrelated communities, and in different centuries, people who are not equally well off. Thus it is bad if Inca peasants, or Stone Age hunter-gatherers, were worse off than we are now. (Parfit 2000, 88)

Applied to the subject at hand, this argument takes the following form: if TRE posits that social equality is non-instrumentally valuable, which entails that we should aim to both abolish inegalitarian social relations and promote egalitarian ones globally, this leads to implausible conclusions. It follows from TRE that it would be bad that people in the past or on distant planets are not regarded and treated as equals. The objection consequently takes a slightly different form when we move from distributive to relational egalitarianism. From a distributive standpoint, the

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standing would miss the goal of relational egalitarianism. To level-down in this sense is precisely the point. For a more detailed discussion, see Lippert-Rasmussen (2021, 426-9).

issue is that people living now are better off than people living in the past; this is what explains the inequality. However, from a relational standpoint the problem is that people in the past lived in a suboptimal state of affairs. The problem here is that this appears to be a radical (and rather depressing) conclusion because we cannot possibly improve their situation. Even if we regard people who lived in the past as our equals, we cannot possibly ensure that they have access to egalitarian relationships. The same with distant human-like aliens. In what follows, I suggest that to say that past or distant social inequalities are bad is not necessarily overly demanding or implausible because we should distinguish the question of the value of a particular state of affairs from that of what can be done to correct bad situations or promote better situations.

### *1.1. Incas, Aliens, and Social Equality: Towards a Telic, Natural Duty of Justice*

On the relational reading of the overdemandingness objection, TRE leads to implausible conclusions because it creates obligations of justice that cannot possibly be met. By saying that we should ensure that all people who ever lived be treated and regarded as equals, then we would have a duty to ensure that Incas and distant aliens also engage in egalitarian relationships. Since this is obviously impossible, we cannot hope to fulfil all of our obligations of justice (Cloarec 2016, 546). Yet, this objection is not insurmountable and, on the contrary, highlights what I believe to be an attractive feature of TRE. To respond to the objection, it is enlightening to consider how *distributive* telic egalitarians have dealt with it, since the same intuition will be at play here.

Segall (2016) presents a convincing response to this objection. As mentioned in the previous chapter, he adopts a distributive telic approach to equality according to which arbitrary inequalities that “leave some individuals worse off than others (...) through no fault of their own” are always bad (Segall 2016, 13). As he recognizes, this entails that arbitrary distributive inequalities between us and past generations or distant human-like aliens are bad. On this, he writes:

[Telic egalitarianism (TE)] is committed, I concede, to the view that the inequality between us and people in the past is bad. What might underlie the objection according to which this implication is counterintuitive? First, it is allegedly silly to pursue equality in this case because we cannot possibly benefit the dead. And second (and given the first point), it does not make sense to make ourselves worse off in the name of such equality with past individuals. (Segall 2016, 4-5)

To respond to this potential problem, Segall points out that recognizing a state of affairs as bad is distinct from the question of what, if anything, should be done about it (Segall 2016, 5). To judge

that a state of affairs is bad one simply needs to answer in the affirmative to the following question: “*supposing one could* do something to rectify a certain state of affairs, would one have a reason to?” (Segall 2016a, 5). The question whether one effectively could or should redress the situation is distinct. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this means that we can identify a situation as bad or unjust, even if nothing can or should be done to redress it. For instance, making ourselves worse off for the sake of equality would be absurd. Yet, one can recognize that the fact that the Incas were much worse off than we are is bad (Segall 2016a, 5); this is not necessarily counterintuitive, but it simply ensues from the fact that evaluative and normative questions ought to be separated. It is possible to recognize that the fact that a state of affairs in the past is bad and simultaneously accept that there is nothing we can do about it.

When we move from *distributive* to *relational* telic egalitarianism, a similar response is available. As argued in the previous chapter, relational egalitarians should adopt a graded understanding of TRE accordingly to which a situation improves the more egalitarian it becomes (and conversely) (Lippert-Rasmussen 2021, 430). The very broad scope of telic distributive egalitarianism is consequently replicated here: if we consider that it is in itself problematic that social inequalities exist and that it is valuable for egalitarian relations to be created because they are good for individuals, then we should be concerned with both the existence of social inequalities and the lack of social equality in the past or on distant planets. Yet, Segall’s response remains available when we adopt a relational egalitarian conception of justice: evaluative and normative questions should also be kept distinct on the relational view.

It is possible to evaluate a state of affairs on its own to consider if it approximates our ideal of perfect relational equality or if it (more or less) deviates from it. Yet, because this is a distinct question from the one about how to redress a bad state of affairs or how to aim for a better world overall there are reasons to consider past social inequalities in Inca or feudal societies bad even if we cannot redress them. Telic egalitarianism, in both its distributive and relational variants, entails that we can assess a state of affairs independently of whether anything can be done to change it.

This is a central difference between telic and deontic egalitarianism. As discussed in chapter 4, following deontic relational egalitarianism, an injustice entails that it was produced socially or that we can identify agents responsible for correcting the situation. In contrast, a telic approach simply aims to evaluate the relative value inherent in states of affairs. This means that telic



egalitarianism can judge certain states of affairs to be bad even if they are not *wrong* following a deontic approach. Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to assume that the telic and the deontic do not communicate in important ways. Though the question of how they interact and can be combined goes far beyond the scope of this dissertation, I want to suggest that a combination of telic and deontic relational egalitarianism can productively inform our moral obligations. As Zimmerman succinctly puts it, the good and the right could be interrelated in three ways: “The first is that the right is to be accounted for in terms of the good; the second is that the good is to be accounted for in terms of the right” and, the third, is a combination of the two (Zimmerman 2015, 15 and 28). The telic position developed here I believe illustrates the latter possibility. In this section I consider the first possibility: that is, how telic relational egalitarianism can inform our moral obligations.

Consider first whether the right should be explained in terms of the good. This means, very roughly, that the right thing to do is to promote what is good. This is clearly captured by a consequentialist position which relies on the basic idea that: “the right thing to do is the best that one can do” (Zimmerman 2015, 15-6). The idea that social equality is good in itself, in that it can be good even if it is not welfare affecting, could then be used to ground the idea that there is a natural duty to promote egalitarian states of affairs. The right thing to do, is simply to do the best one can to improve the overall goodness of the world. This aspect of telic egalitarianism is illustrated by Temkin’s position. As he writes, a telic position leads to the idea that “we have some (prima facie) moral reason to alleviate the inequality if it *were* possible for us to do so” (Temkin 1993, 14). This means that we can judge that a situation is bad even if we cannot redress it; and, if it turns out that it *is* possible for us to redress it, then we have a prima facie reason to do so.

The argument for this natural duty is rather straightforward. It appeals to the cosmopolitan or humanity-centered intuition that the scope of our obligations of justice is not determined only by our existing relations or by our membership in particular associations. This intuition states that principles of justice should include all persons as persons and that some egalitarian principles of justice obtain between all (Caney 2011, 507).<sup>2</sup> As Wenar puts it, the argument behind this humanist position is both simple and quite strong. It posits that:

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<sup>2</sup> Note that this does not necessarily entail that we only have duties of justice towards fellow human beings. In this dissertation, I remain agnostic on whether we have duties of justice towards animals or other non-human entities. Moreover, it is essential to see that this position does not entail that we have no particular, associative duties of justice which are triggered by our existing social relations. The claim that *some* egalitarian principles of justice obtain

[the] life of each individual is of great importance, and is of equal importance, and nothing else is as important as the flourishing of individuals. So a primary moral goal must be to create a world in which the equal moral importance of each life is honored equally (...). Thus every person has a responsibility to respond to the equal value of human lives (...). (Wenar 2008, 404)

If one accepts the claims defended in the previous chapter, then this humanist argument points towards a universal *prima facie* duty to promote egalitarian relationships globally. This duty is grounded in the idea that social equality is a universal good in that it is good for all persons regardless of their context or situation. All agents acting on the global stage thus have at least a *prima facie* reason to protect and promote egalitarian social relations globally, when possible, to aim for a more egalitarian world. In that sense, evaluative and normative considerations communicate to the extent that evaluative questions are essential to understanding how we are to actualize our humanist duty of justice to aim for a better world.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, a focus on states of affairs is also extremely useful to see that there is value in implementing incremental changes to aim for the realization of the ideal where all person are treated and regarded as equals. I believe that this cosmopolitan duty does not necessarily entail that we should only be concerned with what is directly achievable now. To specify, this cosmopolitan duty implies that there are good reasons to not only create new relationships, but also to act on a structural basis to establish the necessary conditions for egalitarian social relationships to obtain in the future.

This point is highlighted by Gilabert (2012, 137). To illustrate this idea, he refers to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Article states the following:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (UDHR art. 25)

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universally is not to be confused with the claim that *all* duties of justice are universal in scope. I discuss this point below. See also Caney (2011).

<sup>3</sup> Notice this this claim does not entail that we should force individuals to engage in egalitarian relationships. Meaningful social relationships cannot be distributed like a currency but they have to evolve organically. Yet, this does not mean that we can do nothing to render these relationships more likely. It is possible for instance to create the background conditions which enable individuals to engage in egalitarian relationships. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, this comes with both a certain level of assurance that one is an equal from interpersonal and emotional sources, and institutional protections, such as equal protection by the rule of law, to ensure that individuals have the capacity to engage in egalitarian social relations.

Gilabert points out that, due to its extensive nature, it is impossible to guarantee the right to all now. Yet, it is possible to implement successive reforms to aim for a situation where, eventually, this right will be guaranteed to all (Gilabert 2012, 138). Accordingly, Gilabert identifies “dynamic duties” which are, in effect: “duties to expand the agents’ feasible sets. These duties are peculiar in that they are not merely focused on what is to be done within certain circumstances, but also on changing certain circumstances so that new things can be done” (Gilabert 2012, 112). These dynamic duties are in line with TRE in that they rely on the idea that we can have a duty to aim for certain states of affairs.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, distinguishing between the evaluation of states of affairs and normative questions concerning what agents should do does not necessarily lead to implausible conclusions and is in fact an attractive feature of the telic view when compared to a pure deontic approach. It allows us to identify future desirable states of affairs which may not be attainable now, but may be obtained after a series of successive reforms. It pushes us to look beyond our existing social relationships to consider how it may be possible to attain more valuable states of affairs. In what follows, however, I argue that this humanist duty of justice should be combined with the deontic constraint.

### *1.2. Combining Deontic and Telic Relational Egalitarianism*

In response to this argument for a humanist duty, critics may respond that it still leads to unattractive conclusions precisely because the duty arises from a purely telic view; it is explained by employing only states of affairs. Two main problems arise. First, it seems to follow that it would be *prima facie* acceptable to treat someone as an inferior if this would lead to a more egalitarian situation overall. Second, it suggests that individuals should promote egalitarian relations generally even if this comes at the expense of their own personal relationships. In what follows I consider each problem in turn to argue that a combination of TRE and DRE can resolve them.

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<sup>4</sup> This could be used to explain why we may have some obligations of justice towards future generations but not towards people who lived in the past. By our actions, we can try to ensure that future generations can entertain egalitarian social and political relationships though this is not possible for those who lived in the past. However, I put this complicated question aside here.

### 1.2.1. Can We Sacrifice Someone For a Better State of Affairs?

Imagine you are confronted with the following choice: treating X as an inferior would mean that five other agents would have the necessary means to stand as equals in their own context.<sup>5</sup> You can either treat X as an inferior to maximize the number of egalitarian social relations or treat X as your equal and thus attain a suboptimal situation where fewer egalitarian social relations exist overall. This should be an unpalatable conclusion for relational egalitarians, yet a pure telic view concerned with the relative value of states of affairs would presumably prefer situations where more egalitarian social relations exist. Therefore, if TRE is committed to the humanist duty outlined above, it can lead to unattractive conclusions. Two things can be said in response. First, we may have prudential reasons not to readily discard the interests of others since this might desensitize us to the fact that social equality is fundamentally good. Even if the second state of affairs is better in one respect, this does not mean that we should be prepared to generalize the idea that it is always a good thing to sacrifice the interest of one for the majority. In the long run, this might prove to be detrimental to the goal of attaining a more egalitarian state of affairs.

Second, recall that in chapter 4 I did not argue that we should reject DRE, but simply that, on its own, it cannot explain why we have reasons to maintain some relationships over time or to create new social and political relationships. DRE should be complemented by the telic view, it does not erase it. This captures the second way to connect goodness and rightness highlighted by Zimmerman. Following this second view, the right is not only what maximizes the good, but it can also be what is *fitting* to do. To illustrate this distinct perspective, Zimmerman appeals to our ordinary intuitions and language:

In English, (...) instead of saying that something is good, we often say that it is *valuable*, where to value something, in the relevant sense, is to have one of a variety of positive attitudes towards it, and the suffix ‘-able’ expresses not simply the fact that the thing in question *can* be valued but that it is *right* or *fitting* (or *suitable* or *appropriate*...) to value it. (Zimmerman 2015, 21)

This, I believe, captures the deontic intuition according to which it is, in a sense, necessary to treat and regard others as equals because it is the attitude that befits the recognition that human beings are moral equals. A certain respect is owed to individuals as persons.<sup>6</sup> This consequently points towards a slightly different idea than the humanist duty of justice presented above. We can see this

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<sup>5</sup> A similar scenario is presented by Lippert-Rasmussen (2021, 432).

<sup>6</sup> For an example of such an argument see Carter (2011).

clearly by underlining that the notion of “value” is used differently in both arguments. In the cosmopolitan argument, value is assigned to particular types of relationships which are taken to be good for persons: as I highlighted in the previous chapter, social equality is both constitutive of our integral sense of self and possesses personal value which goes beyond the way in which it impacts individual welfare. From the deontic perspective, however, value is assigned to the preeminent status of persons as persons in such a way that we ought to treat others as equals: in this way, we honour our equal moral status.<sup>7</sup>

My suggestion is that relational egalitarians should acknowledge that their position relies on both duties: a deontic duty to treat and regard others as equals, and a humanist duty to ensure that all persons have access to egalitarian relationships.<sup>8</sup> Of course, this is a very quick portrait which will inevitably be incomplete and raises many more question than it resolves. Yet, if we recognize both types of duty, there will be limits to how our cosmopolitan duty of justice can be actualized. Our deontic duty to treat and regard all as equals in our actions is likely to restrict how we can pursue egalitarian states of affairs.<sup>9</sup> It is reasonable to say that the way in which we aim for better states of affairs should be generally justifiable to those who are affected by the means we use to reach our ends. Therefore, telic relational egalitarians can respond to the worry that aiming for egalitarian outcomes may come at the expense of the interests of particular individuals once we

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<sup>7</sup> Note that by highlighting that both considerations, the humanist and the deontic approaches remain distinct though they can, and should, be adopted by relational egalitarians. This, I believe, allows me to avoid a potential circularity objection. As Zimmerman points out, a potential problem arises for those who want to argue that we should both conceive of the right in term of the good and the good in term of the right because this can lead to a very circular argument. On this point he writes: “Certainly, if a particular sense of ‘good’ is to be analyzed in terms of a particular sense of ‘right,’ then that same sense of ‘right’ cannot be analyzed in terms of that same sense of ‘good,’ since combining the analyses would be viciously circular. But such circularity is avoided if either of the proposed accounts does not constitute an analysis (of the sort in question, one that involves ‘breaking down’ a complex concept into simply concepts) or if the sense of either ‘good’ or ‘right’ at issue are not the same in one account as in the other” (Zimmerman 2015, 25). The proposed analysis thus allows to avoid the circularity problem because value is understood in two distinct senses here: on the one hand, value is associated to personal, non-instrumental goods, on the other, value is associated with the particular status assigned to human beings.

<sup>8</sup> This potential combination was hinted at by Temkin’s position (2003, 25) and the work of O’Neill (2008) and Lippert-Rasmussen (2021). However, to my knowledge, no one has explored what this combination means when we try to combine goodness and rightness.

<sup>9</sup> Here, I add the qualifier “generally,” since I do not want to commit to the idea that it is never possible to override the deontic constraint. My worry here is that, if pushed too far, the deontic constraint may be used to stifle some types of protests and social movements which aim to modify an unjust status quo. I am personally sympathetic to the idea that civility is not a *sine qua non* to how people can protest and try and change an unjust status quo. However, I put this argument aside for the moment since it would take me too far from the main argument at hand. I simply want to leave open the possibility that, in certain – most probably rare – circumstances, it is possible to override the deontic constraint. On the possibility and legitimacy of *uncivil* disobedience, see Delmas (2018; 2020).

recognize that our cosmopolitan duty of justice does not erase the deontic constraint: it complements it.<sup>10</sup>

### *1.2.2. Personal and Global Relationships*

The idea that we can combine TRE and DRE is also useful to respond to the second worry mentioned above: how is it possible to reconcile our relationships with people close to us and our duties towards distant others? Is it not a consequence of TRE that we may have to sacrifice close relationships to promote social equality overall? This worry takes on particular importance when we consider issues of global justice. TRE could thus lead to an objectionable form of globalism. It would posit that egalitarian social relations have non-instrumental value and ought to be promoted globally, and yet simultaneously fail to see that our existing social relations also matter to the persons engaged in them and may represent more urgent or significant demands in the context of daily lives.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, the combination of DRE and TRE can acknowledge that some obligations arise from our existing relationships. Some relationships like friendships or a familial bond between a parent

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<sup>10</sup> O'Neill himself considers that this combination allows to prioritize our obligations of justice in that we should recognize that our obligations to those closer to us are more urgent than distant others. As he writes: "Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism (...) holds that the badness of distributive inequalities can be explained by reference to the badness of the kinds of social relations that such inequalities bring about. Accordingly, the question of the degree to which distributive inequalities will manifest these forms of badness will depend to some large degree on the nature and intimacy of the social relations that exist between the individuals in question. (...) Non-Intrinsic egalitarianism can also take the view that the degree of interaction between different individuals, peoples, or societies can determine the extent to which a distributive inequality between them is objectionable. Where there is minimal interaction between two individuals, or two groups, an inequality between those individuals or groups will be less significant (...) than an equivalent inequality that exists between two individuals, or two groups, that are in intimately close contact. The relative strength of the social relations between peoples or societies will, on the Non-Intrinsic egalitarian view, in part determine the degree of concern we should have or distributive inequalities that obtain between those peoples or societies." (O'Neill 2008, 137-8) Though O'Neill is here mainly interested with distributive inequalities, he also seems to make a larger point about the degree of normative concern that is owed to persons. He seems to defend the view that stronger social relations entail that we should be more concerned with the position and status of those who are (socially) closer to us. However, I am not certain that this conclusion necessarily follows from the combination of a deontic and a telic conception of relational equality. That is, it seems possible to contend that we ought to be more concerned with the position of distant others than those who are close to us in certain circumstances. In other words, it seems *prima facie* justifiable to accord more importance to the interests of distant others when their basic interests are being seriously threatened. The argument that deontic considerations ought to constrain the way in which we aim to further social equality does not entail that our close social relations always act as trumps when we balance our obligations towards distant others.

<sup>11</sup> A similar problem is considered by O'Neill. See (O'Neill 2008, 137).

and a child may ground special duties which entail a type of legitimate partiality towards those closer to us (on this point, see Kolodny 2003, 153; Kolodny 2010; Scheffler 2010). These partial obligations and humanist obligations to distant others are not necessarily at odds. What's more, entertaining close egalitarian relationships may in fact be correlated with a stronger sensitivity to the position of distant others. Hence, there is no necessary tension between aiming for a more egalitarian world and maintaining relationships with people close to us.

To illustrate this point, “grounded” cosmopolitans have argued that our obligations towards our co-nationals and distant others can be reconciled. They typically claim that experiencing egalitarian social relations is causally connected to a readiness to support the struggle of others in the fight against exploitation and oppression. Evolving in an egalitarian context presumably allows individuals to comprehend and engage morally with the experiences of distant others. This point is underlined by Kymlicka and Walker. As they write: “In [the rooted cosmopolitan] view, we can come to understand the moral significance of ‘the other’ only because we have first been immersed in our own particular communities and ways of life” (Kymlicka and Walker 2012, 4). This immersion allows us to see distant others as moral beings endowed not only with abstract universal rights, but as embodied individuals with demands, interests, and needs (on this point, see also Appiah 2018, 2019; Ferguson 2009; Ypi 2010, 605-8).

Rooted cosmopolitans maintain that experiencing egalitarian social relations, especially in a national, domestic context, nurtures the idea that we owe it to distant others to treat and consider them as equals, and that all persons share the same basic moral equality. This is akin to the idea that the formation of loving and trusting bonds within the family is important for children to develop a certain sense of justice later in life (Kymlicka and Walker 2012, 5). This cosmopolitan mechanism is perhaps best illustrated by the work of Ypi. As she writes:

Shared political membership may be a facilitator rather than an obstacle on the way to satisfying cosmopolitan claims. (...) Established patterns of social interaction within familiar and stable structures of social cooperation can generate expectations of compliance and mobilize resources for political and social participation. And while the local context facilitates interactions among insiders, it does not preclude extending these local attachments to outsiders. (...) The intuition here is that the collective self-comprehension of a people through political participation in a particular community life provides moral solidity and political efficiency to claims of social justice. Local community (...) as well as citizenship conceived as an ideal that allows us progressively to extend recognition to previously excluded groups, can strengthen efforts to identify and oppose injustice. (Ypi 2010, 606-7)

Even though it appeals to empirical claims which would warrant more investigation, this idea at least shows that, conceptually, we have no reason to assume that there is a necessary contradiction between engaging in close social relations and being actively concerned with the social status of distant others.

Moreover, standing as equals in our own context and recognizing the non-instrumental, personal value of egalitarian relationships need not be thought of as two opposite tendencies but rather as two elements working in tandem in practice. To stand as equals in our own context and providing support to distant others to ensure that they can also be treated as equals are compatible aims. When confronted with the question of how to effectively promote social equality and to aim for more egalitarian states of affairs, it may not be fruitful to consider this to be a zero-sum game: it is not necessarily a choice between either promoting social equality close to us *or* aiming for more just states of affairs by promoting social equality abroad. Promoting social justice domestically, considering how our own actions are conducive to global injustices and aiming to promote social equality globally may be mutually reinforcing mechanisms to promote more egalitarian states of affairs all things considered. TRE is not necessarily incompatible with the idea that we hold special obligations towards those close to us. It simply highlights that our deontic obligations of justice do not cover the whole domain of justice.

## **2. Objection 2: Telic Relational Egalitarianism Is Redundant**

Someone might worry that the position developed here reaches a peculiar conclusion: if DRE generally constrains how to actualize TRE, then is TRE any more than a purely symbolic commitment to regard all as equals globally? This would be a rather underwhelming conclusion. I take the potential worry to be that TRE, in the end, adds little, if anything, to our conception of global sufficientarian justice beyond a symbolic commitment to regard all persons as equals. After all, even if one is sensitive to the struggle of (distant) others against social inequalities, it does not necessarily follow that one will act on this sensitivity. More precisely, one might wonder if the telic view adds anything to basic human rights protections: given that I argued that TRE is not consistent with concern for our existing social relations, in what ways does it go beyond sufficientarian justice in the global realm? This is especially important since someone subscribing to DRE only could recognize that we have universal humanitarian, but not egalitarian, duties of



justice. For instance, this is how Sangiovanni, Freeman, Blake, Risse and Miller, all considered in the first two chapters, understand their positions.

Consider Sangiovanni's position – just to take one particular author who has occupied us throughout this dissertation. As previously discussed,<sup>12</sup> his position retains the distinction between egalitarian justice, restricted to certain relations of cooperation, and humanitarian justice, which comprises sufficientarian, humanitarian obligations to uphold and protect basic human rights globally. To recall, Sangiovanni argues that states are characterized by special relations of reciprocity which give rise to egalitarian claims of justice, while humanitarian justice is concerned with protecting all from systematic violations of their basic moral status (Sangiovanni 2007; Sangiovanni 2017, 207 and 254). For him, the international system of human rights should be designed to protect all persons from particularly cruel “practices such as genocide, slavery, inhuman and degrading treatment, invidious discrimination, retroactive punishment, avoidable mass starvation, indefinite detention without due process of law, religious persecution, war crimes, and so on” (Sangiovanni 2017, 254). Human rights are consequently essential protections against particularly cruel and dehumanizing treatment. How is the position proposed in this dissertation distinct from a humanitarian commitment to protect basic human rights? Indeed, it may just be functionally equivalent.

In response, I want to suggest that TRE implies a move beyond human rights as they are typically understood and requires a broader understanding of global justice. As evident in Sangiovanni's quote above, typically, human rights are seen as responding to a particularly urgent class of harms. This understanding is common in contemporary literature. As Nickel puts it, they are “high-priority” rights the violation of which amounts to grave injustices (Nickel 2019; see also Cranston 1967; Griffin 2008, 79–80). However, a telic relational egalitarian position goes beyond grave violations of justice to encompass not only basic human rights, but also the value of egalitarian relationships more generally. As I argued above, TRE encompasses both the disvalue of inferiorizing treatment *and* the positive value of engaging in egalitarian social relationships. This second class of telic considerations in particular necessitates a move beyond the protection against extremely cruel practices only. TRE thus includes moral commitments in addition to the protection

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<sup>12</sup> See chapter 3, section 2.1.

of basic human rights. Yet these commitments are not completely at odds with what we might expect from transnational institutions.

Consider again the case of sweatshop work and the collapse of the Rana Plaza. As I argued in chapter 4, sweatshop work is an instance of global structural injustice. In the case of the Rana Plaza in particular it is necessary to situate the collapse of the building within a global structure to understand how entrenched patterns of interaction, both global and local, led to the creation of pockets of vulnerability which rendered the workers vulnerable to the violation of their basic human rights. To elaborate how to correct such unjust structures, I followed the position of Ackerly (2018). She argues that it is necessary to both critically examine our existing relationships to see how some of our actions led to the injustice, and prospectively, it is also necessary to move beyond the status quo and create new social and political relations to change the structure. This prospective element is grounded in a “democratic impulse.” To recall, as Ackerly writes on this topic:

Just responsibility follows a democratic impulse toward making any political community more inclusive and a global impulse of recognizing that the boundaries between political communities are increasingly dynamic and porous. The impulse to take responsibility for injustice is an extension of the impulse to hear and associate with others. The impulse to take responsibility for injustice exhibits a valuing of the integrity, dignity, freedom, and humanity of others. When people take responsibility in the ways prescribed by just responsibility, they expand the boundaries of political community, rendering these more fluid in ways that some will interpret with cosmopolitan impulses. (Ackerly 2018, 21)

The telic position presented here allows us to make sense of this impulse and to highlight how it is good: this impulse “to hear and associate with others,” with the goal of aiming for a more egalitarian world, explains why we have a reason to equalize the status quo: to maintain and create relationships over time to eventually – and hopefully – attain a better state of affairs. This undeniably demands that we move beyond basic human rights. It is not enough to protect people from invidious discrimination, inhuman treatment, or avoidable mass starvation to fulfill our cosmopolitan duty of justice. It is also worthwhile to work towards a world where all have the necessary means and resources to be treated as equals.

Moreover, this is not only an associativist argument. This is one of the main contributions of the present argument in favour of TRE. We have reasons to actualize this democratic impulse even if there is no relation between us and distant others. Moreover, this conclusion, I believe, resonates with some of our contemporary global commitments. Consider the UN Sustainable Development goals (UN 2015). These goals, adopted by all the members of the UN, encompass

not only ending poverty, hunger, and providing basic healthcare to all, but also more far-reaching goals such as to:

- Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family (...).
- empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

and

- Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all. (UN 2015)

Of course, the point here is not to say that UN representatives were all relational egalitarians bent on inscribing relational egalitarian objectives within these developmental goals, but rather to highlight that TRE can make sense of these goals as general demands of cosmopolitan justice: telic relational egalitarianism supports the conclusion that it would be a good thing to generally “promote the rule of law,” to “promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all,” and to promote gender equality, among other (social) egalitarian goals. These objectives appear as the actualization of the cosmopolitan, humanist duty of justice. In other words, these documents look beyond particularly harmful practices and attempt to positively promote valuable institutional features and social relations. Thus, TRE goes beyond a symbolic commitment to recognize the basic equality of all and to regard all persons as equals — given that regarding all as equals does not necessarily entail any actions or practical commitments — and includes a commitment to promote egalitarian relationships. It requires us to look beyond our existing relationships to include prospective questions pertaining to promoting and eventually attaining a more egalitarian state of affairs.

### Objection 3: Is TRE a Colonialist Position?

Nonetheless, a third and final potential objection arises concerning the practical implications of TRE. The worry is that TRE may lead to an imperialist view because it adopts a narrow idea of what it means to treat and regard others as equals. Applied globally, this could then fuel intolerant and even colonialist policies. Such worries are central in the debates surrounding the ethics of foreign intervention. As Rafanelli has recently pointed out (2021a, 2021b), many contemporary authors associate foreign intervention with intolerance towards difference in collective choices (Rawls 1999a; Godfrey-Smith and Kerr 2019), a failure to recognize the legitimacy of foreign political institutions (Altman and Wellman 2009; Buchanan 2004), or a way to perpetuate colonial hierarchies (Anghie 2006; Koskenniemi 2001; Mutua and Anghie 2000). Though these criticisms underline real problems, I believe the combined position proposed here can dampen this worry by arguing that the deontic constraint restricts how it is permissible to treat and regard others. Not all types of foreign intervention or influence are illegitimate. As Rafanelli points out, we can adopt a nuanced, respectful conception of interventions.

Authors studying the ethics of foreign intervention are typically concerned with coercive and militaristic actions by states. Yet, “foreign interventions” can also include a number of different politics and behaviours – which may not be characterized by force or coercion – and different actors – including individuals or NGOs (Rafanelli 2021, 237; see also Bellamy 2018; Fabre 2018; Pattison 2018a, 2018b). As such, here I follow Rafanelli who adopts a very broad definition of interventions to include all “*deliberate attempts to promote justice in foreign societies*” (Rafanelli 238, emphasis in original). Once we expand and nuance our definition of “foreign intervention”, we can distinguish between different instances along two axes: 1) depending on the degree of control the intervening entity has<sup>13</sup> and 2) depending on the degree of oppositional influence of the intervention.<sup>14</sup> With these distinctions in place, it is possible to see how some interventions are not

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<sup>13</sup> That is, “the degree to which it deprives recipients of the ability to freely adopt politics of their own choosing, as a result of their own freely informed judgements.” (Rafanelli 2021a, 239)

<sup>14</sup> Here, oppositional influence refers to the idea that “[foreign] influencers may employ means that interfere more or less extensively with the operation of recipient societies’ formal political institutions (...). Some foreign influencers, like NATO in Libya, seek to achieve their ends by overthrowing recipients’ institutions entirely. However, not all foreign influence is *regime-changing influence*. Foreign influencers may instead pursue their ends by working in opposition to *some* elements of recipients’ institutions (e.g. by preventing the enforcement of a particular law or interfering with the normal operation of some government agency) without attempting to bring their collapse.” (Rafanelli 2021a, 241).

necessarily coercive, can interact with and recognize the legitimacy of state institutions, and, can, in fact, aim to contest colonial and neocolonial hierarchies. Employing the deontic constraint to restrict the ways we treat and regard others transnationally does not entail that all types of foreign interventions, understood broadly, are disrespectful or objectionable.

To illustrate, Rafanelli considers the case of foreign opposition to an immigration bill in Arizona (SB 1070) (Rafanelli 2021a, 242; see also Sherman 2012). As she writes:

[this bill] contained several anti-immigrant provisions – including one allowing warrantless arrests of people police believed to be undocumented. When SB 1070 made its way to the US Supreme Court, several Latin American Countries submitted *amicus* briefs opposing it. This was, at least in part, an attempt to promote justice in the US, as evidenced by Mexico’s invocation of its citizens’ rights and the rights of other Latin Americans in the US. (Rafanelli 2021a, 242)<sup>15</sup>

In this case, we have an instance of foreign intervention—understood broadly to include different types of influence — which fully recognizes the legitimacy of US institutions (the foreign countries interacted with the US court and aimed to convince the court to strike down the bill).

This captures the idea mentioned above that DRE ought to generally constrain the ways in which TRE is actualized in practice; when relational egalitarians accept that their view relies on two duties of justice – a deontic constraint and a humanist duty to promote social equality – it is possible to foster social equality to respect and fully recognize our interlocutors as equals whom we can try and persuade to engage in egalitarian social and political relationships but that we should not force to do so (Rafanelli 2021a, 243). Moreover, the fundamental tenets of relational egalitarianism themselves point towards the idea that one should always be wary of imposing particular values on others in ways that would produce problematic patterns of domination. Therefore, prudence in transnational interventions should be the norm and relational egalitarians should be very sensitive to the question of how to effectively promote social equality without reproducing objectionable social or political hierarchies. However, this prudence does not amount to an inescapable moral relativism according to which we should abandon all cosmopolitan hope of promoting social equality at the global level. To be able to function as an equal presupposes access to basic goods and some minimal status in society which can be clearly violated under some

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<sup>15</sup> In its brief, the Mexican government writes: “SB 1070 adversely impacts (...) the rights and lives of Mexican citizens and other persons of Latin American descent in Arizona.” (*Amicus Curiae* Brief of the United Mexican States, 2012, 4; cited in Rafanelli 2012, 242). In the end, though SB 1070 was not fully reversed, some of its more controversial elements were struck down by the supreme court’s judgment.

circumstances. Further, promoting equality and accepting the self-determination of collectives do not have to be considered to be opposed goals as long as collective self-determination is understood as implying a commitment to the inclusion of all co-citizens in shared political and social life.

### **3. Conclusion**

In conclusion, by considering three different criticisms of telic relational egalitarianism, I have tried to specify what it entails in practice and how it complements deontic relational egalitarianism. Firstly, as argued, though it does entail a recognition that some past injustices are bad or unjust, this is not necessarily an absurd conclusion once we distinguish between evaluative and normative questions. Moreover, this comes with an important upshot in that, when the two are distinguished, it becomes clearer how evaluative judgements can inform normative conclusions. That is, it becomes clearer when we should aim to redress a bad state of affairs or aim for a more egalitarian world. Similarly, TRE does not necessarily lead to unpalatable conclusions. If telic and deontic relational egalitarianism are understood as complementing one another, then it accommodates the idea that we should be both sensitive to the standing of (distant) others and that we should treat and regard others as equals in our existing social relations. To say that we should aim for more egalitarian states of affairs does not erase our general deontic obligations to treat and regard all as equals.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

The present dissertation has established two main conclusions. First, social equality ought to be treated as more than a deontic constraint: it is not only the proper way to treat and regard others. Egalitarian relationships are also good for persons. Social equality should be recognized as a personally and non-instrumentally valuable good. Second, once we acknowledge the deep value of social equality, then relational egalitarians should accept that they should extend their conception of justice globally. Once we move beyond deontic relational egalitarianism, we should consider how persons are treated and regarded in their own context and aim for a more egalitarian world overall. Therefore, telic relational egalitarianism grounds cosmopolitan obligations of justice.

Both of these conclusions, I hope, will be appealing to relational egalitarians. However, they do require to revise the common understanding of this theory. As Sharp writes, contemporary relational egalitarians typically develop their view based on two intuitive assumptions: “First, concern about relational inequality is only appropriate when persons already share a context or relationship with one another (the *relevant relationship requirement*). Second, relationships across borders are typically thinner than relationships within them” (Sharp 2022, 648, emphasis in original). Yet, if the argument of the present dissertation is right, both assumptions are wrong.

Starting with the second one, it is mistaken to assume that international and transnational relations are “thinner” than intra-national ones. The main arguments which are mobilized to defend this difference – the argument from coercion, cooperation, and the cultural-conventionalist argument – all fail to provide reasons explaining why egalitarian duties of justice only apply to domestic socio-political relations. Given the extent of contemporary globalization, relational egalitarians should consider how to equalize transnational relations to ensure that all are regarded and treated as equals in them.

Moreover, the present dissertation also claims that relational egalitarians should be very careful in how they interpret the *relevant relationship requirement*. Following a deontic understanding, concern about relational inequality would only be internal to existing social relationships; individual only have an obligation to treat each other as equals when relationships exist between them. Although there is an element of truth in this observation, it is important to see

that this deontic duty does not exhaust our understanding of egalitarian justice. Different reasons support the promotion of egalitarian social relationships at the global level. First, it is possible to claim that social equality is instrumentally valuable to protect basic human rights. Even if this instrumental argument is limited – since it cannot explain the particular value relational egalitarians typically assign to social equality – it nonetheless contains an element of truth. Second, as mentioned above, it is also possible to claim that social equality is non-instrumentally valuable: it is a part of a what it is to live a good human life.

In closing, I want to underline that this conclusion should be treated carefully. It supports the idea that an egalitarian world – where people engage in egalitarian relationships – is more valuable than an inegalitarian one. However, relational egalitarianism also contains the idea that we should be extremely careful in how we aim for a more egalitarian world. The telic, cosmopolitan duty to foster social equality should be taken to complement our deontic duty to treat and regard others as equals when we interact with them. Unfortunately, this combination raises more questions than I can answer in this dissertation. Both duties will inevitably conflict in certain circumstances, and the exact relation between them will unfortunately have to wait for another time. Nonetheless, if I am right and relational egalitarianism does rely on both duties, this theory will inevitably be pushed to cover new areas that relational egalitarians tend to overlook. The questions of whether international interventions can be justified, how to reconcile our duties to persons close to us and to distant others, how to work incrementally to improve the state of the world, or of whether we have obligations of justice towards future generations are all questions raised by the view defended here. Relational egalitarianism, as a theory of justice, is thus much broader than typically thought.



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