WILEY

ORIGINAL ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

On the Quality of Relational Justice

Matilda Carter

University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

Correspondence: Matilda Carter (matilda.carter@glasgow.ac.uk)

ABSTRACT

By emphasising the role of concepts like social status, power and respect, all relational egalitarians seek to demonstrate that there is more to the political concept of equality than the distribution of goods. While there is a broad consensus on the nature of equality, however, the nature of justice is a matter of internal dispute. The aim of this paper is to disentangle these argumentative threads, building on work in early relational egalitarian scholarship to develop a relational approach to justice, both distinct from the distributive approach to justice and isolated from the relational approach to equality. In doing so, I reveal possible and sometimes surprising alliances between relational egalitarians and other scholars on the nature of justice.

1 | Introduction

In the late 20th century, political philosophers became embroiled in a debate over what G. A. Cohen termed the 'currency of egalitarian justice'. Participating scholars took the central goal of egalitarian political philosophy to be the discovery of the thing which 'justice requires people to have equal amounts of',[1] whether that be resources,[2] the opportunity for welfare[3] or Cohen's preferred 'access to advantage'.[4] As these discussions wore on, however, discontent began to emerge, with scholars such as Elizabeth Anderson,[5] Iris Marion Young[6] and Jonathan Wolff[7] rejecting this narrow focus on distribution as wrongheaded. These are the origins of what is now known as relational egalitarianism.[8]

By emphasising the role of concepts like social status, power and respect, all relational egalitarians seek to demonstrate that there is more to the political concept of equality than the distribution of goods. While there is a broad consensus on the nature of *equality*, however, the nature of *justice* is a matter of internal dispute. For Anderson, distributive egalitarianism begins both from a flawed conception of equality *and* a flawed conception of

justice.[9] Likewise, Young rejects what she calls the 'distributive paradigm' in theorising about justice, proposing instead a view that has opposition to domination and oppression at its heart.[10] David Miller, on the other hand, has defended a version of relational egalitarianism that conceives of social justice as *essentially* distributive and relational equality as an independent ideal with which it can sometimes conflict.[11]

The divide between 'justice-based relational egalitarians' and 'pluralist social egalitarians', to use Christian Schemmel's terms,[12] reveals two distinct lines of argument made in the early relational egalitarian literature that are sometimes unhelpfully conflated. Distributive egalitarians hold a distributive view of equality *and* a distributive view of justice. All relational egalitarians have a relational view of equality, but only some have a relational view of *justice*.[13] Some distributive theorists of justice are not egalitarians; of particular note are the sufficientarians—who argue that justice requires people to have *enough* of some currency[14]—and the prioritarians—who, when they construe the theory as a theory of justice, argue that it requires priority for the worst off.[15] Likewise, because arguments about the nature of justice and the nature of equality come apart, it

ought to be possible to hold a relational view of justice without being a relational egalitarian.

The aim of this paper is to disentangle these argumentative threads, extracting claims made by early relational egalitarian scholars about the nature of justice to develop a freestanding account of the relational view. This is not intended to stand as a definitive statement of the view of justice used by all justice-based relational egalitarians, nor as an argument about the view of justice such theorists *should* adopt. While I make the case that the underlying elements I identify here are used by other scholars within this tradition, my focus is not on demonstrating widespread, unacknowledged adoption, but on developing the underexplored distinction made in the texts with which I substantively engage. In doing so, I aim to remap the landscape of contemporary political philosophy, bringing much-needed clarity to debates within more recent relational egalitarian literature.

I begin, in Section 1, with Young's distinction between *static* and *dynamic* forms of evaluation. Her preferred latter approach, I argue, is sensitive to conceptions of the *social*, variations in which serve to alter the *scope* within which principles of justice apply. I then move on to Elizabeth Anderson's distinction between *second-* and *third-personal* forms of *justification*, the former of which she identifies with the relational egalitarian tradition and the latter with distributive views. Pointing out that this is a distinction in approaches to justice, not equality, I argue that Anderson's preferred form of justification is sensitive to conceptions of the person, in the sense that they determine the range of interpersonal claims that can rightly be considered reasonable. Using these two elements to model a relational view of justice – according to which the just society is one in which all persons, across all social processes and structures, continually and consistently comply with the demands others can reasonably make upon them – I then set out in the final section to demonstrate its capaciousness. By altering the conceptions of the social and the person that feed into the model, I argue, it is possible to develop accounts of relational justice that vary significantly in their conclusions about the *quality of relation that justice demands*. As with the distributive view of justice, I therefore conclude, wide-ranging disagreement about the *content* of social justice is compatible with agreement on its *fundamental nature*.

2 | Dynamic Evaluation and Conceptions of the Social

In their arguments against their distributive counterparts, it is not always clear whether justice-based relational egalitarians are discussing equality or justice (or both); this tendency to run the concepts together is exemplified by Anderson's adoption of the term 'egalitarian justice' throughout her landmark paper 'What is the Point of Equality?'.[16] This entanglement is not all-encompassing, however, and there are enough arguments that are more precisely targeted to construct a model of the relational view of justice from the work of early relational egalitarian scholars. One such argument, made by Young, concerns the approach to evaluation a theory of justice ought to take. In this section, I will explore the distinction she makes between static

and dynamic forms of evaluation, demonstrating the sensitivity of the latter to conceptions of the social.

2.1 | Processes and Structures, Not Patterns of Holdings

In her landmark 1990 monograph *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young explicitly rejects the distributive conception of justice. Interpreting Rawls as a distributive theorist, she raises two concerns about his model of justice that extend to all operating under what she calls the 'distributive paradigm'. Both issues, she argues, are emblematic of their *static* approach to evaluation, which causes them to miss the significance of social processes and social structures that would be picked up under a more *dynamic* approach.[17]

The first object of her concern is the way distributive theorists of justice handle the institutional context in which goods are distributed. While poverty and deprivation are undoubtedly important concerns, she argues, attention needs to be paid to the way institutions, defined broadly enough to include economic and cultural norms, shape social life. The power of corporations to disrupt the communities that depend upon them for employment, for instance, is not well-captured by a narrow focus on the distribution of goods, nor are demeaning cultural representations of minority groups in the mass media. Worse still, for Young, distributive theorists *presuppose* these institutional conditions, effectively placing them beyond evaluation and restricting the role of social justice to merely compensating for their distributive consequences.[18]

Even where distributive theorists attempt to incorporate questions of power and social status, moreover, Young charges them with proceeding from a misguided social ontology. The logic of distribution, she argues, presents these concepts as if they are static things rather than properties of relations between persons. Consequently, distributive theories of justice assume a kind of social atomism that obscures the extent to which the identities and capacities of persons are shaped by their social relations, while ignoring the role of social processes in maintaining the social order.[19]

The distinction being made here concerns what can be referred to as static and dynamic approaches to evaluations of justice. Distributive theorists engage in evaluations of the state of society as it is in any given snapshot, with the distribution of divisible goods among its members taken as the object of evaluation. Young, by contrast, urges us to consider social processes that lead to and maintain the state of society, including those that are the unintended result of the cumulation of individual actions, thereby shifting the object of evaluation from individual holdings to social dynamics.[20] The latter approach is also favoured by Anderson, who maintains that judgments of justice should be applied to the ongoing human arrangements that make up the social order, including social norms and the structure of public goods, rather than to snapshots of the distributive patterns of divisible goods.[21] Likewise, when Samuel Scheffler sets out his conception of a society of equals, he focuses on the norms its members ought to use to arrive at decisions and rejects the idea of seeking 'conformity to a certain

pattern of distribution for its own sake';[22] this is the dynamic approach to evaluation in action.

Though both have a temporal dimension, Young's proposed evaluative distinction ought not to be confused with that which exists between time-slice and whole-lives views of distributive justice. Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen has argued that, like their distributive counterparts, relational egalitarians need to specify whether the equality demanded by justice must be maintained at every point in a person's life or whether it is enough for persons to have been equal when their lives are considered as a whole.[23] If we proceed from a dynamic approach to evaluation, however, this distinction is meaningless. Both time slice and whole-lives analyses involve static evaluation because both involve looking at comparisons of individuals in a society at a specific point in time. While the whole-lives approach does make room for history, it still proceeds by evaluating a static figure: the comparative total of individuals' holdings across their whole lives.

A dynamic approach to evaluations of justice, on the other hand, concerns how people relate *throughout* their lives, and the social processes that organise their lives so that they relate as such. It would be incoherent for the relational egalitarian to allow the treatment of a person as an inferior because they were treated as a superior in an earlier part of their lives, both because these are things that cannot be quantified (and therefore cannot be discounted against each other) and because it is not individual positions that are subject to analysis but the social relations themselves. A society that consistently treated elderly people as inferiors, for example, would be unjust to a relational egalitarian, regardless of the fact that all elderly persons were once young and so treated as superior to *their* elders; inegalitarian relations are unjust in and of themselves, even if individuals might end up on both sides of them across their lives.

Another of Lippert Rasmussen's critiques of relational egalitarianism, upon examination, reveals the importance of dynamic evaluation in distinguishing between distributive and relational approaches. Questioning the depth of the disagreements between the theorists, he has suggested that distributive egalitarians can accommodate the concerns of their interlocutors, such as freedom from domination and self-respect, by interpreting them as distributable goods.[24] Now, as David Axelsen and Juliana Bidadanure have rightly argued, echoing Young, this strategy mischaracterises those concerns and strips them of their nature as internal features of social relations.[25] Even if they could be meaningfully conceived as such, however, a distributive account of justice that included these concerns would not be able to capture them in the way they are understood by justice-based relational egalitarians because it would proceed from a static approach to evaluation. The extent to which an individual is related as an equal in a single snapshot of a given society is not the only thing that concerns relational egalitarians; they are also concerned about the social processes that generate and maintain unequal relations *over time*. These include injustices in social dynamics that form structures that maintain and replicate the social order, which cannot be adequately understood if one's evaluation solely consists of observing the relative level of power and status that persons possess at any given moment in society.

Consider, for instance, the social processes and structures that support and maintain relational injustices connected to racism in British society. At the time of writing, several prominent political figures in my home country of the United Kingdom are of minority ethnic backgrounds, including the Mayor of London, the Foreign Secretary and the recently departed former Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak. If we could meaningfully conceive of the kind of power and status inequalities that concern relational egalitarians in distributive terms, a static evaluation of justice would find these figures relatively well-off. All, however, are members of social groups who are exposed to wrongful attitudes and behaviours that have their basis in racism. If this is to be addressed, it must be addressed at the level of social group interaction: by addressing the norms, attitudes, social structures and expectations that promote and reinforce racism. The problem for the static evaluator seeking to describe relational concepts in distributive terms is that, given the group-based nature of these injustices, it is impossible for them to be addressed without making these influential political figures better off in terms of 'units' of status and power. So, the challenging of racism at the group level seems to be *pro tanto* unjust at the individual level, in the sense that it widens existing inequalities of power and status, even if it is all things considered justified.

By making use of dynamic evaluation, however, the problems with individualising structural injustices can be avoided by the relational egalitarian; racist injustices occur at the level of social group interaction, and the fact that an individual recipient of them may be relatively privileged in other respects does not lessen the fact that they are wrongful. They are injustices because they involve unjust ways of relating encoded in social processes and dynamics that build and maintain the social order over time, not because they lead to individuals being worse off in some snapshot of the 'distribution' of power and status among citizens. Consequently, there is no *pro tanto* injustice for the relational egalitarian involved in liberating relatively privileged people of ethnic minority backgrounds from injustice by tackling racism, because it is the way of relating that is unjust not the extent to which it disadvantages individuals. If they remain in a position in which they relate to others as superiors more often than they relate as inferiors, this is because of independently unjust ways of relating (between wealthy and poor individuals, for example) that are also encoded in social processes and structures and also must be challenged.[26]

There is a distinct approach to evaluation, then, that differentiates the underlying approach to justice used by (some) relational egalitarians from that of their distributive interlocutors. Focusing on social processes and the structures that maintain and replicate unjust circumstances over time, it shifts the object of evaluation away from individual holdings and towards the relations shared among members of a given society. This is a dynamic approach to evaluation in the literal sense that it is an evaluation of ongoing dynamics rather than static patterns,

proceeding as it does from a conception of social relations as constantly in motion.

2.2 | Determining the Objects of Dynamic Evaluation

The dynamic approach, as set out by Young, sets social processes and structures as the proper objects of evaluation. Which processes and structures should properly be considered social, however, remains an open question. It can be taken for granted that those that do not involve the interaction of persons will always be excluded from evaluations; photosynthesis, pollination and decomposition are processes, but they are presumably, not of (direct) relevance to justice.[27] Likewise, it seems obvious that Young is not suggesting that we look to natural or artificial structures, such as the way hydrogen and oxygen atoms bond to form water molecules or the way wooden planks are fixed together to form a fence when determining if a society is just or not. This is, after all, a *relational* theory of justice, so it seems intuitive to think that the only processes and structures that ought to be relevant to justice are those that are essentially expressible as forms of social relations.

Specifying that a social process or structure is one among persons, however, only gets us so far. While there is likely broad agreement on what a justice-relevant process or structure among persons is, there are important edge cases whose status needs to be determined. Should, for instance, the conservation of resources for future generations, a process involving persons living who make material sacrifices and persons yet to be born who benefit from them, be described as a social process? Should the temporal dynamic that enables us to shape and constrain the possible lives of non-contemporaneous future generations be understood as a social structure? The answers to these questions will be highly consequential for the resulting relational approach to intergenerational justice,[28] and questions like these cannot be answered without a substantive account of the social: one that goes beyond stipulating the necessary involvement of persons.

A particularly influential account, in that it is assumed by a significant number of contemporary political philosophers, is that which is implied by the social contract tradition. Broadly speaking, theorists operating under this tradition see principles of justice as originating in an agreement between self-interested persons for the sake of mutual advantage. More precisely, they tend to hold that such an agreement, whether historical or hypothetical, is the only legitimate source from which obligations to comply with such principles can be generated, thereby rendering it crucial in determining their shape and content.[29] While there are important differences between the major contributors to this school of thought, they all share what Martha Nussbaum calls a 'general image of society as a contract'; a view of social life as beginning at the point of contracting, implicitly excluding all ways of relating that might precede it.[30] A relational theorist adopting this sort of view would integrate a relatively limited account of the relevant social processes and structures: reaching only as far as those procedural and institutional arrangements necessary for social co-operation that constitute what Rawls termed the 'basic structure' of a society.[31]

Within relational egalitarianism, Schemmel is the clearest advocate of this sort of approach to the social.[32]

An alternative view of the social is presented in the field of care ethics, whose adherents tend to reject the social contract tradition. For Eva Feder Kittay, the idea of society as emerging from a contract among independent persons obscures the natural and inevitable dependency of human beings, who could not survive and develop into co-operating members of society without first having received extensive care in infancy from a designated caregiver. That caregiver, in turn, requires assistance to ensure they can meet the needs of their dependents, given that they cannot reliably obtain the means to provide care while committed to engaging in their dependency work. It is, therefore, a necessary condition of human life that there exists a series of overlapping relationships oriented around the provision of care that would precede any contracting situation.[33] This is a sentiment echoed by Daniel Engster, who points to research in evolutional theory, neurobiology, ethology and developmental psychology to support the claim that caring relations would have existed before the development of large-scale social structures and would have been a central organising feature of communal life.[34]

Adopting the view of the social posited in care ethics would afford the relational theorist a wider range of structures and social processes to subject to evaluations of justice than that offered by the social contract tradition, including all processes and structures involved in the provision of care to dependents. Doubtless, some of these aspects of dependency work can plausibly be described as components of the basic structure; Rawls himself included the family among the institutions to which his theory of justice applied.[35] Nevertheless, because the parties to the contract from which social life emerges are imagined as self-interested and independent, the social contract tradition struggles to adequately capture the non-fungible and non-voluntary dimensions of dependency relations. Instead, as Kittay argues, it relegates the incurring of caring responsibilities by specific dependency workers towards specific dependents to the realm of private choice, thereby excluding the processes and structures involved from evaluations of justice.[36]

This brief comparison of the implications of two opposing positions demonstrates the important role conceptions of social play in the process of dynamic evaluation. Any substantive demands generated from a view of justice that uses this approach can only apply to the processes and structures that are properly considered social. The scope of justice evaluation, accordingly, is determined by the underlying conception of the social adopted by a theorist. Moreover, the conception of the social used determines the range of conceptions of the person available to the theorists making use of this view of justice; social contract theory, being grounded in the idea of co-operation among independent agents, is unable to accept a conception of the person as inevitably dependent, while the care ethicist, likewise cannot accept a conception of the person as independent and self-interested. As I demonstrate in the next section, such conceptions play a crucial role in another key distinguishing feature of the relational approach to justice, as set out by Anderson: an interpersonal approach to justification. Conceptions of the social, in this sense, also influence the content of the substantive demands of any relational view of justice that incorporates both of these features.

3 | Interpersonal Justification and Conceptions of the Person

In plain language, the approach to evaluation adopted by a view of justice tells us *where to look*; for a relational theorist using a dynamic approach, social justice and injustice are found in the ongoing relations among individuals rather than their comparative holdings of goods. In this section, I will extract a second distinguishing element of the relational view from the work of Anderson: one that tells us *what to look for* when engaging in these evaluations of dynamics. The simple answer to this question is that we ought to be looking for adherence to and violations of what justice requires, but to do so we need a clear idea of how such requirements are constituted.

In setting out what she describes as the *fundamental disagreement* between relational egalitarians and their distributive interlocutors, Anderson gives the clearest account of a distinctly relational approach for justifying demands of justice in the early relational egalitarian literature. Where Young's dynamic approach to evaluation is sensitive to the conceptions of the social, Anderson's *interpersonal* account of justification is sensitive to conceptions of the person – or so I argue in this section.

3.1 | Justice and Justification

Anderson describes the point of view from which the demands of justice are justified as the *fundamental disagreement* between relational and luck egalitarianism (an influential camp within distributive egalitarianism). The latter, she argues, adopts a third-person perspective, involving abstraction from the claims of particular individuals and the embrace of (purportedly) impartial, universalist reasoning. Relational egalitarians, by contrast, are said to make use of a second-person or interpersonal perspective, such that all claims of justice and injustice are 'essentially expressible as a demand that a person makes on an agent whom the speaker holds accountable'.[37]

Anderson illustrates this distinction through an analysis of the resentment felt by Antonio Salieri towards Mozart, as portrayed in the 1984 film *Amadeus*. However much we might sympathise with his sense of injustice about possessing far more virtue but far less musical talent than his rival composer, for Anderson there is no way of making sense of this claim from a second-person perspective (unless we accept the existence of a God who governs the distribution of musical talent). The fact that he is musically inferior to Mozart does not violate a claim he can reasonably make on someone else, because the distribution of natural talents is not the result of the other-regarding actions of humans.[38] Rather, Salieri's claim of injustice can only be made sense of from a third-person perspective: that he and Mozart's relative holdings represent an unfairness that, under some impersonal principle of justice, warrants compensation.[39]

Despite providing no grounds for objecting to the natural distribution of talents, however, the second-personal approach to justification is well-equipped to address injustices *resulting* from them. For a relational egalitarian, a society in which the talented related to those who are less talented as inferiors would involve violations of claims that we can all plausibly make on others to be treated with respect and to have the moral weight of our interests acknowledged. Indeed, Young explicitly makes the case against the kind of merit-based divisions of labour that constrain the ability of some to develop their capacities while giving others the ability to exert controlling power over them.[40] All that is ruled out is *direct* objection to the way natural talents are distributed on grounds of fairness; every aspect of the way we relate to each other around this distribution falls squarely within the bounds of that which is legitimately subjected to claims of injustice.

Now, as Lippert-Rasmussen has pointed out, not all distributive egalitarians hold that natural inequalities are unjust; just because Salieri's claim *can* be made sense of from a third-person perspective, does not mean that any theorist who adopts one ought to accept it.[41] The point stands, nevertheless, that relational and distributive egalitarian views are structured differently when it comes to justifying the demands of justice, in the sense that a justice-based relational egalitarian *cannot* accept Salieri's claim of injustice as coherent (without the existence of a talent distributing deity who can rightly be made the object of interpersonal moral claims). As set out by Anderson, a second-person perspective entails that there can be no injustice without (i) an injury to someone's interests, (ii) an agent who is substantively responsible for it, (iii) an agent who is entitled to complain to the responsible agent and (iv) deviation from the continual and successful compliance of persons with demands others can reasonably make of them.[42] While the treatment of natural inequalities is a useful way of illustrating these constraints, it is not the only way in which they lead to distinctions between relational and distributive egalitarianism.[43]

Consider, for instance, romantic and sexual relationships. We have good reasons for thinking that having such relationships is important for the well-being of most people, such that persistently single persons are made worse off by not having them. Third-personally, a coherent claim of injustice can be made by the persistently single: not having romantic and sexual relationships makes them worse off, and under any principle of distributive equality that is sensitive to well-being concerns, they are owed compensation. For the relational egalitarian, however, there is no second-personal claim of injustice that can be accepted as reasonable. This is so, because the very basis upon which such a claim would be made, that persons have interests in pursuing romantic and sexual relationships with those they find desirable, implies a correlated interest in not pursuing such relationships with those they do not, both derived from an interest in participating in this aspect of life without coercion. To hold that the refuser violates a legitimate demand that can be made of them is to subordinate their interests in this area to those of the refused party, thereby violating the theory's core commitment to social equality. Accordingly, even though the refusal to enter into a romantic or sexual relationship constitutes an injury to someone's interests that the refuser is at least in part responsible for, it cannot be understood as an injustice for a relational egalitarian because the refused party lacks reasonable grounds to complain to the refuser.[44]

Anderson's interpersonal approach to justification is used more widely by relational egalitarians, and so it helps in differentiating their underlying approach to justice from the model

of justice as distribution. When Schemmel outlines his interpretation of relational egalitarianism, he states that he does not 'object directly to any kind of material inequality between people', but only where it cannot be justified to participants in social co-operation by 'justice-relevant reasons'. As he notes, this creates a relatively strict standard of distributive equality, but it is grounded in second- rather than third-personal reasoning.[45] Likewise, when Samuel Scheffler describes a society of equals as one characterised by a 'reciprocal commitment on the part of each member to treat the equally important interests of every other member as exerting equal influence on social decisions', rather than one characterised by authoritative distributive principles, he is making roughly the same distinction.[46]

3.2 | The Second-Person Standpoint, Recognition Respect and Reasonable Demands

The interpersonal model of justifying the demands of justice relies on an idea of 'reasonable' claims persons can make on one another, in virtue of the standing they possess to complain to those who injure their interests. To operationalise this approach, a clear idea of what it means for a claim to be reasonable and the source of authority upon which complainants draw is needed. In this subsection, I argue that these answers are not present in the structure of the approach itself but rely on a substantive conception of the person.

As Anderson explicitly draws on them in setting out the interpersonal approach to justification,[47] it is useful to begin by examining some arguments made by Stephen Darwall about the structure of moral reasoning. Whenever we give someone a normative reason to regulate their conduct, he argues, we presuppose our own standing to make claims on others and hold them accountable for meeting them. We cannot presume our authority to hold others accountable, however, if we do not also presuppose that they are capable of recognising our demands as potential generators of obligations and holding *themselves* accountable for meeting them. It is always a presumption of moral reason-giving, thus, that there exists a community of obligation and accountability shared among persons with the standing and competence to give and accept reasons to act; taking what he calls the second-person standpoint, in short, always assumes that both we and those we are giving reasons to possess second-personal *authority* that is grounded in second-personal *competence*.[48]

There is a basic kind of equality inherent in Darwall's view, and subsequently in Anderson's account of interpersonal justification. To make claims on others and hold them accountable, we must presuppose that persons can make demands on *themselves* and hold *themselves* accountable for them. We must presuppose, in other words, that others possess the same authority upon which we presume to make demands on them, and that we are equal bearers of it. This, for Darwall, is the essence of what it means for persons to possess equal dignity and, by extension, to be moral equals.[49]

Basic equality, however, does not automatically entail the thicker kind of social equality argued for by relational egalitarians. It

would be perfectly compatible, for instance, for the prevailing social order to maintain the kind of gendered social norms that shape our senses of the permissible and the possible while holding a commitment to the idea that we are all morally equal. It is not immediately clear, for instance, that the social norms that discourage women from stereotypically masculine forms of activity and presentation violate or deny the equal authority of women and men to make claims on others. Neither is it immediately clear that the same is true of social norms that discourage men from taking on the primary responsibility for the care of their children. For the relational egalitarian who wishes to challenge these norms, a thicker conception of the basis of our equality is needed, one which goes beyond the presuppositions made when taking the second-person standpoint.

Darwall's second-person standpoint does incorporate a notion of respect that might be drawn on to challenge these norms, but it cannot be used for this purpose without further information. The dignity of persons, he argues, demands respect as an appropriate response; it is fitting to acknowledge that we are all equal participants in the scheme of obligation and accountability we assume when we give second-personal reasons to others. Making use of his oft-cited distinction, Darwall specifies that the kind of respect involved in such an acknowledgement is *recognition* rather than *appraisal*: that is, the kind of respect one demonstrates when one gives appropriate weight to a thing or a feature of that thing in one's deliberations about how to act, rather than the kind demonstrated when esteeming some thing as an exemplar of excellence in some category or field. We demonstrate respect for the dignity of persons, then, when we give their standing to make demands and hold others accountable *equal* weight in our deliberations.[50]

Cruel and dehumanising social hierarchies, such as that which was instantiated by the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade, can probably be ruled out without needing to specify one's account further, in the sense that they rely on dismissing the standing of those at the bottom to make claims on those at the top. More subtle social inequalities like those that arise from patriarchal gender norms, however, are not easily objected to in these terms. Perhaps overtly discouraging or punishing women for asserting their authority to make claims would fail to demonstrate recognition respect on any account, but a significant proportion of the processes and structures that maintain the relevant norms are historical, unconscious and/or unintended. What is sometimes referred to as 'good-girl syndrome', whereby adult women struggle to place down boundaries and feel compelled to meet the needs of others before themselves, stands as a clear example of this.[51] The impediment to assertiveness in such cases is internal: a cumulative result of childhood moments and cultural representations that may be insignificant when taken in isolation but have long-lasting psychological effects.[52] Subsequently, the hierarchy of power and status it engenders can be maintained without any need for overt conflict; indeed, those benefiting from it may even believe that they *are* demonstrating recognition respect towards the women suffering from this syndrome, especially where their claims are accepted gladly and politely.[53]

What is needed, to rule out inegalitarian processes and structures, is a conception of the person to whom recognition

respect is owed and an accompanying account of the social. Darwall himself draws on a Kantian notion of personhood and the social contract tradition, thereby grounding second-person authority and competence in rational agency and limiting the scope of justice to governing co-operation on terms agreed by independent and self-interested parties. Insofar as recognition respect demands that we place equal weight on the fact that persons are rational agents when deliberating about what to do, this does offer grounds for objecting to some of the examples I have raised here.[54] It is unsurprising, then, that justice-based relational egalitarianism, at least as outlined by Anderson[55] and Schemmel,[56] tends also to draw on a Kantian conception of the person. Even Young, who explicitly eschews liberal individualism, maintains a focus on equal moral worth and agency of a distinctly Kantian flavour.[57] What causes her version of relational egalitarianism to differ slightly from others, it would seem, is her conception of the social, which involves an important ontological claim about the existence of privileged and oppressed social groups.[58]

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the second-person standpoint and, by implication, the interpersonal approach to justification inevitably implies a Kantian conception of personhood and therefore inevitably entails a form of egalitarianism. If the standing to make claims on others can be grounded in other features of persons towards which recognition respect is due, and this conception of personhood can be embedded in an alternate view of the social, then the kind of demands persons can be reasonably expected to abide by would alter. As I will demonstrate in the final section of this paper, coherent alternate options are available, leading directly to alternate views of the quality of relation that justice demands people share with one another.

4 | Qualities of Relational Justice

To recap, in the previous two sections, I have identified two concepts developed through arguments about the nature of justice in relational egalitarian scholarship: Young's dynamic approach to evaluation and Anderson's interpersonal account of justification. I have also demonstrated that these are sensitive to, respectively, conceptions of the social and conceptions of the person. Taken together, these are sufficient to develop a working model of the relational approach to justice: a model whose underlying components can be altered such that it outputs different conclusions about the quality of relation justice demands. This can be contrasted with the distributive approach to justice as follows:

- Justice as Distribution: The just society is one in which the distribution of the currency (or currencies) of distributive justice among its members matches the pattern that justice demands.

- Justice as Relational: The just society is one in which all persons consistently and continually comply with all demands others can reasonably make of them, across all social processes and structures in which they participate. In doing so, their relations with others realise the quality of relation that justice demands.

In the model of justice as distribution, it is third-personal arguments about the thing that ought to be distributed – the currency or, in Lippert-Rasmussen's terms, the 'distribuendem'[59] – and about the correct distributive principle that determine what justice demands. And what justice demands, in terms of the form of the model's output, is a pattern. In the relational model, by contrast, it is second-personal arguments about what persons can reasonably demand of one another – determined through a process of interpersonal justification – that determine what justice demands. And what justice demands, in terms of the form of the model's output, is a quality of relation to be realised across the processes and structures that determine the scope of the social.

It should be noted that Lippert-Rasmussen has his own interpretation of the relational model of justice, whose inputs are a 'relationendum' – referring to the dimensions of relations relevant for assessments of justice – and a specified 'shape' that relations must take to be just, with its output being social relations that have 'specific, desirable features'.[60] While superficially similar to what I have set out here, however, this account imports the static model of evaluation and the third-personal approach to justification from the distributive approach, thereby mischaracterising what it means to think of justice in relational terms.

Consider first his examples of how the 'relationendum' of justice might differ. These include whether what matters is if people actually relate to each other in certain ways or have opportunities for doing so and its implied view about what makes relations objectionable: be that expressive content, social power, how persons regard one another or something else. The first distinction is intended to analogise to disagreements among distributive theorists about their preferred pattern-determining principle, while the latter seems to analogise to disagreements about their preferred currency.[61] These analogies are only possible, however, because Lippert-Rasmussen has presented relations as if they are distinct, countable units (or can be divided up into dimensions that are distinct and countable in this way). A distinction between outcomes and opportunities makes some kind of sense when discussing acquirable goods: it is a distinction between counting up how many of those goods people actually have and contrasting their comparative probability of acquiring them. To talk of relations in this way is far less compelling because their character is something that emerges from active, ongoing dynamics between persons, not from production and acquisition. We cannot count up expressive content, social power or the way persons regard one another, nor can we make a probabilistic comparison about how likely people are to acquire them in their relations. Even if we could, moreover, we would be engaging in a static form of evaluation that is inattentive to the dynamic features of social relations.

Similarly, Lippert-Rasmussen's examples of how the 'shape' relations must take to be just might differ prove too much through analogy. He suggests that relational theorists possess roughly the same options in this area as distributive theorists have for their preferred patterned-principles of distribution, including egalitarianism, sufficientarianism and prioritarianism.[62] Now, it is certainly possible that some of the *outputs*

of my model of relational justice will bear a nominal resemblance to these distributive principles; it is obviously not incoherent to talk of relational egalitarianism, and it is possible to imagine a view of personhood according to which recognition respect demands affording sufficient but not equal weight to persons in our deliberations, which would lead the model to output a demanded quality of justice that we could call sufficientarian if plugged into it.[63] It is not the case, however, that a relational view of justice can use these principles as *inputs* because to do so would be to adopt the third-personal approach to the justification that Anderson rejects. Qualities of relational justice are not overarching principles arrived at through impersonal reasoning. They are, rather, emergent properties of relations among persons, whose characters are determined by the way they respond to another's demands. We cannot use independently determined principles to pick out in advance 'specific, desirable features' of relations, because those demands and our conclusions about their reasonableness will vary from context to context, even if we hold our conceptions of personhood and the implied demands of recognition respect fixed. Achieving justice in relational terms is, in this respect, more art than science.[64]

What Lippert-Rasmussen describes as the relational model of justice, then, turns out to not clearly be relational in nature. As his interpretation of what a relation is misrepresents it as a discrete countable good—or, at least, something that can be divided into discrete, countable goods—and his model makes use of the patterned-principles used by distributive theorists of justice, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that this is a variant of the distributive view of justice: relabelled to take account of the fact that it seems incoherent to talk about distributing social relations according to a pattern, even if that is in fact what the model suggests relational theorists are doing. My model of relational justice, by contrast, is genuinely distinct from the distributive view in both inputs and outputs. It is a model of justice *as relating*—an ongoing, dynamic, and context-dependent process—rather than a model of justice *as the distribution of relations*—a static accounting exercise that mischaracterises the nature of that which it seeks to count.

To be clear, my contention is not that all relational egalitarians make use of this model. Neither is it my contention that all relational egalitarians *who view the theory as a theory of justice* do so. The key contribution I am seeking to make here is to highlight a distinctive model of justice that some of the early relational egalitarians were developing: one that has not been adequately fleshed out and explored in subsequent works. It is my view that some relational egalitarians are implying this view, and also that they are right to do so, but I leave it as an open question whether there are other ways of interpreting justice in relational terms.

5 | Surprising Allies: Three Non-Egalitarian Qualities of Relational Justice

Having developed a relational model of justice from arguments made by early relational egalitarians, in this final section I demonstrate its capaciousness by exploring three alternative sets of inputs that output three alternative qualities of relational justice. Each departs, in differing degrees, from relational egalitarianism as I have conceived of it, while sharing with it the same basic view about what justice, by nature, is. By revealing these alliances, two of which are surprising, I further clarify the boundaries of the approach and reinforce the importance of conceptions of the social and of personhood to determining the shape and content of the demands of justice, from a relational point of view.

5.1 | Relational Caring Justice

Having already unpacked its underlying account of the social, I turn first to the field of care ethics. It should be noted that several theorists operating under this banner do not see it as a view of justice at all but, rather, an alternative moral framework that is separate from and may sometimes conflict with the ethics of justice.[65] There is, however, a contingent of justice-based care ethicists, who use the insights of care ethics to reconceptualise justice, including Kittay[66] and Engster,[67] to whom I have already referred. Drawing on this subset of the relevant literature, it is possible to develop a relational theory of justice that demands an emergent quality of caring.

Before developing such a theory, there is a significant roadblock that needs to be overcome. Darwall's notion of second-person competence seems to imply a capacity for rational reflection that is incompatible with the inclusion of some dependents as equal participants in the scheme of obligation and accountability, including very young infants and persons with severe cognitive disabilities. Indeed, Kittay notes that any claim of equality inevitably excludes, and claims of equality that have their basis in cognitive competence criteria are likely to exclude some dependents from this 'charmed circle'.[68] As Anderson's interpersonal approach to justification is heavily indebted to Darwall's analysis of the second-person standpoint, it might seem as if care ethics cannot make use of the model of relational justice I have been using so far – or at least cannot do so without leaving some dependents behind.

Now, Darwall himself has a way of integrating these persons into a basic moral framework: conceiving of respect as a way of relating to another as a being with dignity and care as a way of responding to them as a bearer of welfare.[69] Nevertheless, because he explicitly states that being worthy of care is a different form of moral worth than being worthy of recognition respect,[70] this move does not resolve the problem I have raised. The care ethicists who take the view that justice and care are separate moral ideals would not necessarily be troubled by the Darwallian approach. To develop care ethics into a relational account of justice, however, it is necessary to demonstrate that the moral demands to care flow from the conception of recognition respect, rather than from outside of it. It is not enough to state that persons who lack rational agency are regardless owed a different sort of moral concern, because the point of such a view would be to present the requirement to realise a quality of care in our relations with each other as the central requirement of justice, not a complementary moral requirement.

To reiterate, in Darwall's view our second-personal competence consists in our ability to rationally consider the legitimacy of

demands others place on us and to hold ourselves accountable for meeting them. Our second-personal authority, which we assume both we and others have whenever we give them such reasons, is then said to be grounded in this; it is this shared possession of the grounds for authority to make claims on others that makes his analysis so readily compatible with justice-based relational egalitarianism. This Kantian interpretation of the model, however, need not be followed if an alternate source of that authority can be identified. For care ethicists, this possibility rests in their conception of the person as inevitably dependent and inextricably interdependent.

There is a striking similarity between Darwall's account of the presuppositions of moral reason-giving and Engster's argument about our shared presupposition of obligations to care. All human beings, the latter claims, can be assumed to value their survival, development, and avoidance of suffering. Further, all human beings require care to secure these things, implicitly making claims on others to meet their needs in periods of inevitable dependency. By making these claims, we presuppose both the value of care as a goal and the existence of a moral norm that those properly positioned to give care to dependents have an obligation to do so. Where we are so positioned, he therefore concludes, we have an obligation to recognise claims for care as valid, because we implicitly assume they are whenever we make those claims ourselves.[71]

Little modification of Engster's argument is necessary to interpret it in the language of second-personal authority. Humans, on this view, are not autonomous agents who voluntarily contract together for mutual advantage, but persons born in relationships who give implicit normative reasons to care for them to others from the moment they are born. As no human would have survived infancy without these care needs being met by others, there is a presupposition of the validity of care demands and the obligations to meet them baked into any act of moral reason-giving by an adult. Our second-personal authority, accordingly, can be grounded in our status as an inevitably dependent member of an interdependent species, all of whom have benefitted from care and all of whom have thereby implicitly assumed the legitimacy of demands on others to provide it. When we make claims on the conduct of others, in other words, we presuppose that both we and they are, in Kittay's terms, 'some mother's child'.[72]

Placing the inputs of personhood by inevitable dependency and the social as universal interdependency into the relational model of justice produces an output that is similar to, yet distinct from the quality of justice recommended by justice-based relational egalitarians. Recognition respect would require us to take seriously our equal nature as inevitably dependent beings when deliberating, which thereby alters the shape of equality: away from recognition of the equal value of our deeply-held interests or capacities and towards a commitment to the equal claim we all possess to be treated as a worthy subject of care, including when we are engaged in the act of caring for dependents. Justice would demand that our relations with one another, thus, be governed by a quality of what Kittay calls *doulia*: 'just as we have required care to survive, so we need to provide conditions that allow others—including those who do the work of caring—to receive the care they need to survive and thrive'.[73]

Making use of dynamic evaluation, a theory of relational caring justice would not view care or caring persons as a resource to be appropriately distributed, but instead focus on the social processes and structures that inhibit the emergence of doulia in social relations. Though they tend not to describe themselves as relational theorists of justice, it is common to see evaluations of this kind in the work of justice-based care ethicists. Kittay, for instance, highlights several such impediments in American society, including patriarchal family structures that institutionalise threats of exploitation for dependency workers, welfare systems that individualise responsibility for and obscure the inevitability of dependency and dependency work, and a market ideology that fails to recognise dependency work as valuable work.[74] Engster, in a similar vein, raises several concerns about the ways in which Western cultures inhibit caring attitudes, drawing particular attention to the pervasiveness of violence and violent attitudes on television.[75]

In sum, there is a distinct theory of relational caring justice that can be developed by inputting care ethicists' conceptions of the social and the person into the model of relational justice I have developed in this paper. Though it involves an appeal to equality, it shifts emphasis away from the need for persons to relate as social equals, towards the need to develop relations of reciprocal care. In this respect it differs from relational egalitarianism, such that it may not rule out certain kinds of hierarchical relations: namely, those that exist between dependency workers and dependents. Indeed, Kittay herself rejects the view of domination adopted by (most) relational egalitarians – consisting in the mere capacity for a powerful actor to interfere arbitrarily in another's interests, whether or not they ever engage in such interference[76] – as incompatible with the reality of the dependency relation, favouring instead a definition of domination as an illegitimate *exercise* of power.[77] While it remains the least surprising of the allies I set out in this section, then, relational caring justice nevertheless represents a departure.

5.2 | Relational Libertarian Justice

More surprising, given extensive areas of disagreement with relational egalitarianism, is the fact that my relational model of justice is capacious enough to include within it a libertarian view, heavily influenced by Robert Nozick. Interestingly, some 16 years before Young, Nozick embarked on a similar critique of distributive egalitarianism, which the former cites approvingly (if cautiously) when developing her argument against static evaluation.[78] I refer here to his well-known argument, summarised in the pithy phrase: 'liberty upsets patterns'.[79]

A patterned theory of justice, in Nozick's view, is one that fails to place appropriate weight on history. Such theories draw on principles that are either ahistorical or only narrowly historical: principles that only permit variations in the distribution of resources if they accord with a prescribed pattern. Where they are ahistorical or 'end-state' principles, to use Nozick's term, they place no importance for evaluations of justice and injustice on how a particular distributive pattern came to be. The principle 'distribute according to I.Q'., for instance, is concerned only with what persons have in relation to their inherent features, not the way they come to possess it. Where they are narrowly

historical, they place some importance on past actions, but the moment of evaluation remains at the end-state distributive pattern. A principle of 'distribution according to moral merit', for example, is concerned with past actions to the extent that they determine what a person is owed, but it is only *derivatively* concerned with them; what matters for justice is not how people come to hold a distributive position, but whether their distributive position, at the point of evaluation, matches the moral merit they have attained.[80]

The problem with solely evaluating justice according to patterns, for Nozick, is that no such distributive principle can be realised 'without continual interference with people's lives'. This is so because the free choices of individuals in utilising their resources will inevitably disrupt the pattern, such that either it continually needs to be reinstituted by coercive action or such action needs to be used to prevent free choices. Nozick's thought experiment involving the late American basketball player Wilt Chamberlain is invoked to illustrate exactly this point; were he to have signed a contract that gave him a significant cut of the ticket prices of each game he played, and fans to have attended gladly knowing such an arrangement was in place, he would have received an income far greater than his colleagues and far greater than the average – such that it would almost certainly violate any patterned principle of justice – merely as a result of the free choices of individuals.[81]

As an alternative, Nozick favours a view focused on *entitlement*. Rather than evaluating the justice of a given society according to the end-state distributive pattern of goods, he argues that we should evaluate according to the legitimacy of the transfers that lead to the differential holdings of persons. If persons do not violate the requirements of just transfer to attain goods, such as through theft or coercion, then they are entitled to those they hold, no matter the resulting pattern of distribution. Judgments of justice, in other words, ought to occur at the level of social processes, not at the level of end-state distributions.[82]

Nozick is arguing here against the same static approach to evaluation rejected by Young. His concept of justice in transfer, likewise, involves the same kind of dynamic approach to evaluation she defends. This alone suggests a degree of similarity between his libertarianism and the work of relational egalitarians that is not widely acknowledged. The convergence, however, does not end at the level of evaluation. Upon examination, it becomes clear that Nozick also rejects third-personal justification, making use of the second-person approach favoured by Anderson.

Nozick's concept of just transfer is grounded in the non-violation of rights; transfers are morally legitimate, broadly speaking, if they take place without the violation of either of the parties' rights. He stresses, however, that the non-violation of rights should not be viewed as an end-state moral goal, such that justice becomes a question of minimising rights violations in any given society. We should see them, rather, as side constraints on our individual goals. So understood, there is no justice in violating the rights of a few in pursuit of a greater good, whether that greater good is the prevention of serious harm or even a larger number of rights violations. Rights are only, for Nozick, constraints on our actions given to us by others, which we must respect out of the Kantian notion that we ought never to treat other persons as mere means to an end.[83]

In adopting a view of rights as a side constraints, Nozick makes his libertarianism incompatible with third-personal justification. There is no overarching set of principles arrived at through impersonal reasoning about what a society should be like here; that is the hallmark of the end-state approaches to justice that he rejects. Instead, his view of justice consists in determining what we can justifiably require from others as constraints on their actions. This fits neatly under Anderson's definition of interpersonal justification, as well as Darwall's analysis of the second-person standpoint on which it is built. Combined with the fact that it makes use of dynamic evaluation, these are solid grounds upon which to interpret Nozick's libertarianism as a relational theory of justice, on the model I have developed.

Now, it may strike readers as curious that Nozick proceeds from Kantian grounds yet endorses a view that is far less demanding than relational egalitarianism. There are two features of relational libertarianism, however, that explain this divergence: its conception of the social and its *interpretation* of Kantian personhood. Exploring Nozick in relational terms, therefore, helps to illustrate that conceptions of the social and of the person can come apart, such that two theorists can share one but differ on the other, and that both are variously interpretable, such that theorists can appear to share them yet understand them differently.

Taking first the question of the social, it is notable that Nozick rejects the social contract tradition in favour of what he calls an 'invisible-hand explanation of the state'. Rather than being founded on a historical, imagined or implicit set of agreements to govern the terms of co-operation, Nozick seeks to demonstrate that the state can emerge as a cumulative result of rational, self-interested choices of individuals seeking to protect their holdings from others, ensure enforcement of freely chosen contracts and prevent private enforcement of justice.[84] Setting aside the plausibility of this explanation, what this indicates is that he possesses a distinct theory of the social from most justice-based relational egalitarians; we are only inextricably related to others in the realm of exchange, such that our social relations consist only in those that govern our market interactions. Consequently, he interprets the justice-relevant features of Kantian personhood in a far more minimal way, emphasising the *separateness* of persons as rights-bearers, rather than their equal standing to make claims on others in a scheme of thoroughgoing co-operation.[85]

Inputting a bare, market-based conception of the social and an interpretation of Kantian personhood that emphasises separateness into the relational justice model, inevitably, produces demands of recognition respect in relations of a libertarian character. When deliberating, the appropriate weight to place on the personhood of others consists solely in the non-violation of their rights through our actions. There is no need to consider their wider social standing, their relative distributive position, or social norms and structures that may restrict their sense of

what is possible. All that matters is that we do not treat them as mere means to our ends; that our relations with them embody the quality of respect for our separateness.

The interpretation of Nozick I have presented here should not be misunderstood; in terms of their substantive views of justice, libertarians and relational egalitarians agree on very little. Indeed, it seems self-evident that justice-based relational egalitarians have more in common with distributive egalitarians than any theorists in the mould of Nozick. Nor should what I have said here be misapprehended as a claim that Nozick himself would claim to be a relational theorist of justice. My point, rather, is that his work can be interpreted through the model I have developed in this paper, such that it outputs a distinctly libertarian view of the quality of relation that justice demands.

5.3 | Hierarchical Relational Justice

By outlining a relational interpretation of Nozick's libertarianism, I hope to have demonstrated that theories of justice that are ostensibly antagonistic can begin from the same position regarding the essential nature of that concept. Before closing, I wish to bolster this point by taking it to its logical extreme. Libertarians and relational egalitarians agree on little, but they both begin from the premise that persons are morally equal: a premise that, in the words of Ronald Dworkin, represents 'a kind of plateau in political argument' among contemporary philosophers, from which any deviation is considered unreasonable.[86] We do not need to look that far back into intellectual history, however – nor beyond the bubble of Western analytic philosophy for that matter – to find views about social justice that proceed from the idea of natural hierarchy. In this final subsection, I aim to demonstrate that these, too, can be understood as relational theories of justice.

The theory I will set out here is a construction for the sake of argument; I do not draw on any particular philosopher in setting it out. In part, this is because outright defenders of natural hierarchy are difficult to find. My overriding concern, however, is in avoiding tangential discussions of how best to interpret work that is historical or produced outside of the Western analytic paradigm, alongside sidestepping ethical concerns about the consequences of platforming contemporary voices that reject the moral equality of persons. While this may raise concerns of straw-personing, the point I am making here does not rely on any actually-existing hierarchical theorist being a relational theorist of justice; all I am seeking to demonstrate is that it is possible to arrive at conclusions that would appal relational egalitarians while making use of the model of justice that I have developed here. In this sense, a constructed view of justice that inverts the demands of relational egalitarianism is well suited for achieving this goal.

It might seem puzzling that a theorist could possess a conception of persons as bearers of natural ranks while adopting the interpersonal approach to justification. If we inevitably presuppose that the persons to whom we give normative reasons possess the same standing that we presume ourselves to hold, then it might seem like it is conceptually incoherent for a person

to make claims on others on grounds of natural superiority. Indeed, even if we were to grant that such natural ranks exist, it might seem like the status of being a natural inferior precludes second-personal competence, because such persons would be definitionally incapable of reflecting on whether or not to meet the demands of their natural superiors, and there would be no clear alternative basis upon which they could claim second-personal authority.

A belief in the existence of natural hierarchy, however, need not extend to the belief that persons cannot defy the demands of their rank. Indeed, it would be quite superfluous to build a theory of justice based on a concept of natural hierarchy if conformity with it were inevitable. A more plausible concept of natural hierarchy (relatively speaking) can be grounded in both the internal features of persons and in a view of the nature of social life. For example, a theorist might hold that the social world is a creation of a divine will and that, as such, it is our duty to conform to a divinely ordained hierarchy to be faithful to its intended design. A secular alternative to this might draw on evolutionary theory, positing that the social world exists because it aids in our primary natural drives to survive and pass on our genes and that it is most beneficial when it follows a strict system of hierarchy according to natural abilities.

Defending such views is not my intention here: indeed, both are contrary to my intuitions and considered judgments about the existence of a god and the process of evolution. My point, rather, is that there is no conceptual incoherence in adopting either of them alongside a model of interpersonal justification. We can presuppose that persons do possess a natural rank *and* that they are capable of choosing whether or not to behave in ways that respect or violate it. Therefore, hierarchical theorists need not even depart from the grounding of second-personal authority in second-personal competence, let alone develop alternative grounds, because acknowledgment of one's own natural rank does not preclude one from possessing rational agency.

Proceeding from these inputs, recognition respect in relations would consist of placing the appropriate weight on a person's natural rank. Respect is displayed when a natural inferior places greater weight on the interests of a superior and vice versa. The quality of relational justice that would be recommended by such a theory, accordingly, would be one of obedience to authority and responsibility in exercising it. Being dynamic, evaluations of justice would not focus on the distribution of these qualities but on the social processes and structures that inhibit their emergence, placing great emphasis on removing barriers to the exercising of authority by superiors and the acceptance of the need to be obedient by inferiors.

Relational hierarchical justice is the most surprising ally of relational egalitarianism among the three views I have considered here, to the point where it may seem perverse to call the quality of relation it demands just. It is diametrically opposed to the quality of egalitarianism in social relationships recommended by relational egalitarianism, and there are many reasons to object to the conceptions of the social and of personhood that it would be grounded in. Such a view, nevertheless, can be arrived

at from the model of justice I have set out here, rendering those disagreements a matter of inputs and outputs, not of the nature of justice as a concept.

6 | Conclusion

In this article, I have developed a model of the relational approach to justice, extracting its key features from the arguments of two early relational egalitarians: Young and Anderson. This is a model whose outputted quality of relational justice depends upon the conceptions of the social and the person it receives as inputs. As well as illustrating this model in egalitarian and caring forms, I have also shown that libertarians and believers in natural hierarchy can make use of it to develop their own relational theories of justice. In so doing, I have demonstrated the flexibility of the model and reinforced the separateness of arguments about equality and justice in relational egalitarianism.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Endnotes

[1] Cohen, G. A. 1989. "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice." *Ethics* 99, no. 4: 906.

[2] Dworkin, R. 1981. "What is Equality? Part 2: Equality of Resources." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 10, no. 4: 283–345.

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[4] Cohen, G. A. 1989. "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice." *Ethics* 99, no. 4: 906.

[5] Anderson, E. S. 1999. "What is the Point of Equality?" Ethics 109, no. 2: 287–337.

[6] Young, I. M. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 15–38. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[7] Wolff, J. 1998. "Fairness, Respect, and the Egalitarian Ethos." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 27, no. 2: 97–122.

[8] Nath, R. 2020. "Relational Egalitarianism." *Philosophy Compass* 15, no. 7, e12686.

[9] Anderson, E. S. 1999. "What is the Point of Equality?" Ethics 109, no. 2: 295.

[10] Young, I. M. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[11] Miller, D. 1997. "Equality and Justice." *Ratio* 10, no. 3: 224–232.

[12] Schemmel, C. 2015. "Social Equality—or Just Justice?" in *Social Equality: On what it Means to be Equals*, edited by C. Fourie, F. Schuppert, and I. Wallimann-Helmer, 146. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

[13] Some distributive egalitarians, moreover, recognise the independent value of equal relations in addition to holding a distributive view of justice—a pluralist approach that bears a close resemblance to Miller's version of relational egalitarianism. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing me towards secondary scholarship on Cohen that interprets his invocation of the value of community in this way. [See: Nielsen, L., and Albertsen, A. 2021. "Why Not Community? An Exploration of the Value of Community in Cohen's Socialism." *Res Publica* 28, no. 2: 303–322].

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[23] Lippert-Rasmussen, K. 2018. *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 132–133. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

[24] Lippert-Rasmussen, K. 2015. *Luck Egalitarianism*, 238. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

[25] Axelsen, D. V., and Bidadanure, J. 2019. "Unequally Egalitarian? Defending the Credentials of Social Egalitarianism." *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 22, no. 3: 340.

[26] There is an interesting question that might be raised here about priorities. Given resource limitations, a political movement may only be able to tackle the relational inequalities of a society in stages, which may result in some individuals being liberated by the removal of some unjust ways of relating that inhibit them while they are still privileged in comparison to others in other respects. In the British context, it seems plausible that the priorities of the 1997–2010 New Labour government could be criticised on these terms: prioritising the challenging of racism, homophobia, and sexism, while leaving other injustices related to social class and wealth intact. To the extent that such a situation can be described as unjust for a relational theorist, however, it is not because it is *pro tanto* unjust to remove oppressive or dominating relational burdens from relatively privileged people, but that the relations between social classes or wealth groups remain unjust *despite* the removal of other oppressive and dominating relations. We might even say that there is something internal to that injustice that places them beyond scrutiny or below the priority level that should be accorded to them.

[27] The building of a skyscraper at a position that overshadows the gardens of those in the vicinity, thereby preventing their plants from engaging effectively in photosynthesis, for instance, would be an issue of justice that indirectly involved this natural process.

[28] For more on relational approaches to intergenerational justice, see: Sommers, T. 2013. "Can There be Relational Equality Across Generations? Or at All?" *Res Publica*: 469–481.

[29] Weale, A. 2020. *Modern Social Contract Theory*, 4–14. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

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[36] Kittay, E. F. 1999. *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, 94–99. London, UK: Psychology Press.

[37] Anderson, E. 2010. "The Fundamental Disagreement between Luck Egalitarians and Relational Egalitarians." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40, no. 1: 1–3.

[38] At least not directly. Environmental factors like pollution and food insecurity can have a significant impact on persons in utero and, insofar as such talents are the result of genetics, choices in sexual partners can affect their distribution. Unless they were enacted to specifically target the distribution of natural talents, however, any such effects from factors of the first kind are indirect in nature; the interpersonal injustice would consist in a way of relating through processes and structures that is dismissive of the universal human claim to food security and freedom from health-damaging pollution. Factors of the latter kind, on the other hand, cannot generate interpersonal claims of injustice because the persons who are affected by them do not exist at the time of choosing. Even if the non-identity problem could be circumvented, moreover, it is doubtful that any child could ever have the standing to demand that their parents had reproduced with partners other than those that they chose.

[39] Anderson, E. 2010. "The Fundamental Disagreement between Luck Egalitarians and Relational Egalitarians." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40, no. 1: 8–11.

[40] Young, I. M. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 192–193. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[41] Lippert-Rasmussen, K. 2015. "Luck Egalitarians Versus Relational Egalitarians: On the Prospects of a Pluralist Account of Egalitarian Justice." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 45, no. 2: 232.

[42] Anderson, E. 2010. "The Fundamental Disagreement between Luck Egalitarians and Relational Egalitarians." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40, no. 1: 5.

[43] If structural injustice is understood as that which has no clear individual who is responsible for it, there may seem an inconsistency between the interpersonal approach to justification and the dynamic approach to evaluation. I take it, however, that relational egalitarians tend to take a broad view of responsibility which encompasses more than causal liability. Young's social connection model of responsibility, for instance, posits a *political* responsibility that those who are connected to structural injustice have to tackle it. [See: Young, I. M. 2011. *Responsibility for Justice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press].

[44] This is not true the other way around; even though both cases involve a clashing of interests of equal strength held by moral equals, someone coerced into a romantic or sexual relationship with another would have the standing to complain to the coercer under relational egalitarianism. This is so, because other key interests like bodily autonomy, privacy, and freedom of association are here injured, providing more than adequate grounds for charging the coercer with failing to abide by reasonable demands that can be made of them. No such considerations exist in the refused relationship case.

[45] Schemmel, C. 2021. *Justice and Egalitarian Relations*, 17. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

[46] Scheffler, S. 2015. "The Practice of Equality," in *Social Equality: On what it Means to be Equals*, edited by C. Fourie, F. Schuppert, and I. Wallimann-Helmer, 36–37. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

[47] Anderson, E. 2010. "The Fundamental Disagreement between Luck Egalitarians and Relational Egalitarians." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40, no. 1: 4.

[48] Darwall, S. 2009. *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, 255–262. Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press.

[49] Darwall, S. 2009. *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, 138. Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press.

[50] Darwall, S. 2009. *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, 121–126. Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press.

[51] The discouragement of men from sensitivity and engagement with their own emotions is often the result of similar mechanisms and, because it does not directly inhibit the ability of men to assert their own claims on others, the unjustness of the social norms that cultivate what might be called 'big boy syndrome' is even less likely to be captured by this model.

[52] Salmenniemi, S. 2022. *Affect, Alienation, and Politics in Therapeutic Culture: Capitalism on the Skin*, 181–206. Basingstoke, UK: Springer Nature.

[53] For more on the operation of power without overt conflict, see Lukes, S. 1979. *Power: A Radical View*. London, UK: Macmillan and Foucault, M. 1979. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York, NY: Vintage.

[54] Darwall, S. 2009. *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, 35–38. Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press.

[55] Anderson, E. 1999. "What is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109, no. 2: 319.

[56] Schemmel, C. 2021. *Justice and Egalitarian Relations*, 3–6. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

[57] Young, I. M. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 35–37. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[58] Young, I. M. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 39–48. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[59] Lippert-Rasmussen, K. 2018. *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 2. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

[60] Lippert-Rasmussen, K. 2018. *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 5–6. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

[61] Lippert-Rasmussen, K. 2018. *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 6–9. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

[62] Lippert-Rasmussen, K. 2018. *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 9–11. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

[63] Indeed, there is an account of relational sufficientarianism that has been set out in a recent journal article co-authored by Andreas Bengston and Lasse Nielsen—though it is one that does not share the characterisation of the relational model that I set out here. [See: Bengtson, A., and Nielsen, L. "Relational Justice: Egalitarian and Sufficientarian," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, (Published Online on 17th April 2023), https://doi.org/10.1111/japp.12658].

[64] In this sense, a relational egalitarian conception justice that emerges from the model I have developed here would not be vulnerable to criticisms focused on perceived indeterminacy about what it means to relate as equals. Andreas Bengston and Lauritz Munch, for example, have identified a distinction between regarding someone as an equal and treating them as such, and have suggested relational egalitarians must decide whether relating as equals means to do both or just to do one of those things. On my model, however, the relating is neither about treating nor regarding but

about *recognition* and how that determines required responses to demands. [See: Bengtson, A., and Aastrup Munch, L. 2024. "What Relational Egalitarians Should (Not) Believe." *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 27, no. 2: 315–340].

[65] For a concise intellectual history of this viewpoint, see:

Held, V. 2015. "Care and Justice, Still," in *Care Ethics and Political Theory*, edited by D. Engster, and M. Hamington, 18–36. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

[66] Kittay, E. F. 2015. "A Theory of Justice as Fair Terms of Social Life Given Our Inevitable Dependency and Our Inextricable Interdependency," in *Care Ethics and Political Theory*, edited by D. Engster, and M. Hamington, 51–71. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

[67] Engster, D. 2007. *The Heart of Justice: Care Ethics and Political Theory*, 2. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

[68] Kittay, E. F. 1999. *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, 182–184. London, UK: Psychology Press.

[69] Darwall, S. 2002. *Welfare and Rational Care*, 14. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[70] Darwall, S. 2002. *Welfare and Rational Care*, 117. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[71] Engster, D. 2007. *The Heart of Justice: Care Ethics and Political Theory*, 46–49. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press on Demand.

[72] Kittay, E. F. 1999. *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, 49–50. London, UK: Psychology Press.

[73] Kittay, E. F. 1999. *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, 133. London, UK: Psychology Press.

[74] Kittay, E. F. 1999. *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, 118–140. London, UK: Psychology Press.

[75] Engster, D. 2007. *The Heart of Justice: Care Ethics and Political Theory*, 234–239. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

[76] Nath, R. 2020. "Relational Egalitarianism." *Philosophy Compass* 15, no. 7, e12686.

[77] Kittay, E. F. 1999. *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality, and Dependency*, 33–37. London, UK: Psychology Press.

[78] Young, I. M. 1990. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 28–29. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

[79] Nozick, R. 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 160. New York, NY: Basic Books.

[80] Nozick, R. 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 153–156. New York, NY: Basic Books.

[81] Nozick, R. 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 160–163. New York, NY: Basic Books.

[82] Nozick, R. 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 150–182. New York, NY: Basic Books.

[83] Nozick, R. 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 28–33. New York, NY: Basic Books.

[84] Nozick, R. 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 88–119. New York, NY: Basic Books.

[85] Nozick, R. 1974. *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 33–35. New York, NY: Basic Books.

[86] Dworkin, R. 1983. "Comment on Narveson: in Defense of Equality." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 1, no. 1: 25.