

RELATIONAL EGALITARIANISM AND INFORMAL SOCIAL INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

I identify and respond to a problem for liberal relational egalitarians. There is a *prima facie* worry about the compatibility of liberalism and relational egalitarianism, concerning the requirements of equality in informal social life. Liberalism at least involves a commitment to leaving individuals substantial discretion to pursue their own conceptions of the good. Relational equality is best understood as a kind of deliberative practice about social institutions and practices. Patterns of otherwise innocuous social choices (e.g., where to live, whom to befriend or marry) can create emergent, severe differentials in power, status, and influence, and when they do they can threaten relational equality. If relational equality required individuals to subordinate personal choices to egalitarian considerations, it would run into conflict with liberal commitments. In response, I defend the value of accepting an imperfect realization of relational equality. What I call *fair relational equality* demands that members of society treat some informal social norms and practices as part of the basic structure of society, in need of justification. Three practices are required to meet that demand. First, the relational-egalitarian society must develop institutional strategies to preempt or mitigate tendencies toward emergent inequality as they are identified. Second, members of society must engage in broad social deliberation about the norms and expectations of informal social interaction. Third, they must be willing to reform social practices where doing so does not impinge on important personal projects and values.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a contribution to the literature on relational egalitarianism, which is a relatively recent development in academic philosophy. In particular, it concerns efforts made in the last five years to provide a positive conception of relational equality. At the same time, it deals with some of the oldest questions for liberal egalitarians: how to negotiate conflicts between ideals of social equality and individual liberty, how those conflicts should affect our understanding of those ideals, and how we can build an egalitarian social order that leaves people free to plan and manage their own lives.

Relational egalitarianism claims that equality is best understood in terms of the quality of social relations, not first and foremost in terms of the distribution of any particular good. While this dramatically refigures some egalitarian concerns, it should not be surprising if adopting this framework does not solve or avoid all outstanding problems in egalitarian theory. Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen has recently argued that “many of the challenges faced by luck egalitarianism reappear, *mutatis mutandis*, once we try to specify relational egalitarianism more fully” (2018, xi). While I am less concerned than Lippert-Rasmussen to draw comparisons to luck egalitarianism, I agree with the claim that there are familiar challenges that await relational egalitarians. How to draw the line between public and private, and what significance to give to that distinction, is a perennial issue for liberal political philosophy. One of the central claims of this dissertation is that interaction in informal social life significantly affects our ability to relate as equals. Thinking about this influence clarifies what kind of relational equality we are likely to achieve in a liberal society, how we should value the ideal, and what we should do in pursuit of equality.

In liberal societies, individuals make many choices about their lives for personal reasons. They choose what projects to adopt, how to spend their time, where to live, whom to marry or befriend, what they will admire and esteem, and how they will present themselves in public. Many of these choices can be deeply meaningful and important—whether as part of a person’s narrative identity or expressing their deeply held convictions and values. Such choices are often described as personal or private matters, where that means individuals do not owe the public an accounting for such choices. Even if their options are shaped by social expectations, traditions, and practices, there is an important sense in which those choices are left to individuals.

However personal such decisions may be, patterns of those personal choices can profoundly shape a society. The choices we make in our everyday lives frequently have unforeseeable distant consequences. Patterns of relatively small consumption choices can create and destroy markets, give rise to political movements, and change the face of the planet. The relationship between individual choice and social pattern, and more particularly our individual responsibilities for such patterns, has been explored in the context of sweatshop labor, climate change, and structural injustice more generally.¹ Patterns of personal choices also influence what power and status different groups in society have. This is commonly recognized when thinking about active discrimination—when members of one group exclude others from jobs, neighborhoods, and social circles. In some cases, even when individuals mean well and harbor no objectionable attitudes, patterns of social choices can still produce a social world in which some groups are excluded, marginalized, discredited, or disesteemed.² When they do so, such patterns threaten our ability to relate to each other as equals.

This dissertation identifies a worry about conflict between fundamental liberties in

¹ See, for example, Lawford-Smith (2015), Sinnott-Armstrong (2005), and Young (2011).

² Chapter 4 describes some circumstances in which this is possible, drawing on sociological research and arguing that similar effects could be produced in otherwise ideal societies.

private life and relational equality. On its own, the idea of a conflict between liberty and equality is a well-worn subject. Rawls's justice as fairness is commonly understood as offering a way of reconciling "the competing claims of liberty and equality" (Rawls 2001, 2). People relate as free and equals when society, conceived as a mutually beneficial system of social cooperation, is governed by two principles of justice. The equal basic liberties of all citizens take priority, after which fair equality of opportunity and the difference principle regulate social and economic inequalities. In such a system, people relate as free and equals because they can develop their own conceptions of the good and they have an equal status to make claims on that system of cooperation. So the competing claims of liberty and equality are reconciled in two ways. First, claims to certain basic liberties trump claims to some distributive or economic equality, should those ever conflict. Second, there is a more fundamental idea of equality involved in how we can relate as equals, which is not in conflict with those liberties.

Elizabeth Anderson's pioneering work on relational egalitarianism likewise describes equality in terms that would attenuate the conflict:

[Democratic equality] claims that the social condition of living a free life is that one stand in relations of equality with others. This claim might seem paradoxical, given the prevailing view that represents equality and freedom as conflicting ideals. We can see how it is true by considering the oppressive relationships that social equality negates. . . .

To live in an egalitarian community, then, is to be free from oppression to participate in and enjoy the goods of society, and to participate in democratic self-government.

(1999a, 315)

On her view, equality requires that the "social conditions" of citizens' freedom be secured (1999a, 289). Anderson seems to be taking up the second Rawlsian strategy mentioned above, to

argue that in fact the ideals of liberty and equality do not conflict.

If relational equality is understood as some flat distribution of power or status, then it seems obvious that fundamental liberties of association and expression can conflict with relational equality. As Michael Walzer put it, “equality is an ideal ripe for betrayal. Committed men and women betray it, or seem to do so, as soon as they organize a movement for equality and distribute power, positions, and influence among themselves” (1983, xi).³ But if relational equality is defined in terms of some ideal relationship between “free and equals,” then it might seem that conflict is impossible, because the secure possession of some fundamental liberties is built into the definition of the relationship.

Since the view I defend in this dissertation is Rawlsian in some ways and deeply influenced by Anderson’s work, why think there could be a conflict between fundamental liberties in private life and relational equality? As I will argue, I think we need to see relational equality as an aspirational political project—an achievement that we strive for, not a definition of whatever relationship free people have when they respect each other’s rights or act on principles that express appropriate attitudes toward each other. Following Samuel Scheffler (2015), I treat relational equality as a kind of practice people can engage in, with attendant requirements that we can fail to meet for a variety of reasons. Understood as a particular practice and not a summary concept of morally appropriate relations, it is less surprising that relational equality could conflict with other ideals. The exercise of clearly important basic liberties can impede that practice. Elsewhere Scheffler describes liberal egalitarianism as an attempt to simultaneously satisfy a plurality of different values (2005b), and I think it is worth emphasizing that such attempts may not always perfectly succeed.⁴ So however well-worn the discussion of conflicts

³ Jonathan Wolff sounds a similar theme in “Equality and Hierarchy” (2018).

⁴ See also Bernard Williams’s description of the possibility of such value conflicts (2005 [1962], 1965).

among liberty and equality may be, it takes a new form in light of further development of a positive relational-egalitarian ideal. Relational egalitarians have been slow to articulate a positive conception of their view—to say what positively constitutes relating as equals—so there has been little discussion to date of the long-range, ideal-theoretic requirements of relational equality. It is only when we begin to give a more robust characterization of the positive requirements of relational equality that this conflict comes into view.

After identifying that conflict, I argue that liberal relational egalitarians should accept an imperfect realization of relational equality, even in ideal circumstances. At first glance, this will also look like a familiar egalitarian position. Larry Temkin has argued that most egalitarians today are pluralists—they recognize that equality is not all that is important, and that there are some circumstances where it may not be pursued further (2003, 63).⁵ On his view, it is sometimes more important to heed values of efficiency or compassion. So many egalitarians claim that we should accept an imperfect form of equality in many circumstances. What distinguishes the argument I make here? First, this should be a surprising development for relational egalitarianism, since the appeal to pluralism is often offered as a response to the leveling down objection, which is not as pressing a worry for relational egalitarianism as it is for equality of welfare. It would be worth articulating even if it did not ultimately differ considerably from Temkin's pluralism. Second, appeals to pluralism often seem open (at least in principle) to trading equality off against anything else of value, whether it be efficiency, compassion, beauty, or the achievement of excellence. By contrast, I defend a kind of deontic egalitarianism in which equality may only be traded off against other demands of justice. We have an obligation to pursue relational equality, I argue, up to the point at which further efforts would compromise other ideals of justice. Finally, my argument goes beyond the claim that we can only pursue

⁵ See also Parfit (1997) and O'Neill (2008, 143–4).

equality so far or to a certain degree. I argue that, in the face of likely conflict, relational egalitarians need to reflect on and develop a relational ideal that is suitable for liberal societies. They need to say more about what it is we can reasonably hope for, to explain why we can reconcile ourselves to an imperfect realization of relational equality, and to help identify when we should not directly pursue a perfect realization itself.

In this project, I bracket a number of closely related issues. First, I do not engage with the more fundamental arguments about egalitarianism—the debate about “basic” or “moral” equality and what shared properties we must have to count as equals in this sense. Second, I do not propose to offer a freestanding defense of the value of liberal commitments themselves. Throughout I assume a commitment to protecting fundamental individual liberties; though there is important work to do in characterizing what Christian Schemmel calls “radical [relational] egalitarianism” (2011b, 142), a full treatment of radical possibilities goes beyond the scope of this project. Third, I assume throughout that some form of value pluralism is plausible, such that we can see genuine conflict between our ideals. In spite of these assumptions, this project should still be of interest to those who are not antecedently inclined toward liberal egalitarianism. Anyone with either a liberal or an egalitarian commitment has reason to consider these issues, of course. Critics of liberalism and relational egalitarianism may also find material here, however much I find the rejection of either commitment unattractive.

The first two chapters introduce and develop a positive conception of relational equality. In chapter 1, “The Fundamental Claims of Relational Egalitarianism,” I introduce the basic idea of relational egalitarianism and explain what distinguishes it from other forms of egalitarianism. Chapter 1 describes what kind of account of relational egalitarianism we need—why an account

of the ideal is useful, why relational equality is a matter of justice, why I remain neutral about the appropriate scope of relational equality, and why it is a distinctive view of equality. It also offers a few reasons to prefer conceptions of relational equality that are practice-oriented—that is, that define relational equality as something achieved when we engage in a certain practice.

Chapter 2, “The Deliberative View of Relational Equality,” describes in greater detail the particular conception of relational equality used throughout this dissertation. I argue that we should build on Samuel Scheffler’s egalitarian deliberative constraint to work out a positive conception of relational equality. On this view, equals make decisions together about the structure of their society, and their social institutions and practices could be justified to each other in fair deliberation. Scheffler (2015) leaves open how to determine what decisions members of society would have to make together, and how to assess whether some decisions meet the deliberative constraints, so chapter 2 supplies provisional answers to those questions.

In order to explain the worry about the compatibility of relational egalitarianism and liberalism, some account of liberal principles is needed. Chapter 3, “Liberal Commitments and the Liberal Society,” provides a stipulative sketch of core liberal commitments. In particular, I focus on the importance accorded to fundamental individual liberties and the vision of a society in which individuals are left considerable latitude regarding personal choices. The sketch remains neutral about how liberal commitments are justified, and generally it aims to serve as a fairly ecumenical characterization of liberalism.

Chapter 4, “The Compatibility Worry,” brings the work of the preceding chapters together, to show why there is some tension between relational-egalitarian and liberal commitments. I argue that fully satisfying the deliberative view of relational equality would sometimes require intrusive interventions or illiberal demands on individuals’ personal choices.

Chapter 4 describes the social and political institutions likely to be demanded by relational egalitarians and what those institutions could accomplish. It then shows why institutional action alone is unlikely to secure relational equality. Beyond demanding that individuals reject inegalitarian attitudes—a demand that in many cases is unobjectionable—relational equality may also require individuals to attend to the downstream political consequences of personal choices. This is because emergent social inequalities in power, status, and influence can arise out of patterns of otherwise innocuous personal choices. I argue that these emergent social inequalities can impede relational equality, and that in some cases they cannot be eliminated entirely without undermining the liberal society.

The rest of the dissertation lays out a response to this problem. Chapter 5, “Fair Relational Equality,” introduces the possibility of fair relational equality—the acceptance of particular forms of imperfect relational equality, even in ideal circumstances—and the idea of the informal social structure. The first section describes the idea of fair relational equality by drawing an analogy to the Rawlsian idea of imperfectly realized fair equality of opportunity. I argue that fair relational equality is achieved when institutions and individuals do everything they can to help realize relational equality, up to the point at which other demands of justice conflict. The second section begins explaining what that would require. I argue for a shift in focus from particular individual choices to the informal social structure—a set of norms and practices that facilitate and shape our informal interaction. Liberals can include the informal social structure in the basic structure of society, because it plays a key role in determining how social cooperation is organized. Members of society owe each other justification for the social practices that organize their cooperation, even where they do not owe each other a justification for personal choices. So liberal relational egalitarians can treat some aspects of informal social

interaction as matters properly decided together, and they can shape those norms and practices to eliminate or mitigate emergent social inequalities.

Chapter 6, “Fair Relational Equality and the Division of Moral Labor,” outlines one way in which the work of creating and maintaining a fair informal social structure might be achieved. The first section focuses on what state institutions could contribute to that effort. I argue that institutions should aim to realize as best as possible a kind of background justice in informal social interaction, so that emergent social inequalities are minimized whatever personal choices individuals make. Institutions can shape the environment in which individuals interact, engage in informative and persuasive speech, and mitigate the effects of emergent social inequalities by making some informal choices less consequential. The second section turns to how individuals can contribute to the creation and maintenance of a fair informal social structure. I argue that conceiving of individuals’ obligations as part of the duty to support just institutions can help support a limited responsibility—individuals ought to help create better norms and practices, but they need not make every personal choice for exclusively political reasons. Individuals can be asked to accept changes in the norms of public interaction, to restrain some expressions of partiality, and to participate in public discussion about informal social choices that are not properly decided collectively. Finally, I explain why these efforts would not be sufficient to realize perfect relational equality but nevertheless could realize an imperfect form of relational equality.

The project as a whole is concerned with what relational egalitarianism demands, given certain facts about how informal social goods are distributed. Testing the long-range compatibility of liberal and relational-egalitarian commitments requires some idealizing assumptions, so the practical implications of the theory of fair relational equality are not

immediately obvious. Chapter 7, “Implications for Nonideal Circumstances,” describes how nonideal considerations would change the practical requirements on institutions and individuals. It focuses on how dealing with legacies of injustice, institutional noncompliance, and individual noncompliance would displace and modify what constitutes a fair informal social structure. While the chapter does not provide a set of prescriptions for immediate practical use, it argues that the preceding chapters make a difference to what relational egalitarians in our own circumstances should do.

As is already evident from the argument summary, this dissertation draws on and redeploys a handful of existing ideas in political philosophy. The project is conceived in a broadly Rawlsian spirit, and it aims to borrow and extend several ideas in Rawls. I am defending a kind of liberal egalitarianism, and throughout I use Rawls as an exemplar of that tradition. In some places, I lean heavily on Rawlsian concepts that other liberals may find dispensable. First, chapter 3 makes use of the idea of basic liberties and presumes that liberals are committed to the existence of multiple reasonable conceptions of the good. Second, chapters 5 and 6 rely on the idea of the basic structure of society and related ideas about a liberal division of moral labor. I am not convinced by objections to institutionalism made by G. A. Cohen (1997) and Liam Murphy (1999), but this dissertation does not add much to Samuel Scheffler’s (2005b) defense of the value of the idea of the basic structure.⁶ I aim to use the idea in novel contexts, though: I argue that the idea of the basic structure can be extended to incorporate some informal social norms and practices. While that partly acknowledges the force of Cohen’s argument about the importance of personal choices, I think basic-structure talk helps identify the distinctive moral work of norms and social practices. Third, the idea of fair relational equality in chapter 5 is

⁶ If Richard Arneson is right that “for Rawls, whether a society is just depends on the character of its basic structure *not its social norms* and prevalent personal ideals” (2003, 155), then I am diverging from the traditional Rawlsian position, insofar as I want to expand the basic structure to include some informal social norms and practices.

partly modeled on Rawls's discussion of fair equality of opportunity. Fourth, chapter 6 borrows the idea of background justice as an aim for institutions, extending it from its original context in economic transactions to thinking about an institutional role in informal social life. Since there is such extensive borrowing and reuse throughout, it seems worth saying at the outset that I am not invested in defending a particular interpretation of Rawls, nor do I defend his view beyond what I use here. Doubtless, in defending a form of liberal egalitarianism that has these features, I am defending a view with a deep family resemblance to Rawls's position, but the dissertation as a whole remains neutral about some large issues in his work. (For instance, the main line of the argument does not require accepting a particularly Rawlsian conception of equality of opportunity, the Difference Principle, the contractarian argument for the principles of justice, the theoretical priority given to fully cooperating members of society, property-owning democracy, the social bases of self-respect, or the appropriate relations between peoples.) So the dissertation could be of interest to those without relational-egalitarian commitments, since anyone working in post-Rawlsian liberal political philosophy may find some use in the way Rawlsian concepts are borrowed and extended.

Likewise, the project should be of interest to feminist political philosophers generally, since it provides a framework for thinking about how to address structural injustice (and about the extent to which we can address it). The characterization of informal social life given here, while drawing on a number of works in philosophy and sociology, is particularly indebted to Iris Marion Young's account of structural injustice (2011). Informal social life includes interaction within private relations, among family and friends. It includes interaction in civil society, within voluntary associations and privately owned businesses. It also includes certain kinds of public interaction—particularly norms and practices that are not legally codified, that remain a matter of

etiquette and social expectation. I focus most attention on associational decisions and behavior related to the formation and expression of personal esteem, but the argument has implications for many subtle aspects of interaction. Throughout her work, but particularly in *Responsibility for Justice*, Young argues that structural injustice can result from “the accumulated outcomes of the actions of the masses of individuals enacting their own projects, often uncoordinated with many others” (2011, 62).

I share a similar focus on acts that would be innocuous on their own and a complex of social practices that we should take responsibility for. However, Young moves from descriptions of structural injustice to a rejection of Rawlsian institutionalism (2011, 70), and I think this is premature. While we should take a structural point of view on social relations, considering how many individual decisions and structural processes might intersect to create undesirable outcomes, that does not force us to accept a monist or anti-institutionalist position. Among other things, this dissertation offers a way for liberal relational egalitarians to accept the possibility of structural injustice as a result of informal interactions without abandoning central liberal commitments. It provides a way of talking about responsibility for some forms of structural injustice that does not require a novel conception of responsibility, such as Young’s “political” or “forward-looking” responsibility.⁷ Individuals have an existing obligation to decide questions about the informal social structure together, even where they do not have an obligation to make particular individual decisions for political reasons. So the dissertation also contributes to discussion of how liberal feminists can respond to structural injustices.

⁷ See Parekh (2017, 626–9) for discussion of Young’s conception of political responsibility, its novelty, and some of the difficulties it faces.

CHAPTER 1

THE FUNDAMENTAL CLAIMS OF RELATIONAL EGALITARIANISM

It is commonly argued, with some merit, that relational egalitarians have not yet explained what constitutes relations of equality.⁸ In order to properly assess relational egalitarianism, we need a clearer grip on its positive ideal, so chapters 1 and 2 together provide an interpretation of its central commitments. This first chapter has three tasks. First, I introduce the basic idea of relational egalitarianism. Second, I address a few important questions likely to dog the argument if not discussed at the outset: whether relational equality can be defined positively, whether relational egalitarianism is a matter of justice, whether it is tied to a specific conception of the scope of justice, and whether it offers anything that cannot be gleaned from non-relational views of equality. Third, I turn to how to positively characterize relational equality, and I offer a few reasons to favor views that describe equality in terms of a practice people can engage in. The next chapter outlines and defends a conception of relational equality that builds on Samuel Scheffler's work on egalitarian deliberation, what I call the deliberative view.

The interpretation offered in these chapters is not a comprehensive picture, and there are some important issues that will be bracketed for the purposes of this argument. I am not principally concerned with showing that relational egalitarianism is a distinct, freestanding alternative to so-called "distributive" views of equality. Likewise, I am not especially concerned to retread the debate about whether relational egalitarianism is superior to luck egalitarianism. I will suggest some reasons why one would care about

⁸ See, for instance, Wolff (2015a, 214) and Lippert-Rasmussen (2018, 63).

relational egalitarianism and thereafter assume it is worth attention, regardless of the result of these debates among egalitarians. Finally, the interpretation offered here should be taken as provisional. Since the dissertation as a whole offers reasons to revise our understanding of liberal relational egalitarianism, any characterization at this stage will necessarily be incomplete.

1. An Initial Description

There are two central ideas in relational egalitarianism, an interpretive claim and a normative commitment. First, relational egalitarians hold that equality is best understood as a certain kind of social relation. This is commonly contrasted with distributive egalitarianism, which holds that equality is a matter of some good being distributed equally—whether that good be money, other resources, welfare, opportunity for welfare, or some other distribuendum. Relational egalitarians often argue that their view has demanding distributive implications, but such distributive concerns derive from a more fundamental concern with the character of certain relationships. Relations of equality have as much to do with power, status, and how people interact as they do with relative wealth. As David Miller puts it, social equality “is a matter of how people regard one another, and how they conduct their social relations” (1997, 232). Second, relational egalitarians hold that this kind of social relation is a constitutive feature of the just society, not merely an attractive ideal.

There are many different kinds of relationships that could be structured on an even footing—relations between marital partners, friends, colleagues, or teammates, for instance. The relationship that primarily concerns the relational egalitarian is the one that

holds between members of a society (simply insofar as they are members).⁹ This is a political relationship, but that doesn't mean the relational egalitarian is only concerned with how people relate in political institutions (e.g., their interactions in courtrooms or town halls). How people relate in a number of different areas—for example, as marital partners, friends, colleagues, neighbors, participants in labor markets, and as members of voluntary associations—can influence their equal standing in society.¹⁰ This is a political ideal in the broad sense of the term—at the very least, this vision of a society of equals has implications for appropriate structures of government, the details of civil society and public spaces, economic practices and institutions, and relations between groups in that society (e.g., adherents of different religions, members of different subcultures). That is compatible with some instances of private relationships (e.g., some marriages or voluntary associations) not being structured on egalitarian lines.

In order to understand this view, we need a working definition of both 'relational equality' and 'relational egalitarianism.' Although the details will be examined in detail in this chapter and the next, here are provisional, schematic definitions. It should be clear where vague clauses will need further specification:

⁹ This says nothing about the proper boundaries of a society of equals (it may be that individuals only need to stand in relations of equality with co-nationals, or it may be that relational egalitarianism pushes us to create a global society of equals). Nor does it rule out the possibility that there are other kinds of relationships that are also valuable for similar reasons; even if relational egalitarianism does not require a global society of equals and only co-nationals must stand as equals, there may be duties to stand in some other kind of fair relation with others. In section 2.3, I discuss disputes over the scope of relational egalitarianism—whether duties to stand as equals are only triggered by existing relations of co-citizenship or whether there is some pressure to include international relationships under this ideal. As I argue there, I want to remain neutral in this dissertation on the ultimate answer to that question.

¹⁰ Along these lines, Elizabeth Anderson claims that relational equality is “about conceiving of society as, ideally, a place where people can meet and interact with one another on terms of equality” (2012c, 188).

Relational equality (*provisional definition*): Parties relate as equals, or on equal terms, when they perform the activity characteristic of or central to their relationship free of certain inequalities of power, status, and influence.¹¹

The emphasis on activity is meant to suggest that relational equality cannot be merely conditional—it cannot be that parties relate as equals if they merely would interact in a certain fashion, if they were to interact. The emphasis on relationship-specific activity is meant to suggest that what parties must do together for the relationship to be appropriately egalitarian will vary by context. That still leaves open what constitutes that relationship-defining activity, which inequalities must be eliminated, and what would be required to eliminate them. I will defend a conception of relational equality that has internal and external components: certain actions and perhaps attitudes may be demanded of the parties, but whether the egalitarian relationship is actually realized also depends on broader social circumstances. ‘Relational egalitarianism’ is easier to define but still requires work to unpack:

Relational egalitarianism: Equality is best understood in terms of the quality of social relations, and a sincere commitment to realizing relational equality is a requirement of justice.¹²

One of the claims of the dissertation as a whole is that those who are genuine, committed relational egalitarians may accept some circumstances where relational equality is not achieved. Clearly there is work to be done to clarify the content of these terms.

¹¹ I take the emphasis on relationship-constitutive activity to help focus our attention on what needs to be specified, and this framing helps to explain why external societal conditions might inhibit well-intentioned parties from relating as equals.

¹² This can be contrasted with Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen’s definition of so-called “outcome relational egalitarianism,” what he takes to be the common view of most relational egalitarians: “a situation is just only if everyone relates to one another as equals” (2018, 7). I want a definition that leaves open the possibility that a society that could fail to perfectly realize relational equality without injustice. Section 2.2 describes this in further detail.

As a well-defined position in debates about equality in academic political philosophy, relational egalitarianism is relatively young—formative articles that defended the conception of equality as centrally focused on relationships started appearing in the late 1990s.¹³ In many ways, though, this conception of equality revives a much older tradition of thought—relational egalitarianism arguably has deep roots. Aspects of its ideal of interaction among individuals as free and equals can be found in Aristotle’s *Politics*,¹⁴ in his description of the reciprocal relations of citizens. Egalitarian political movements from the Lollards on have emphasized the pernicious impact of status and wealth hierarchies on interpersonal relations (as is evident by the focus on class or station in John Ball’s slogan from 1381, “When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?”).¹⁵ The architects of the French Revolution were animated by objections to privilege and status hierarchies, which can be seen in their attention to forms of address and the mingling of classes in public spaces (Rosanvallon 2013, 58, 42). British socialists like R. H. Tawney (1931) emphasized the importance of a culture of equality, in which individuals are not ranked as superior and inferior. Even though the language of “relational egalitarianism” was not prominent before the first decade of the twenty-first century, Elizabeth Anderson and Samuel Scheffler both defend relational egalitarianism as an extension of ideas embedded in John Rawls’s work. Despite the recent vintage of the name and its novelty as a

¹³ See, in particular, Miller (1997), Norman (1997), Wolff (1998), and Anderson (1999a).

¹⁴ *Politics* I.7, 1255b16–20, trans. Reeve. Aristotle (2017), 10.

¹⁵ The Lollards have been described as forerunners of the Reformation, and their criticisms of the Church focused on hierarchies of power and status. The Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, of which the Lollard John Ball was a leader, protested taxes on the poor, systems of forced labor or serfdom, and monastic privileges. The critique of class and privilege captured in Ball’s slogan suggests that the later egalitarianism of the Levellers and the Diggers had historical precedent. The slogan may have been fabricated by an unsympathetic chronicler, but even so it likely captures something of the spirit of the movement. See Barker (2014), 213–17.

focus in academic political philosophy, then, relational egalitarianism should be seen as the development of central, long-held convictions about what makes equality important.¹⁶

In spelling out these central ideas, it may help to begin with negative claims.

Relational egalitarians have consistently argued that contemporary academic treatments of equality have been concerned with or prioritized the wrong elements, and their criticisms have often been clearer than the alternatives they offer. It is difficult to provide an initial sketch of relational egalitarianism without noting that many early formulations of the view define it in contrast to luck egalitarianism. It is best understood, at least initially, as a reaction to two features of conversations in academic political philosophy about equality. First, a central debate among academic egalitarians in the 1980s and 1990s focused on the “currency” of equality—supposing that egalitarianism held that *something* had to be distributed equally, the debate focused on the relative merits of claiming that resources, welfare, opportunity for welfare, or access to advantage ought to be distributed equally.¹⁷ (Obviously resources can be distributed in an equal pattern. Welfare cannot be directly distributed, but it seems natural to think it can be at least roughly equalized by a patterned distribution of other goods.) Relational egalitarians deny the idea that the key element of any egalitarian theory is its identification of some equalisandum (the good that everyone ought to have in equal amounts). Along similar lines, they deny that equal relations can be realized by distributive measures alone. The second feature of recent academic theorizing which many relational egalitarians reject is the idea that egalitarians are committed to

¹⁶ Christian Schemmel claims that Marx was the first to articulate the relational objection to an exclusive focus on distributive equality (2011b, 125). Even if he is the first to offer the criticism (and I am not in a position to assess that), that doesn’t mean that relational egalitarianism does not have a much longer history in less self-conscious form.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Sen (1980), Dworkin (1981a, 1981b), and G. A. Cohen (1989).

eliminating the influence of luck over the lives of individuals.¹⁸ Larry Temkin's characterization can serve as a statement of the idea of luck egalitarianism: "I believe egalitarians have the deep and (for them) compelling view that it is a bad thing—unjust and unfair—for some to be worse off than others through no fault of their own" (1986, 101). The luck egalitarian holds that we ought to be concerned with all undeserved differences in well-being (and, correspondingly, differences that are deserved, including perhaps the products of individuals' choices, may be of lesser importance).

Two of the most influential early defenses of relational egalitarianism defined it in contrast to luck egalitarianism. Elizabeth Anderson, in "What is the Point of Equality?" (1999a), argued that

[t]he 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. (288–9)

In a similar spirit, Samuel Scheffler claimed in "What is Egalitarianism?" (2003b) that

[e]quality, as it is more commonly understood, is not, in the first instance, a distributive ideal, and its aim is not to compensate for misfortune. It is, instead, a moral ideal governing the relations in which people stand to one another. . . . It claims that human relations must be conducted on the basis of an assumption that

¹⁸ I will not weigh in on Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen's argument that "luckist" commitments are orthogonal to the relational vs. distributive egalitarian debate (2018, 7). Even if a luckist relational egalitarianism is possible, Anderson (1999a) and Scheffler (2003b) were motivated by the idea that the elimination of brute luck should not be the central focus of egalitarian politics.

everyone's life is equally important, and that all members of a society have equal standing. (191)

The explicit negative claim in both of these passages is that it is not the goal of egalitarianism to completely eliminate the effects of luck on people's lives. Looking at the complementary positive claims, it is plain that relational egalitarianism is positioned in opposition to "distributive egalitarianism" more broadly (Schemmel 2011a, 376), where that means a view of equality as concerned first and foremost with the patterned distribution of some good. Luck egalitarianism is targeted because it commands broad assent among egalitarians, not because relational egalitarianism is framed to target it specifically. Instead of offering an alternative account of what should be distributed equally, the relational egalitarian holds that whether equality has been achieved depends upon whether the members of the relevant community stand in appropriate relations to each other.¹⁹ Relational egalitarians, regardless of whatever else they disagree on, are at least united around a shared intuition about the inaptness of distributive egalitarianism. That may not yet give us much insight into what relational egalitarianism *does* claim.

The discussion so far has left open a central question, one which has not been fully resolved by relational egalitarians: what is the best way to characterize relations of equality themselves? Suppose Anderson is right that the "proper positive aim" of egalitarianism is "to create a community in which people stand in relations of equality to others" (1999a, 289)—what would that look like, or what are the characteristic features of

¹⁹ This is not to say that distributive questions are irrelevant to the achievement of justice. All relational egalitarians take their view to have distributive implications, and some engage directly in debates about the proper metric for distributions. Elizabeth Anderson, for example, defends the use of capabilities to participate as citizens (rather than resources or welfare) as the metric for distributive justice (2010b). How relational egalitarianism fits into debates about the currency of equality is not obvious, though.

that kind of relationship? Anderson uses the language of citizenship throughout her work (e.g., how individuals relate *as citizens*); I avoid leaning on it because I don't want to assume that only co-citizens owe it to each other to cultivate and maintain these relationships. Another way to ask this central question, then, is what kind of relationship do members of a society of equals stand in with regard to each other, just inasmuch as they are in a society of equals?

Relational egalitarians agree on a number of aspects of relationships that are criticizable from a relational-egalitarian standpoint. They agree that differentials in power can create objectionable relationships (e.g., relations of domination, relations of second-class citizenship), as can differentials in status and standing (e.g., when groups are segregated, discriminated against, or excluded from public debate). Beyond this point, however, they splinter on how to characterize relations of equality themselves. It may be that there are multiple ways to adequately characterize the same ideal, so all we need to aim to do is find one that will suffice. There is little reason to argue that only one characterization could capture the central relational-egalitarian commitments.

It might be tempting to rely on a historical approach to the question of how to characterize relations of equality, to generate a characterization from the demands that egalitarian political movements (e.g., republicans, abolitionists, labor unions, civil-rights demonstrators) have in fact made. There would be a handful of advantages to relying on what historically has been demanded: the resulting characterization would have immediate plausibility, since it would be grounded in demands that people have actually made, and such a method could allow for a variety of heterogeneous concerns to be admitted. Anderson's non-ideal therapeutic model (2009, 135), which suggests that political

philosophy ought to focus its attention on injustices as they arise, along with her consistent attention to what egalitarian political movements have actually demanded, points in this direction.²⁰ Even without a precise understanding of which historical movements should be included in this tradition, one might think there is enough agreement about paradigmatic examples that we could produce a fair characterization of relations of equality on that basis. We might define relations of equality as the absence of a number of hierarchies that egalitarians have objected to: people who stand as equals are not stigmatized on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnic origin;²¹ they are not dominated by the wealthy; they are not systematically given less weight in deliberation on the basis of some class or caste assignment; and so on.

What political movements historically have demanded is a useful way to begin characterizing relations of equality, but on its own that data is insufficient to characterize relations of equality in full. If we want a more robust definition of relations of equality, the historical data alone will not serve. Knowing what egalitarian political movements have demanded does not show that no other inequalities are objectionable, and it is not clear that we could generalize from the inequalities that have been protested to a picture of full relational equality. Furthermore, it is hard to know merely on the basis of what has been demanded whether those demands are connected in a principled fashion to some coherent ideal of relations of equality. Novel egalitarian demands are frequently resisted as being

²⁰ Throughout this chapter, I draw on a number of comments from relational egalitarians that suggest ways of spelling out the positive contents of relations of equality. Elizabeth Anderson in particular, perhaps by virtue of having written more on the subject than others, is the source of a number of different, perhaps incompatible, suggestions about how to articulate relations of equality. Because these comments might be interpreted as pulling in different directions—a wholly non-ideal or therapeutic approach may be incompatible with an approach that speculates about what contractualism could say about relational equality, for instance—I do not want to claim to be providing a complete interpretation of Anderson’s position. Rather, I think there are as-yet underexplored ideas in her work that could be used in different ways.

²¹ See Goffman (1963) on the idea of stigma, the social processes that enforce it, and its harms.

fundamentally different than egalitarian demands that have already been broadly accepted,²² and unless there is some explanation of what connects them, it will be hard to see how to develop a full account of relational equality from historical political demands.

2. Preliminary Questions about Relational Egalitarianism

Before examining a few options for characterizing relations of equality, I'd like to quickly address four questions that are likely to be a distraction if they are not headed off here in chapter 1. They concern disputes in the literature about what relational egalitarianism claims, and while not all of these debates need to be conclusively settled to proceed with the argument in the following chapters, it will be useful to stake out a position on them.

2.1. Is a Positive or Ideal Definition Useful?

The first dispute concerns whether it is necessary or even useful to ask what characterizes relations of equality. Some have argued that relational egalitarianism does not require a general account of what it means to relate as equals. In the passage cited in the previous section, Anderson claims the negative aim of egalitarian justice is to end oppression. That could be defined capaciously—Anderson, drawing on Iris Marion Young, has identified domination, marginalization, stigmatization, cultural imperialism, and exploitation as relevant forms of oppression (1999a, 312). Along similar lines, she has

²² To take a few examples: One could support universal manhood suffrage and oppose enfranchising women, on the grounds that such an extension raised novel questions about a proper “division of duties” by sex or the “indelicacy” of women participating in the political process. One might have approved of extending the right to intimate privacy (guaranteed in *Griswold v. Connecticut* to marital couples only) to the unmarried in *Eisenstadt v. Baird* but denied that such a right should extend to homosexual couples, on the grounds that homosexual acts were uniquely “crimes against nature.” Opponents of new (or newly empowered) egalitarian movements often try to resist their demands by disclaiming any resemblance between them and the demands of older, successful movements.

elsewhere argued that relational equality is best understood in terms of a contrast with social relations that are organized by certain hierarchies, where hierarchies are understood to be structures of inequality that persist over time, ascribe inferior positions to individuals on the basis of their identity in some group, and which are systematically sustained by laws, norms, or habits. These kinds of hierarchies sustain inequalities of power, esteem, and standing (Anderson 2012b). Not all inequalities of power, esteem, and standing are objectionable, but she suggests that relational equality can be understood as the absence of objectionable hierarchies.

Someone might define relational egalitarianism on a wholly negative basis—arguing that all the relational egalitarian needs to do is identify salient inequalities, that there is no need to develop a positive picture of relational equality. Elizabeth Anderson comes close to suggesting as much in *The Imperative of Integration*:

This is a work in nonideal theory. I do not advance principles and ideals for a perfectly just society, but ones that we need to cope with the injustice in our current world, and to move us to something better. . . . We recognize the existence of a problem before we have any idea of what would be best or most just. Nor do we need to know what is ideal in order to improve. (2010c, 3)

In multiple instances, Anderson has endorsed a methodology that conceives of political philosophy as “medicine for the body politic,” in which one begins by assessing the “health” of the society, then identifies and diagnoses “problematic symptoms” and finally “tailor[s] treatments” to address the diagnosis (2009, 135). On a view like that, we may not need any clearer picture of relational equality than the absence of objectionable inequalities that have already been identified. What relational equality requires may change over time, as

we identify new social problems and objectionable relations, but the ideal is responsive to already identified problems. So in our own society, we would be likely to emphasize the hierarchies of status and standing created by racial segregation, domination by the wealthy who can convert their wealth into political power, and the cultural imperialism of a society that publicly denigrates, silences, or marginalizes the views and practices of minority groups. Not everyone who defends some nonideal theory need be committed to defining relational egalitarianism on a wholly negative basis, but we can imagine an interlocutor who denies that we need any general or positive characterization of what relations of equality would look like.

While a non-ideal approach may be prudent, more effective politically or less likely to bog down in abstract disagreement, it is not required by the concept of relational equality. I find this imagined wholly negative approach unsatisfactory for a few reasons.²³

First, a positive, ideal definition of relational equality may already be at work implicitly, in which case we could clarify our commitments by articulating it. An implicit positive conception would explain how various perceived inequalities are unified as divergences from relational equality. There might be a variety of heterogeneous reasons to want to eliminate various forms of stigma, domination, and marginalization; for example, those kinds of relations may cause quite different setbacks to well-being. Even so, the fact that they have all been objected to by reference to some appeal to equality suggests it is worthwhile to try to develop a positive characterization of relations of equality. A positive characterization might help us better understand the interconnections between a variety of social ills. Jonathan Wolff has recently argued that “an ideal theory of social equality is hard

²³ Some of these worries are raised in the 2014 *Political Studies Review* symposium on Anderson’s *The Imperative of Integration*, particularly in Hertzberg (2014).

to sustain, because it is very difficult to give precise and unique content to an ideal of social equality” (2015b, 22). He may be correct that social equality is “variably realized” (24) and that we aren’t likely to get one unique set of necessary and sufficient conditions for such an ideal, but all the same we can improve our understanding of relational equality by trying to find what elements are implicitly shared by various egalitarian demands.

Second, a positive characterization of relations of equality can help to identify unrecognized relational inequalities. We can become inured to existing objectionable features of our relationships, and a general ideal of relations of equality may help remove some blinders. Non-ideal theorists have argued that an approach solely focused on an ideal theory is vulnerable to epistemic blindness toward certain forms of injustice (a compelling example is Anderson’s criticism of policies based on an ideal of colorblindness in *The Imperative of Integration*). But a non-ideal theory without any ideal vision is similarly vulnerable to forms of epistemic blindness: if we only attend to what we immediately recognize as problems we may miss important forms of injustice, since we may be accustomed to existing inequalities. The wholly negative approach relies on there being resentment or objection to inequalities, but very often existing inequalities go ignored until contingent social conditions give the disadvantaged a platform. For example, the recent gains in the gay and lesbian rights movement have galvanized transgender activists, who have called attention to forms of stigmatization and ostracism that were broadly accepted just 20 years ago. Having a positive conception of relational equality is not a foolproof measure for identifying inequalities we have naturalized and come to ignore—there are a number of reasons why social movements arise when they do—but it is at least possible that a positive conception could help us see our social world with fresh eyes.

Third, a positive ideal can play a role in motivating reform. Having an attractive ideal of human relations, however distant it may be from the current contours of society, can energize and sustain efforts for reform. This is not just a repetition of the previous point: a characterization of relations of equality can catalyze action not just in virtue of identifying new inequalities but perhaps also by providing an inspiring vision of what social relations could look like.

I do not need to show the decided superiority of an ideal-theoretic approach to establish that it could be worthwhile to try to pursue a positive, general characterization of relations of equality. All that is really needed here is a reason to think that an ideal of relations of equality could be useful. There are advantages to be had from a hybrid approach, one that takes insights from the focus a nonideal approach puts on lived realities and the objections people have actually raised to certain relational inequalities, as well as developing a more robustly developed positive account of what full relational equality would look like.

2.2. Is Relational Equality a Matter of Justice?

The second dispute concerns whether relations of equality are a matter of justice. There are several ways to frame this: Is a society unjust if it fails to realize relational equality? Are individuals under obligations to help realize relational equality that are demands of justice? Most relational egalitarians follow Elizabeth Anderson in treating relational equality as unequivocally a matter of “egalitarian justice” (1999a, 228). Christian Schemmel describes distributive and relational egalitarianism as alternative approaches to

“social justice” (2011b, 123; 2015, 152).²⁴ Martin O’Neill has argued that relational egalitarians claim the “character of our shared institutions, and the way in which those institutions treat us” is a matter of justice (2018). There are a variety of explanations given for the connection between relational equality and justice. Some emphasize the injustice of particularly inegalitarian relations, which are paradigms of injustice (e.g., domination, caste hierarchies, or oppression generally). Some argue that our fundamental moral equality requires recognition in our social and political relations or creates a standing presumption in favor of political equality.²⁵ Some argue that relating as equals can be understood as a demand of fairness (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 172).

There are, however, philosophers who deny that relational equality is primarily a matter of justice. The most prominent examples, David Miller and Andrew Mason, argue that “social equality” is something over and above what justice requires. Relating as equals may realize an admirable, beautiful ideal, without being demanded by justice. In “Equality and Justice” (1997), David Miller argues that there is an important difference between the kind of material equality that is demanded by justice and the kind of relational equality that we identify as a desirable feature of societies. For Miller, relational equality “identifies a social ideal, the ideal of a society in which people regard and treat one another as equals, in other words a society that is not marked by status divisions such that one can place different people in hierarchically ranked categories” (1997, 224). According to Miller, individuals who stand as equals will share a sense of camaraderie or solidarity (232), and they will share certain values and projects. Some of these elements—genuine feelings,

²⁴ Schemmel (2015) distinguishes what he calls “liberal justice-based relational equality,” which takes relational equality to be a matter of justice, from various forms of “pluralist social egalitarianism,” which accord to relational equality other rationales for seeking equality. His sympathies are with the justice-based view.

²⁵ See Waldron (2017) on so-called “basic equality” and Gosepath (2015) on default presumptions.

shared values, and private judgments—make the ideal of social equality something appealing but not a matter of justice. However admirable and worthy of pursuit this ideal of relational equality is, it does not impose on us the same kind of enforceable duties as does the distributive demands of justice. Likewise, Andrew Mason has recently argued that

a vision of a society of equals—a society whose members have equal standing . . . not only within its institutions and practices but also . . . in their ordinary interactions . . . takes us beyond what justice alone requires of us in our treatment of one another, encompassing a broader ideal of civic friendship or respectful behavior. (2015, 129)

Both Miller and Mason argue that relational equality is part of a comprehensive vision of the good society, which involves further elements in how people relate—degrees of “fellow-feeling” or community—that we cannot rightly demand of anyone. Someone who adopts a view like this may treat such relational equality as wholly optional or as a value that we have to trade off against other values; Christian Schemmel has argued that people who find this view attractive might adopt a value-pluralist stance and hold that relational equality is one value to be balanced against others (2015, 148).

There is a degree to which these two views are simply talking about different things. For Miller and Mason to be right, it would have to be the case that the relational-egalitarian ideal inextricably requires that people share values and feel a sense of camaraderie. We can, however, frame relational equality as a normative ideal, separate that ideal from attractive aspects of ideal societies that cannot be demanded, and continue to speak of relational equality as a matter of justice.

Two further objections might be raised to treating relational equality as a matter of justice. First, it might be said that relating as equals is primarily about interpersonal interaction, while justice is about the structure of our social institutions, so relational equality cannot be a matter of justice. Second, it might be said that the characteristic feature of duties of justice is that they are enforceable, but relating as equals requires modes of interaction that cannot or should not be enforced, so relational equality cannot be a matter of justice. I do not find either objection persuasive.

Someone might argue that justice is a virtue of institutions and relational equality is primarily a matter of how individuals treat and regard one another, so relational equality is not a matter of justice. Thomas Pogge has distinguished justice from morality in a way that might encourage such an argument:

We must keep sharply distinct, as Nozick does not, *our* subject, *how the ground rules of a social system ought to be assessed/designed*, from the (secondary) subject of how actors (individuals, associations, and the government) may and should act within an ongoing scheme whose terms are taken as fixed. The former of these subjects, *justice*, is concerned with the moral assessment and justification of social institutions; the latter, *morality*, with the assessment of conduct and character.

(1989, 17)

Some aspects of relating as equals—how people treat and regard one another—seem to be wholly or very nearly completely about how individuals act. Why not think, then, that how individuals treat one another is a moral matter but not a demand of justice? Even if institutionalism about justice is true (and those who agree with G. A. Cohen’s critique of Rawls will dispute that), relational equality could be a matter of justice. Whether people

can relate as equals partly depends on the structure of social institutions. We could say, following Onora O'Neill, that states are the primary agents of justice but that individuals are important secondary agents of justice (2001, 181). The state can do quite a bit to realize a relational-egalitarian structure of institutions, by eliminating objectionable inequalities of power and status. Individual duties could be conceived as duties to support just institutional efforts to achieve relational equality. So we cannot deny that relational equality is a matter of justice because much of it concerns interpersonal conduct.

Second, we need not deny that relational equality is a matter of justice because we cannot coercively enforce some relational-egalitarian duties. Someone might argue that duties of justice are distinguished by their being enforceable, we cannot coercively enforce some forms of interpersonal treatment and regard, and relational equality depends on such treatment and regard, so relational equality cannot be a matter of justice. David Miller (2017) disputes whether all obligations of justice are enforceable. He claims that it would be unjust for parents to distribute gifts to their children unfairly but that no one can force them to do so. Similar examples could be drawn up for relations outside the family, when people have obligations to treat each other fairly and it is not permissible for third parties to coercively enforce those obligations. If such examples are plausible, then we need not draw such a tight conceptual connection between duties of justice and enforceability. Without that connection, arguing that some relational-egalitarian duties are not properly the targets of coercive enforcement does not show us that relational equality is not a matter of justice. Another way to respond to this objection, of course, would be to dispute the idea that there are relational-egalitarian duties that are not enforceable. Whether and to what degree positively achieving relational equality is a demand of justice will depend

on our characterization of relational equality, so a full answer first requires more work on the relational-egalitarian ideal.

I contend that relational egalitarianism is a matter of justice, but we need to be careful how this is articulated. Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen has characterized relational egalitarians as arguing that “a situation is just only if everyone relates to one another as equals” (2018, 26). As indicated in my provisional definition of ‘relational egalitarianism’ at the beginning of the chapter, I prefer the claim that relational egalitarianism makes a sincere commitment to realizing relational equality a demand of justice. What is appropriately considered a demand of justice is not the successful realization of relational equality, but some set of actions that are necessary for realizing it. A full defense of this characterization—why we should treat relational equality as a matter of justice—depends on the positive characterization of relational equality that I give in chapter 2.

Finally, it is worth noting that Miller and Mason would be right to say that relational equality is not a demand of justice if its requirements were impossible to satisfy. If relating as equals required genuine, spontaneous, uncultivated feelings of camaraderie or community, of the sort that we cannot decide to feel, then relational equality could not be a demand of justice.²⁶ There may be further questions left unanswered by this dissertation about admirable qualities of a society of equals that cannot properly be demanded (e.g., some forms of fraternity, camaraderie, or community), but the central focus here will be on the normative ideal that can be demanded.

²⁶ Some political philosophers argue that justice is not “constrained by what it is possible for people to do,” but even Cohen thinks that is compatible with accepting “ought implies can.” See Cohen (2008), 250, and Gheaus (2013).

2.3. *Is Relational Egalitarianism Tied to a Specific Scope?*

The third dispute revolves around whether relational egalitarians are committed to a particular scope, or conception of the size and membership conditions of the egalitarian community. Some think that accepting relational egalitarianism itself commits us to a particular view about what triggers egalitarian duties—about the conditions under which we must aspire to relational equality with others. Of course, it is at least conceivable that a relational egalitarian might think there are various kinds of relations that have varying levels of egalitarian demands (e.g., citizens owe each other one kind of relationship and noncitizens a different kind of relationship). What I am considering here is whether we can provide a general, positive account of the political ideal of relating as equals without connecting that account to a particular trigger.

Elizabeth Anderson has described relational egalitarianism in a way that connects it explicitly to what citizens in a democracy owe each other. She claims that citizens owe each other “effective access to the social conditions of their freedom at all times” (1999a, 289), and this obligation is one that they have in virtue of being citizens in a democratic state. (Although she does not discuss what citizens owe noncitizen residents of the state in that essay, Anderson may well intend to pick out all the residents of modern democracies, or she may have a supplementary theory about when citizenship in modern democracies should be extended to all residents.) In *The Imperative of Integration*, she implies that the full ideal of relational equality is part of the normative features of democratic societies, and she admits that this “approach initially narrows our focus to social relations within the borders of a democratic state but expands the demands of justice inside those borders” (2010c, 18). Although in places Anderson remains agnostic about whether and when the

relational-egalitarian ideal should be extended outside the borders of a democratic state (1999a, 321n78), her view as a whole suggests that individuals have duties to create communities of relational equality only with democratic co-citizens.

By contrast, Gillian Brock's *Global Justice* argues that Anderson's own version of relational egalitarianism can be "applied" or "extended" to the "global arena" (2009, 304). Brock holds that there are ways in which international relations can also be guided by fair processes that treat each individual as equal. Hierarchies of status and power can be normatively important for individuals involved in regular trade or cooperation in complex economies. This is so, she claims, even if they do not share any pre-existing commitment to democratic relations. So it is possible, Brock claims, for relational egalitarians to hold that the trigger of relational-egalitarian duties is not mere co-citizenship, that we may be obligated to build such societies in virtue of other forms of interaction. In a similar vein, Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen has argued that it is at least possible for relational egalitarians to characterize their view in more cosmopolitan terms (2018, 150).

I think it is fairly obvious on reflection that the basic ideal of relational equality is not tethered to a statist or cosmopolitan scope—we can describe it in ways that leave open what triggers such duties, and we can understand the idea of relational equality in isolation from democratic ideals. (This is not to deny that the associative duties of democratic co-citizens may provide independent grounds for thinking relational equality is required, as Andrew Mason [2012] and Niko Kolodny [2014a, 2014b] argue.) If relational equality is not strictly tied to a particular scope or trigger, then the ideal can be developed at length without fully settling whether relational egalitarianism only binds democratic co-citizens or whether there is some pressure to extend it to everyone in something like a global basic

structure. The ideal of relational equality and what it demands can be separated from questions about when relational equality is a requirement for some relationship.

2.4. Is Relational Egalitarianism a Distinctive View?

The final dispute is not among relational egalitarians themselves but among relational egalitarians and their critics. Some critics allege that relational egalitarianism fails to offer a distinct view of equality. We can divide these criticisms into three positions. Some argue that relational interests can be accommodated as one piece of a larger concern with some other form of equality. Among this group, some defend what I call reductionism about relational equality, and others defend pluralism. A third group argues that the relational-egalitarian literature provides only a rationale or motive for pursuing equality that anyone could adopt (so relational egalitarians are making a kind of category mistake).²⁷

Reductionists hold that all the concerns of relational egalitarianism can be wholly subsumed by other existing egalitarian views, such as luck egalitarianism. Anca Gheaus (2016) provides an instance of the first strategy. Gheaus treats what she calls “political relationships” as one distributable good among many, and she takes this to be a way of absorbing relational-egalitarian concerns altogether.²⁸ Likewise, Chiara Cordelli (2015b) thinks egalitarians of all positions can make room for the equalizing of (at least opportunities for) so-called “relational resources.” If relational egalitarianism can be

²⁷ The distinction among these three groups is somewhat artificial, as many critics offer versions of each. Zoltan Miklosi (2018), for instance, suggests that relational egalitarianism is either reducible to distributive egalitarianism or implausible on the merits, and similar dilemmas might be offered with these criticisms as options.

²⁸ I don’t think the language of “political relationships” is quite right; the relational egalitarian is concerned with structures of power, but she isn’t necessarily exclusively concerned with how individuals relate in formal political institutions.

comprehensively characterized in terms of relational resources, then considerations about relational equality could be subordinated into a larger egalitarian theory or reduced to a component of goods of fortune. A luck egalitarian might argue that she already accounts for unfortunate marginalization or stigma, for instance.

The reductionist strategy misfires. It treats relationships as a kind of good that can be distributed, and implies that the relational egalitarian's concern for certain kinds of relationships is entirely dependent on their instrumental value as a resource for individuals.²⁹ The surface grammar of 'relational egalitarianism' suggests that some relational good should be equalized—whether that relational good be power, influence, support, or something else that flows from relationships—but this is not the best way to think of relational egalitarianism. Trying to identify some general good that can be distributed gets things backwards—the relational egalitarian begins from a picture of human relations and moves to consideration of what distribution of goods is necessary to construct and support a society characterized by such relations. Arguing that some relational good like care ought to be distributed equally will only undermine genuinely caring relationships by changing the nature of those relationships, forcing individuals to operate in an artificial manner. Alternatively, if the critic constructs a more complicated good to be distributed (e.g., equality of status where status can only be understood in terms of the relations one stands in with everyone), relational egalitarianism will be reducible to distributive egalitarianism only in a fairly superficial manner. (On this last point, I am merely endorsing Scheffler's argument for the distinctiveness of relational egalitarianism [2015b].) Beyond that, treating the importance of such relationships as entirely focused on

²⁹ See O'Neill (2008), Tomlin (2015), and Lippert-Rasmussen (2018) for accounts of the other kinds of value such relationships might have.

the goods that individuals get from them forces us to overlook other reasons for thinking they are important. They could also be intrinsically important for the parties, impersonally good in themselves, or important because they are connected to deontic requirements.³⁰ Even if there were not these problems with simply absorbing a concern for relationships into a luck egalitarian view, relational egalitarianism would still be distinctive insofar as it holds that those relational goods take priority over other goods of fortune.

If “political relationships” could not be simply treated as a component of goods of fortune, a second subsumption strategy might be attempted. Pluralists hold that even if relational egalitarianism identifies distinctive concerns, it could nevertheless be subsumed by a new, pluralist theory. That might be used to ultimately deny that relational egalitarianism is a distinctive conception of equality. Such a critic might argue that relational egalitarians are just identifying a different set of goods or interests that need to be taken into account, and that relational egalitarianism cannot really supplant distributive-egalitarian views. Critics like Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (2015, 2016, 2018) have argued that relational equality could be one facet in a pluralist theory of egalitarian justice.³¹ As Lippert-Rasmussen puts it, “while [relational egalitarians] might have identified some aspects of justice luck egalitarians have tended to ignore—e.g., the issue about compensation for morally praiseworthy actions that are prudentially bad for the agent—luck egalitarianism should not be rejected in light of the critique from [relational egalitarians]” (2015, 206). This criticism acknowledges the importance of social relations but argues that the relational egalitarian has not offered a view of equality that stands alone—it may be supplemented or combined with other considerations. Since this

³⁰ Tomlin (2015) describes a list of similar possibilities.

³¹ See also Tomlin (2015), Elford (2017), and Moles and Parr (2018).

dissertation is fundamentally concerned with finding a defensible interpretation of the demands of relational egalitarianism, not with adjudicating whether relational egalitarianism says everything that needs to be said about equality, I do not need to dispute the possibility of a pluralist theory of egalitarian justice. In many ways, T. M. Scanlon's view of the diversity of objections to inequality also offers a pluralist theory (1996), and his view is plainly compatible with maintaining some relational-egalitarian commitments. If this is all the critic means when alleging that relational egalitarianism does not offer a distinctive view, we can ignore it for our purposes.

Critics in the third camp, instead of arguing that relational goods can be subsumed into a broader distributive egalitarian theory, allege that relational egalitarianism offers nothing more than a rationale or motive for pursuing egalitarian goals. Relational egalitarians have made a kind of category mistake in offering their view as an alternative to distributive egalitarianism. David Miller says that, while it may be “tempting to regard relational egalitarianism as a rival theory of justice to the luck egalitarian theory . . . it may be more illuminating to see it instead as providing an alternative account of why we should care about limiting material inequality” (2017). Richard Arneson argues that it is wrong at the level of fundamental moral principle but may offer practical guidance at some non-fundamental standpoint (2010, 27). Admittedly some statements from relational egalitarians themselves invite this criticism—claims that the “point” of equality is to create certain relations or that “equality is foremost *about* relationships between people” could not uncharitably be interpreted as offering reasons to care about equality (Anderson 1999a; Fourie, Schuppert, and Wallimann-Helmer 2015b, 1, emphasis added). If the relational egalitarian is just telling us that we should care about equality because we should

care about relations among people, critics might say, this doesn't show that the relational egalitarian has a distinctive view of equality itself. Stated so generally, such a rationale might well be something any egalitarian could (and perhaps should) adopt.

What distinguishes relational egalitarianism, though, is not simply a novel motivating framework for egalitarianism, but a different way of understanding the structure of a theory of equality. There is at least a theoretical difference between relational egalitarianism and forms of distributive egalitarianism. Relational egalitarians think that the question of the currency of equality is not central to equality as a value, but rather a question to be answered when trying to implement and realize that value. In its place, they think that explicating the value of equality requires an account of how people should interact. The positive characterization of relations of equality that will be pursued in this chapter and the next can provide a way of articulating relational egalitarianism as more than just a rationale for pursuing equality—it offers a distinctive set of criteria for determining when equality has been realized.

There are practical differences that follow from this theoretical difference, as well. Once questions about what should be distributed equally are demoted to questions of institutionalization, which can be addressed after the first task of articulating the ideal of equality, then it becomes possible that the egalitarian may not need a singular, unifying distribuendum. What needs to be distributed equally will be dependent on what is required to create relationships of the appropriate type. Furthermore, there are good reasons to think relational equality may not require strict equality of resources (such as wealth or income) or equality of welfare, however much it may require a compression of the range of such things when resource inequality interferes with relational equality.

To summarize, although I would argue that relational egalitarianism does not just offer a type of good that ought to be distributed equally—that it is fundamentally a different way of thinking about equality—I do not need to claim that it captures the whole of egalitarian concerns. For my purposes, all I need to claim is that it does identify a distinctive and important consideration—a demand of justice that citizens stand as equals to each other. That may ultimately be compatible with Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen’s pluralism about egalitarian justice. Relational egalitarianism identifies a set of concerns that may not emerge on a luck-egalitarian framework, even if both types of egalitarianism wind up proposing roughly similar distributive claims at the end of the day.

3. Characterizing Relational Equality

With these preliminary questions either bracketed or answered in a provisional fashion, we can turn to the central question about relational egalitarianism: how best to characterize relational equality. There are a variety of ways to build on the schematic definition of relational equality offered at the beginning of the chapter. In this section, I offer some inconclusive but suggestive reasons not to use what I call distributive or attitudinal conceptions of relational equality and prima facie reasons to favor practical conceptions. Distributive conceptions define the egalitarian relationship in terms of the distribution of power, status, and other relational goods or qualities. Attitudinal conceptions define the relationship in terms of attitudes the parties hold, communicate, or express to each other. Practical conceptions define the relationship in terms of a practice that the parties engage in. Chapter 2 is an extended examination of how we might build on

Samuel Scheffler's practical conception of relational equality, so this section aims to justify that attention.

3.1. Distributive Conceptions, Vulgar and Complex

Sometimes relational egalitarians characterize the relevant relationship as one that lacks hierarchies of power, status, or standing.³² We might generalize that and say that people relate as equals when there is an appropriate distribution of power, status, and other relational goods. Parties relate as equals when they have equal power, or equal power in certain domains, or equal status or esteem. Alternatively, they might relate as equals when they each possess sufficient power or status. It might seem counterintuitive to offer a distributive characterization of the relationship after proposing relational egalitarianism as an alternative to distributive egalitarianism. Such characterizations may not immediately reduce to forms of distributive egalitarianism (or sufficientarianism), though. One could still defend relational egalitarianism as a distinctive view, if description of the relationship helps identify distributions that would not be discoverable otherwise, or what matters first and foremost is not the distribution but the resultant interaction between citizens. All the same, if relational equality is appropriately understood in terms of some such distribution, relational egalitarianism will not be as divergent or radical a view of equality as some of its proponents suggest. I will consider two distributive conceptions—the vulgar view of relational equality and the complex equality view.

The vulgar view claims that relational equality is dependent on a kind of similarity or homogeneity, such that all inequalities or differences between individuals are suspect

³² See, for instance, Anderson (2012b).

and potentially objectionable. If, as Anderson puts it, equality is “a kind of social relation between persons—an equality of authority, status, or standing” (2010a, 1), the vulgar relational egalitarian interprets that to mean that relations of equality are achieved when the parties have completely equal power, undifferentiated social status, and exactly equal influence over every public decision. Any differential in what individuals can do, in what appraisal esteem they are accorded, or in how well they can persuade others would be objectionable.

Vulgar View of Relational Equality: Members of society relate as equals when they are absolutely equal in power, status, and influence in all domains.

Pierre Rosanvallon cites the eighteenth-century Benedictine monk Dom Deschamps as having such a view—a vision of an equal society in which everyone is fundamentally similar and undifferentiated, not only in power, esteem, and influence, but also in appearance, taste, and temperament (2013, 129). Other utopian socialists may well have had similar ideas that relating as equals requires a kind of indistinction that prevents envy or stratification.

To my knowledge, no contemporary relational egalitarian holds the vulgar view—and for good reason, as it is deeply unattractive. It doesn’t acknowledge the social value of having a diverse array of talents. In some cases, it may advise leveling down talents to prevent disparities in abilities. It makes our ideal of equality dependent on a state of similarity that never has been and never will be attained. Most importantly, it confuses equality with similarity. This is not what relational egalitarians mean when they say people should stand as equals. The distribution of talents across a society, and the attendant

differences in what each individual can do, is not in itself regrettable. Some inequalities of power, esteem, and influence are not obstacles to the realization of relational equality.

Not every inequality of power is objectionable from a relational-egalitarian standpoint. The authority teachers have over students or parents have over their children, to cite the most obvious examples, are well justified in many cases, so any definition of relational equality (like the vulgar view) that suggests such forms of authority are incompatible with a society of equals has gone wrong somewhere. Likewise, a judge in a legitimate state can have a singular power to issue sentences for convicted criminals. Legislators have powers to enact laws that others lack. So there are unobjectionable differentials in power that attach to offices. Personal property rights confer on individuals small degrees of sovereignty, inasmuch as they have an exclusive right to make certain decisions regarding that property, but the bare idea that individuals would have such differential authority is not objectionable in itself. Finally, there are differences in what individuals are capable of doing that should not strike us as inherently objectionable, even if such differences are not attached to roles or offices. The distribution of natural talents will mean that some individuals have capabilities that others lack. That difference by itself is not a cause for concern.

Neither is every inequality of status or esteem objectionable. We can use the familiar distinction between the kind of respect accorded to people in virtue of their status simply as persons (what Stephen Darwall [1977] calls *recognition-respect*) and the kind of respect or esteem that is accorded to people in virtue of their various talents and achievements (what Darwall calls *appraisal-respect*). There may be some circumstances in which vast differentials in appraisal-respect can hinder the degree to which individuals can stand as

equals, but not all differences in how the features or acts of people are appraised should be an obstacle to relational equality. That Alf is recognized as a fine opera singer and Betty is not does not preclude them from relating as equals.

Finally, not every inequality of standing or influence is objectionable. Differences in insight, experience, intelligence, and persuasiveness will mean that some individuals have more influence over certain public decisions than others, but this need not automatically translate into an objectionable social hierarchy. There is nothing obviously objectionable about every differential in such influence. So, given that no relational egalitarian starts from the position that *all* disparities in power, status, and influence are objectionable, what criteria can we use to identify which inequalities are in fact objectionable?

The implausibility of the vulgar view does not show that relational equality cannot be defined in distributive terms. Perhaps relational equality should be understood in terms of a more complex distributive pattern—not the elimination of all inequalities of power and status but the avoidance of certain conjunctions of power and status inequalities. The complex equality view, inspired by positions defended by Michael Walzer (1983) and David Miller (1995), would offer such an alternative. On this view, relational equality requires a pattern governing all the relevant differentials of power, status, and other relational goods, such that there is no dominant good or status norm pervasive throughout society as a whole. Some inequalities in power and status are acceptable, so long as they do not impinge on the distribution of social goods in distinct “spheres” of value.

Complex Equality View of Relational Equality: Members of society relate as equals when the distribution of power, status, and influence among them is structured such that there is no dominant good (and the integrity of independent spheres of value are maintained).

This would provide a criterion for justifiable differentials in power, status, and influence: so long as inequalities in one sphere did not translate into inequalities in all other spheres, they would satisfy this requirement. If it were generally true that everyone could find some community of like-minded individuals, it would not be imperative that they be included or held in high esteem in all groups. Wealth inequalities would be less objectionable to the degree that wealth could not be converted into power over other areas beyond consumption choices (e.g., power over the political process). Status inequalities would be permissible so long as they were relatively self-contained—since high regard in the opera community does not translate into superior status in civil society generally, the distribution of accolades and status within the opera community itself would not be as worrisome.

Relatively few relational egalitarians have made more than passing reference to the complex equality view, which is one reason I will spend less time discussing it.³³ There may be ways of spelling out a complex equality view that give a plausible characterization of relations of equality. While there may be a compelling view along these lines in the offing, here are two reasons to doubt this approach would be adequate to characterizing relations of equality in full. First, the description of complex equality given by Walzer and Miller, in which there are a variety of different kinds of spheres of value with their own governing norms, seems to permit some forms of marginalization. It seems possible that (a) a society

³³ Kei Takahashi (2016) argues that relational egalitarians should incorporate the demands of complex equality.

may lack any dominant good or dominant status norm and (b) some individuals in that society may nevertheless be comprehensively shut out of equal participation in any of them.³⁴ Second, perhaps relatedly, the lack of a dominant good or dominant status norm only seems to provide a negative constraint on a society of equals—such a society must not have such forms of dominance—so it does not tell us if there are other minimal positive requirements for relational equality. For those reasons I suspect this would not be the most productive route to describing relations of equality, but as there are relatively few attempts to provide such a characterization, I hesitate to make any stronger claim than this.

It is possible that some other pattern among differentials might appropriately capture relational equality, and so justify a distributive conception of relational equality. Showing that the vulgar view is incorrect and that the complex equality view is insufficient does not show that relational equality cannot be defined just in terms of the distribution of power, status, and other relevant goods. That said, there is something odd about distributive conceptions generally: the relationship itself seems to fall out of the picture, and relational equality seems to be something that could happen to the parties, when distributions of power and other goods are changed by others. Though the distributions of such goods are undoubtedly relevant to whether parties can relate as equals, it does not seem promising as a way of characterizing relational equality itself.

³⁴ This criticism applies most directly to Walzer's articulation of complex equality in *Spheres of Justice* (1983). Rainer Forst writes that Walzer later introduced a more expansive notion of "inclusive citizenship" as a "master principle of distributive justice" (Forst 2012, 170–71). There may be more sophisticated versions of the complex equality view that address this criticism, then, but I won't pursue it further in this dissertation.

3.2. Attitudinal Conceptions

An alternative way of characterizing relational equality would emphasize the attitudes of the parties in the relationship. If relating as equals has to do with how people treat and regard one another,³⁵ perhaps we should say that relational equality is achieved when the parties hold appropriately respectful attitudes toward each other and act on principles that express that respect. To be more precise, we could follow Lippert-Rasmussen (2018, 76–7) and ramify this into two variants. A communicative conception of relational equality would hold that parties relate as equals when they treat each other in a way that intends to communicate appropriate concern and respect. Alternatively (and more plausibly), we might characterize relational equality as being realized when the parties treat each other in ways that express that concern and respect (where the expressive content of an act depends not just on the intentions of the parties but on the social meanings of certain acts and principles).

One popular attitudinal conception of relational equality focuses attention on how certain inequalities might express judgments of inferiority and superiority. This position, which I'll call the expressive view, has been defended most explicitly by Carina Fourie (2012b), and further support for it can be found in W. G. Runciman (1967), David Miller (1997), Gideon Elford (2012), and, to a lesser degree, in T. M. Scanlon (1996) and Jonathan Wolff (1998). Here is an initial gloss of the expressive view:

³⁵ David Miller (1997, 224) and Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (2018, 70) both emphasize as the constituents of relating as equals.

Expressive View of Relational Equality: Members of society relate as equals when their actions do not express a judgment of inferiority of status.³⁶

The judgment in question concern overall personal superiority and inferiority, not just any assessment of lesser skill. Consider as an example the kind of appraisal esteem we might confer on someone for being a very fine opera singer in our society. Someone who is given that kind of appraisal respect is not marked as a decidedly (all-things-considered) superior or more worthy human being than someone who is not so appraised. The disparity need not be a source of deep shame for those who lack it or a sign that they should be treated worse in general. By contrast, we could imagine a world in which it is the case that being a fine opera singer was the marker of basic worth (it could affect the recognition respect accorded one). Lacking such a skill would be a reason for shame, and individuals without that skill would be taken less seriously in other matters. In this imagined case, the tone-deaf would be marked so that this failing could be used as the basis of general differential treatment—contempt in public, downgrading their contributions to political deliberation, exclusion from voluntary associations. In such cases, we could say that a status hierarchy was instituted in society, and this differential in status would be objectionable on the expressive view. Where an inequality of esteem leads to treating others as inferior on these fundamental matters, it is objectionable.

David Miller (1997) and Carina Fourie (2012b) have used this idea of status hierarchy, characterized as a ranking that expresses some judgment about the inferiority or superiority of some people on the whole, as the key indicator of which inequalities are

³⁶ Lippert-Rasmussen offers alternative phrasing for the same rough idea: “For two individuals to relate to one another as equals is for them to act in relation to each other only on principles which express equal concern and respect for the two parties involved” (2018, 40).

objectionable.³⁷ On their view, society might be *socially differentiated*, such that individuals are recognized and awarded differential appraisal esteem for their talents and skills, without thereby introducing *status hierarchies*, which express a judgment of the people occupying the lower positions in the hierarchy as inherently inferior or lesser. That seems plausible enough; what seems more contentious is the claim that relational inequality is solely a matter of the existence of status hierarchies. As Fourie puts it, “It is only once these differences have been associated with a particular evaluation, which leads to a ranking of the worth of the bearers of these titles, that social inequality would ensue” (2012b, 113).

Miller requires that the difference in prestige set up an “unequivocal” ranking:

[Social equality] does not require that people should be equal in power, prestige or wealth, nor, absurdly, that they should score the same on natural dimensions such as strength and intelligence. What matters is how such differences are regarded, and in particular whether they serve to construct a social hierarchy in which A can unequivocally be ranked as B’s superior. (1997, 232)

Miller’s explanation is a bit more capacious, since it may include some inequalities as objectionable because they “serve to construct a social hierarchy” even if the difference itself isn’t taken as the proof of some judgment of inferiority. The central idea is the same in both accounts, though; what makes some inequality objectionable is that it either expresses

³⁷ Though it is worth noting that Miller has since walked back his commitment to the expressive view, in favor of a view that prioritizes a particular form of community and regular interaction: “But what exactly is social equality, and how much should we care about it? In the past, I and other philosophers defined it mainly by contrast to a ranked society. . . . That contrast seems less relevant now, since people’s experience of social inequality has changed. The super-rich are regarded as “people like us” who have somehow hit the jackpot (in fact, a lot of privilege is hereditary, but this is carefully concealed). . . . So there is a superficial egalitarianism that prevails (“everyone has a chance”) even though people from the different social strata rarely interact with one another on terms of equality. A definition of social equality for the present day needs to address this, by underlining that a society of equals is not only one that lacks a formal hierarchy but also one whose members actually *share a form of life by interacting as equals on a daily basis*” (Miller 2015, viii, emphasis mine).

or supports the expression of some judgment of the greater overall worth of some individuals. In a similar vein, T. M. Scanlon suggests that one reason (among several) to object to inequality fits this model: “One possible reason for objecting to these differences [various forms of inequality] would be the belief that it is an evil for people to be treated as inferior, or made to feel inferior” (1996, 43).³⁸ When inequalities produce or communicate a judgment of the overall inferiority of the person, this view targets them as objectionable.

One obvious hard question for the expressive view is which kinds of inequalities express or communicate such a ranking. Individuals may feel less worthy or inferior for a range of idiosyncratic reasons (e.g., having picked a plan of life that relies on a talent they possess to a smaller degree than others), but whether individuals feel inferior cannot by itself be sufficient to say that there is an objectionable status hierarchy. Inequalities express a ranking of people as superior and inferior when unequal treatment is a way of explicitly or implicitly endorsing a judgment that not all individuals have the same basic status, or when it would be inconsistent to permit those inequalities without endorsing that judgment. Some differences in status do obviously express societal judgments of inferiority—Fourie describes as examples a society in which black people are expected to step off the pavement at the approach of a white person (2012b, 111), a society in which people without degrees are expected to bow and scrape to people with doctorates (112), the caste system in India, the system of racial classification in apartheid South Africa, and the hierarchy of citizens and slaves in ancient Greece (116). The first two examples involve informal social norms that require individuals to put themselves in toadying, humiliating

³⁸ Scanlon offers a motley of different reasons for objecting to material inequality—which also includes concerns with relieving suffering, minimizing domination, preserving equality of opportunity, and procedural fairness (46)—so he is not properly interpreted as offering a purely expressive view of relations of equality, but this claim that stigmatizing differences in status provide reason to object to inequality is similar in spirit to the Fourie-Miller line.

positions—to provide signals that they accept some judgment of themselves as inferior.³⁹

The last three examples involve social structures that, in denying some individuals fundamental rights and liberties, express a judgment of inferiority because they deny those individuals what is typically accorded as basic rights to most others. These examples are helpful, but they don't provide a reliable guide for identifying when differences in status are objectionable in other cases. It is possible that societal judgments of inferiority may be expressed even without a norm requiring toadying behavior or a legal structure that denies some basic rights, but it's not clear what would suffice to communicate such a judgment. The extremes on either side may be obvious—that some are praised for being fine opera singers seems unobjectionable, that some are regarded as unfit for civil society because of their race is obviously objectionable—but the boundary is vague at best.

In other words, some ways of assigning differential status may express judgments of inferiority even if they lack the elements of Fourie's extreme examples (i.e., denial of fundamental liberties or social norms requiring individuals to accept humiliation). Consider a society in which black people are not expected to step off the sidewalk, but in which a majority of the population privately believe they are inferior and act accordingly. Even a society in which a sizable minority of the population holds such an opinion might well impede the realization of relational equality in that society. Fourie hasn't claimed otherwise; her examples are likely meant just to illustrate how social norms can express judgments of inferiority. The point here is rather that this initial characterization of the expressive view leaves unanswered the most difficult questions about which inequalities are objectionable.

³⁹ Philip Pettit's description of citizens living as equals in terms of nondomination appeals to similar ideas (1999; 2012, 2), though nondomination obviously puts more emphasis on the distribution of power as well.

Although the expressive view captures an important class of cases, I doubt whether this is the best way to characterize relational equality. It highlights many cases where inequalities in status are indeed objectionable, but it may miss objectionable inequalities of power and influence. Disparities in power and influence may not themselves express judgments of superiority and inferiority, but they may be equally objectionable inasmuch as they prevent people from really interacting on an even footing. To see why, imagine a culture that espouses a commitment to equality and that rejects status hierarchies that characterize some individuals as inherently less worthy. We can suppose that this is a culture that does not demand the poor be obsequious to the rich—at least in matters of etiquette and address, it may approximate Walzer’s “society of misters.”⁴⁰ All the same, if the society is also characterized by vast inequalities in power and influence—if the rich are able to amplify their own voices and make choices that affect the lives of others in ways that are unreciprocated—the members of that society may not be able to stand as equals, no matter what lip service they pay to the importance of equality.⁴¹ It may be true in that society that there is no formal requirement for the poorer person to abase him- or herself, and there may be no informal social norm that requires obsequious shows of deference to the rich, but that doesn’t tell us that individuals can stand as equals. The expressive view leaves out the possibility that impediments to relational equality might arise unintentionally.

⁴⁰ Nancy Isenberg credits W. R. Crocker for having coined an apt phrase to describe this society of merely superficial egalitarian respect: a “democracy of manners” (2016, 258).

⁴¹ Lippert-Rasmussen similarly argues that “the notion of relating as equals has, as it were, an external component, i.e. a component which is external to the dispositions, attitudes etc. of the parties to the relation in question” (2018, 41).

It might be possible to work backwards from the identification of inequalities of power to some likely effect on inequalities of esteem in that society, but I doubt this is a reliable method. It seems possible for a society to be characterized by deep inequalities of power and yet for all the individuals in it to avoid *feeling* inferior or judged. If we want to say that in such a society, those individuals are nevertheless *treated* as inferior, and the power differential *expresses* a judgment of inferiority, we would need some further explanation of which inequalities express that judgment. In that case, it seems to me that the expressive component is playing at best an indirect role—that there are other, more fundamental reasons to say such relations are unequal.

To summarize, the expressive view of relations of equality is attractive because it identifies an important element of relations of equality—namely, that the parties regard or respect each other in a certain way. There are three significant hurdles for anyone who adopts the expressive view, though. First, it is not clear which inequalities express or communicate a ranking of the overall superiority/inferiority of individuals. Some inequalities obviously communicate a judgment of inferiority (e.g., blanket refusal to grant individuals basic citizenship rights on the basis of ascriptive-group identity, or caste hierarchies of esteem that label some “untouchable”), but it is unclear where to draw the line between disrespectful hierarchies and permissible differentials in appraisal esteem. Second, the expressive view is too narrowly focused on status norms, such that it may fail to identify objectionable disparities in power and influence unless they can be directly connected to expressions of objectionable status norms. Third (on a related note), the focus on attitudes excludes the very possibility that external forces might impede relational

equality.⁴² In light of these problems, the expressive view is likely not a complete account of relational equality.

3.3. Practical Conceptions

A third possible strategy for characterizing relational equality is to say that the parties relate as equals when they successfully engage in some particular practice. Relational equality would be something the parties realize together, in so acting. In the next chapter, I describe and defend in greater detail a practical conception of relational equality.

Practice-oriented views improve on distributive conceptions because they offer an account of equality that is clearly distinctive; equality cannot be reduced to the distribution of power, status, and other goods. Practical conceptions might also improve on attitudinal views insofar as they can show why relating as equals is not just dependent on the attitudes the parties communicate or express through their action. Rooting relational equality in a practice allows for both external and internal components—certain societal conditions may have to be in place to allow them to successfully engage in the practice, and actually engaging in the practice may make attitudinal requirements on them. It may be that the practice makes demands on the ultimate outcome or distribution of power and status, and it may make demands on the attitudes of the parties.

The provisional definition of relational equality, at the beginning of the chapter, claims that people relate as equals when they perform some activity characteristic of their relationship in a certain fashion. As may be obvious, this definition already favors a practical conception. When it comes to the political ideal of members of society relating as

⁴² Relations of domination exemplify this problem: if domination only requires the “capacity for interference” (Pettit 1999, 272), then one party can be dominated even if the other has a benevolent, respectful attitude.

equals, the most obvious contenders for the characteristic activity are forms of decision-making or cooperation. Members of society relate as equals when they cooperate in building or maintaining a society, or when they make decisions about that society together, in a certain fashion. Differentials of power, status, and influence are identified as objectionable by reference to the practice: some will have to be eliminated if the parties are to successfully engage in the practice, and some are incompatible with the spirit of the practice.

None of this establishes that the only proper way to characterize relational equality is by reference to a practice that parties participate in, but I hope to have shown that it has some advantages over other characterizations and merits further attention.

CHAPTER 2

THE DELIBERATIVE VIEW OF RELATIONAL EQUALITY

Having considered several strategies for characterizing relational equality, we are now in a better position to examine and defend a promising practical conception. I argue in this chapter that we ought to understand the substantive content of relations of equality, following Samuel Scheffler's suggestive remarks, as being defined in terms of a kind of deliberative practice. Scheffler's account of the "practice of equality" offers a good framework for understanding what relations among equals should look like, but relational egalitarians need to build on it to produce a fuller picture of egalitarian deliberation. This chapter makes a modest contribution to that endeavor. The goal here is not to provide a comprehensive theory of relational equality, but to help explain why some differentials of power, status, and influence should be viewed as impediments to relational equality.

In section 1, I introduce Scheffler's idea of the egalitarian deliberative constraint. Section 2 discusses some relational inequalities that this deliberative practice would make salient. Section 3 looks at the problem of determining which decisions should be relevant to a relationship among members of a society of equals—which decisions they ought to make together. Section 4 considers evaluative criteria for successful use of the deliberative constraint, and section 5 argues that further relational-egalitarian demands can be found in the preconditions for genuine participation in actual deliberation.

1. The Egalitarian Deliberative Constraint

I aim to defend an interpretation of relational equality that, following suggestions in the work of Elizabeth Anderson and Samuel Scheffler, prioritizes a conception of deliberation among individuals.⁴³ On this view, people stand as equals when their relations (and connectedly, the structure of their shared society) pass a certain kind of interpersonal deliberative test. In some circumstances, that requires that the structure of such relations *could* be justified to and accepted by all members in fair deliberation, so a hypothetical-deliberation test will be sufficient. In other circumstances, it requires that its structure be subject to actual ongoing deliberation and be accepted by all reasonable members—that they actually participate in justificatory exchange with each other. So the view is not exclusively focused on hypothetical deliberation or on actual deliberation. (When actual deliberation is required is a matter that needs to be specified.) The central idea, to lean on Scheffler’s language, is that the equality that characterizes a society of equals is defined in terms of a deliberative practice that its members engage in. Inequalities of power, status, and influence are objectionable when they would be rejected by participants in the practice or when they prevent individuals from genuine participation in this practice.

1.1. Egalitarian Deliberation in Rawls and Anderson

The idea that relations of equality might be explained by reference to an ideal of deliberative exchange has been a common element in many accounts of relational equality. The social contract tradition in general starts from recognition of the basic moral equality of humans

⁴³ It is worth noting at the outset that my interpretation of Scheffler’s work draws out some ideas that are also found in Rainer Forst’s work on a right to justification (see especially Forst [2012]). My interpretation of the egalitarian deliberative constraint is indirectly influenced by Forst’s work, particularly regarding practices and institutions that need only meet a hypothetical deliberative standard (we could alternatively say those practices must be justifiable to all relevant individuals and the idea would be much the same). That said, this interpretation of the egalitarian deliberative constraint does not depend on any of Forst’s commitments, and I don’t have room to make a full assessment of the ways in which this deliberative-practice view may differ from Forst’s view.

and defends certain social structures on the basis of what individuals would agree to if given equal voice and a fair position in deliberation. John Rawls's description of the members of a well-ordered liberal democratic society as "free and equal persons" arguably contains the germinal idea of relational equality. He says that the "most fundamental idea" in his "conception of justice as fairness is the idea of society as a fair system of social cooperation" (2001, 5). This already advances an ideal of how members of that society should interact (and a claim that they already are so interacting)—namely, as cooperators of a certain kind. His description of citizens as free and equals is guided by this conception of them as co-participants in a cooperative scheme, where their equality is at least in part a matter of how they (or better, their representatives in the original position) would deliberate together to settle on a framework for society. For their society to be a fair system of cooperation, the terms of cooperation must reflect a kind of reciprocity or mutual benefit (6). It is not just a matter of how the benefits of social cooperation are divided that show them to be equal: each citizen has an equal entitlement to make claims on their institutions (23), and the procedure for reaching agreement gives each an equal voice (20).⁴⁴ This conception of citizens coming to agreement about "questions of political justice" (23)—questions concerning the basic structure of society—characterizes their equality first and foremost as a matter of how they are positioned in that deliberation over the fair terms of social cooperation. So there is an idea that justice demands a kind of equality of standing and authority in deliberation over the ground rules of society.

⁴⁴ The insistence on the importance of reciprocity has encouraged the objection that Rawls excludes the severely disabled (see Kittay 1999 and Nussbaum 2006 for examples). Anderson's discussion of how workers should treat the economy as a system of cooperative, joint production (1999a, 321) may raise similar issues. I don't have room to discuss possible replies to these objections, and since my view is not hampered by this problem (there is no obvious reason to think standing as equals must be limited to "fully cooperating" able-bodied workers), I will not pursue it further. Relational egalitarianism need not take on all the commitments that Rawls or even Anderson accepts, so this issue can be set aside. What is important is the movement from conceiving of society as a cooperative endeavor to a position that claims individuals should have equal influence over the terms of cooperation.

Elizabeth Anderson's account of relational equality emphasizes the idea that citizens who relate as equals deliberate in an ongoing, regular fashion. She says "democratic equality [the name for her version of relational egalitarianism] 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" (1999a, 313). That demand for actual justificatory exchange goes beyond the Rawlsian requirement that the terms of social cooperation be such that they could be justified. We might well ask, looking just at that passage, which actions individuals ought to be obliged to justify to others. Her account primarily describes what citizens owe to each other as citizens,⁴⁵ so the deliberation in question presumably concerns political matters. That would at least include deliberation over the basic structure of society. Anderson casts this as a requirement for actual citizens of a democracy, not just their representatives in an original position, so one might also charitably interpret her to be saying that ongoing democratic deliberation in general ought to be guided by this ideal. Finally, her expansive definition of 'democracy' allows room for issues that are not traditional political subjects to be included in that deliberation. She has described democracy as "a way of life" that includes a "culture [of] free, cooperative interaction of citizens from all walks of life on terms of equality in civil society" (2010c, 89). That culture is a matter "of habits and sentiments of association" that may require deliberation about the structure of "all domains in which diverse citizens may interact and cooperate" (93, 94).⁴⁶ So, inasmuch as her conception of democracy involves a way of life of some kind, Anderson's characterization of citizens relating as equals

⁴⁵ To take a few examples from her 1999a essay: "Democratic equality guarantees all law-abiding citizens effective access to the social conditions of their freedom at all times" (289); "[people] are entitled to the capabilities necessary for functioning as an equal citizen in a democratic state" (316).

⁴⁶ To be clear, I'm not endorsing Anderson's definition of democracy or her general view here, only drawing out the historical precedent for the deliberative view of relations of equality.

requires considerable actual deliberation and collective decision-making, beyond organizing the basic structure of society in a way that could be agreed to in fair deliberation.

1.2. Scheffler's View

Samuel Scheffler further develops the idea of equal relations being defined in deliberative terms in a recent essay (2015b), in which he describes a kind of deliberative practice in its most general terms. He argues that people relate as equals when their relations are governed by what he calls an egalitarian deliberative constraint.

Egalitarian Deliberative Constraint (EDC): “Each person accepts that the other person’s equally important interests—understood broadly to include the person’s needs, values, and preferences—should play an equally significant role in influencing decisions made within the context of the relationship.”⁴⁷ (2015b, 25)

Much of this needs further specification, as he notes: what counts as an interest, how to make interpersonal comparisons of the importance of interests, what it means to play a role in influencing decisions, and which decisions fall “within the context” of the relationship (what they should decide together).

The EDC is meant as a general characterization of how fair deliberation among equals proceeds; it is not exclusively a characterization of political deliberation. Scheffler starts from egalitarian personal relationships such as good friendships or companionate marriages,⁴⁸ and he describes how the members of such personal relationships go about making decisions together.

⁴⁷ I take it that this involves both real deliberative practice and a hypothetical deliberative standard because some decisions that citizens should make together (e.g., whether to maintain certain ongoing social practices or political institutions) may not be actively deliberated upon, and that doesn’t pose a problem for the equality of the relationship if the preservation of those practices meets a hypothetical deliberative standard.

⁴⁸ Scheffler draws this term from Anderson (2012b), 40. By ‘companionate marriage,’ what is meant is an ideal of marriage as a kind of affective and intellectual partnership or friendship on terms of equality. John Stuart Mill’s discussion of marriage in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) describes this ideal.

The reason why egalitarian personal relationships are governed by a *deliberative* constraint is that recognition of the equal importance of the individuals commits them to structuring the relationship in a way that gives each party equal, nonzero standing and so requires some collective decision-making. Their needs and interests are given equal weight, and among their vital interests is an interest in being recognized as an agent, so they have an interest in being able to articulate and determine their own interests.

According to Scheffler, the EDC provides a rather open-ended requirement in personal relationships—the members of the relationship have to decide together how to go about balancing their interests (2015b, 25). There is no mechanistic decision procedure in such cases. The people in that relationship have to decide together when an issue should be decided collectively—there is no obvious way of determining this in every case without appealing to how the individuals themselves conceive the relationship (27). They must also determine together which interests, needs, and preferences to prioritize and the agenda for deliberation (29).

Obviously, this leaves much of the characterization of the practice, and the actual constraints of the EDC, up to the individuals in the relationship. As Scheffler puts it:

relating to others as equals is best thought of as a complex interpersonal practice.⁴⁹ It is a practice that makes substantial demands on the attitudes, motives, dispositions, and deliberative capacities of the participants. There is no general formula or algorithm for determining how best to engage in the practice. Instead, sustaining an egalitarian relationship requires creativity, the exercise of judgment, and ongoing mutual commitment, and even the sincere efforts of the parties are no guarantee of success,

⁴⁹ Someone might ask what else “relating to others as equals” could be besides a “complex interpersonal practice.” I think Scheffler’s point is that egalitarian relationships cannot be neatly summarized by a simple formula. It will not be sufficient, for example, that individuals agree to a one-person, one-vote majority-rules decision procedure. The discussion of appropriate attitudes, motives, and dispositions confirms this—there are multiple, interacting desiderata for such relationships.

although success is a matter of degree and should be not be conceived in all-or-nothing terms. (2015b, 30–31)

Although there are many details of how such deliberation proceeds that would depend on the members of the relationship, it is not entirely a matter of discretion. Some inequalities seem incompatible with actually abiding by the EDC, no matter what actual deliberators would say. If one accepts Scheffler's claim that relations of equality are relations governed by the EDC, then much of the work of specifying what relational egalitarianism requires can be done by identifying (a) what deliberation in accordance with the EDC would look like, (b) the set of decisions that members of a society of equals *must* make together, governed by the EDC, and (c) what kinds of inequalities are fundamentally incompatible with the spirit of the practice itself.

Scheffler argues that this characterization of egalitarian personal relationships can be extended to the political relational-egalitarian ideal. Like egalitarian personal relationships, the relations of members of society should be governed by the EDC. Clearly, there will be differences between personal and political relationships. The decisions members of a society of equals should make together are less intimate than those made by individuals in personal relationships. At the political level, the relations are not always face-to-face, individuals do not have close knowledge of each other's interests, and there is a clearer need to set up definite boundaries to the relationship, to delineate what kinds of decisions ought not be made jointly (36). As discussed at the outset of chapter 1, to say that these are "political relationships" is not to say relational egalitarianism is only concerned with interaction in political institutions such as courtrooms and town halls. Rather, this is meant to signal that the nature of the connection

between the individuals is a political one—they are or should be related as members of a society.⁵⁰

With a sufficiently fine-grained characterization of this practice, relational egalitarians could specify which inequalities of power, status, and influence are pernicious by reference to what parties engaged in that practice would reject. We can call this way of identifying relevant inequalities—looking to what is necessary to deliberate in this fashion and to what would be found objectionable in this kind of deliberation—the deliberative view of relations of equality.

Deliberative View of Relations of Equality: An inequality among certain individuals is an impediment to their relating as equals iff it would be found objectionable by a party to that relationship on the basis of the egalitarian deliberative constraint.

How does the deliberative view differ from the expressive view? The deliberative view provides a more direct explanation than the expressive view of why disparities of power and influence matter: they aren't objectionable simply because they are conducive to inequalities of status or esteem, but because they can be an obstacle to the kind of interaction appropriate for social equals.⁵¹ Where people are equals, each has a right to participate in joint decision-making about some matters, regardless of whether being refused would make one feel inferior.

There remains considerable work to do to spell out what the EDC would require in a society of equals. First, more needs to be said about the nature of the deliberative practice

⁵⁰ To be clear, since I want to remain neutral about the appropriate trigger for this kind of relational-egalitarian duty, this could either mean that the relevant individuals are already recognized as members of the same society, or that due to some other consideration (e.g., significant international interaction or shared coercive pressures) they ought to be considered part of the same society.

⁵¹ Along similar lines, Rainer Forst's account of social justice as resting upon a right to justification (a right to be given reciprocal and general reasons for all social relations relevant to justice), which is also a kind of deliberative-practice view, stresses that "the first question of justice is the question of power" (2012, 195). A right to justification is in many ways similar to a valid claim to have one's relations structured by the EDC, and in both it is obvious how asymmetries of power fail those standards.

itself—what it means to let an interest have a certain amount of influence, how to gauge interests, how to make decisions among them, or whether there are deliberation-stopping procedures (e.g., voting) that is compatible with the EDC. Second, a relational egalitarian ideal should make clear which matters members of society should jointly decide. There is a good case to be made that the EDC should guide interaction on many everyday political questions, not just matters of the basic structure of society, but it remains to be seen what should be decided together.⁵² Third, relational egalitarians need some way of discriminating reasonable and unreasonable interpretations of the EDC. It is not surprising that there is no simple, mechanical formula for weighing and choosing among interests. Strict formulas could be insufficiently sensitive to contextual details and the parties’ interests and so be rejected by the deliberators themselves. In many cases, the EDC does not determine a uniquely satisfactory decision. All the same, this leaves vague when we should say that individuals’ judgment that they are deliberating as equals is mistaken. The next three sections of this chapter discuss these concerns.

2. The Egalitarian Deliberative Constraint in Practice

The deliberative view says that individuals relate as equals when their relationship is governed by the EDC. What this requirement involves is not immediately obvious; the relational egalitarian needs to say more about what it means in practice to let “the other person’s equally important interests . . . play an equally significant role in influencing decisions made within the context of the relationship” (Scheffler 2015b, 25). In this section, I address three questions about the nature of the deliberative commitment: (1) Why does this constraint on how people relate

⁵² There may be a set of decisions that members of a society of equals could optionally choose to decide together, but which they need not decide together in order to relate as equals. The list indicated above should include only those decisions that must be subject to the EDC. It is not limited to those decisions that members of society must actually discuss and decide together; it will also include decisions about how to shape social practices that may proceed without continual renegotiation or deliberation in everyday life.

require that they deliberate together at all? (2) Could their interests be taken into consideration without any actual collective decision-making? (3) Does the EDC provide any generalizable insight into the kinds of inequalities that are likely to be found objectionable?

Even if the deliberative view of relations of equality can be applied to personal and political relationships alike, how the EDC operates in practice will be sensitive to the nature of the particular relationship in question. Friends, marital partners, co-members in voluntary associations, and co-citizens have different associative obligations and will relate to each other in different ways. Some qualities of the relationship—perhaps its point or purpose, the way in which it was formed, or its history—indicate that some decisions the parties make (collaboratively or unilaterally) will be relevant to that relationship. For parties to stand as equals, they need to make the decisions that fall within that domain in an egalitarian fashion; presumably different kinds of decisions would be relevant to different kinds of relationships. Whether to make a down payment on a house is routinely taken to be a decision for marital partners to make together; it is not often taken to be a decision that close friends must make together. How parties in different relationships make those decisions will also differ, depending on levels of formality, intimacy, and trust. We can isolate the requirements of one kind of relationship from another, to some degree. It is possible for people to be enmeshed in an egalitarian personal relationship—say a companionate marriage—without standing as equal citizens, and vice versa. So we could talk about whether the personal relationship between two individuals is governed by the EDC, or whether their relation as members of a society of equals is governed by the EDC, and we need to specify the kind of relationship that is being evaluated. Since the relational egalitarian is concerned first and foremost with a socio-political ideal, we are mostly interested in the kind of political relationship that individuals have with each other in

virtue of being members of the same society.⁵³ Unless properly qualified, then, future references to ‘relations of equality’ will refer to the relevant kind of political relationships that individuals have in virtue of being members of a society of equals.

2.1. Weighing Interests

Before asking what decisions members of that political relationship should make together, it is worth asking how the EDC directs decision-making at all, and why it enjoins that the parties make decisions together. What does it mean to let an interest influence a decision, and how we can measure equally significant roles in influencing decisions?⁵⁴ Arguably, for an interest to play a role in influencing a decision is just for it to be taken into consideration—for it to be added to the relevant set of reasons under consideration. For equally important interests to play equally significant roles in influencing a decision just requires that (a) the strength of all interests be appropriately recognized and (b) the decision is made in an unbiased and fair manner. There is a limit to how much I can say about what it means for an interest to influence a decision (or to be properly weighed as a factor) without a significant detour into a different project in value theory, but Scheffler’s proposal does not seem to rely on anything technically complex.

⁵³ We could talk about their relations of co-citizenship as a shorthand, so long as it was kept in mind that the question about the appropriate scope of relational egalitarianism has not been settled yet. It may be that only citizens need to stand in this relationship to each other to constitute a society of equals, or that all permanent members of the society must stand in such relations, but there are difficult questions there about what kind of boundaries are fair and justifiable.

⁵⁴ I set aside entirely the issue of how to define and identify genuine interests. In conversation, Simon Rosenqvist has argued that Scheffler’s broad definition of ‘interests’ to include “needs, values, and preferences” (2015b, 25) makes it hard to see how interests could be compared or measured at all. The deliberative view is probably best served by leaving the identification of such interests up to the concerned parties, subject to some reasonableness criteria, but I agree that the looseness of the definition would make it difficult even for deliberators operating in good faith to give each proportionate influence in any nonarbitrary way. At the very least, then, further work is warranted on how to identify and define the relevant set of interests.

Operating solely from the characterization of the EDC alone, it would be unclear why this requires the parties to actually make decisions together. There are ways in which diverse interests could be taken into consideration by one party, who decides unilaterally for others. An impartial administrator with sufficient knowledge could use an act-utilitarian calculus to make decisions that give everyone's interests proportionate weight. Scheffler, however, treats the EDC as requiring that the parties deliberate together about matters of collective importance, and he claims that the "human implications of living together on utilitarian terms" makes it incompatible with the relational egalitarian ideal (2015b, 41). One might argue that this is a wholly separable commitment, and that the EDC does not itself require any shared form of decision-making. In order to help explain why the relational-egalitarian ideal requires a practice of shared decision-making, we need further claims about the nature of the interests people have, and the epistemic difficulties of identifying and weighing them appropriately without deliberative engagement.

In this respect, the egalitarian deliberative constraint (EDC) looks superficially similar to the principle of equal consideration of interests (PECI). The EDC requires that each person's equally significant interests play an equally significant role in influencing some decision; the PECI, to use Stanley Benn's wording, requires that decision-makers "direct consideration to the *interests* of those affected" (1997 [1967], 115) and presumably consider their importance impartially. There are a variety of ways of operationalizing the PECI. Benn suggests that interests be arranged (and presumably satisfied) in order of urgency, giving preference to basic needs. Peter Singer, by contrast, thinks the PECI commits him to aggregating interests and maximizing their satisfaction (1993, 13). Robert Dahl and Thomas Christiano agree that a commitment to PECI doesn't by itself specify how decisions ought to be made, so they both

make the case for supplementing it with some other commitments to get to some kind of democratic or deliberative decision procedure. Dahl argues that an argument for democracy also requires a supplemental assumption that everyone is the best judge of their own interests (1989, 86–88, 100). Christiano argues that people are in fact best positioned to understand at least some of their own interests better than others, everyone has an interest in recognition that democratic participation partly satisfies, and that people’s interests are often discovered in the course of deliberation itself (1996, 71–5, 84). These arguments would also give us reasons to think that the EDC—a commitment to letting equally important interests play an equally significant role in influencing decisions—must result in a deliberative view.

Scheffler does offer similar reasons to think that the EDC requires a complex deliberative practice. First, if there is “no general formula or algorithm for determining how best to engage in the practice” (Scheffler 2015b, 30), then there often will be multiple ways to adequately satisfy the EDC. Considerations of fairness would weigh in favor of allowing all the parties to have some role in deciding which method to use, which suggests a deliberative model. Scheffler claims that assessment of whether the EDC is satisfied could be made diachronically (33), looking at how the individuals interact over the long term rather than in individual, isolated decisions. This plausibly captures intuitions we have about interaction among equals—given that not every decision can equally well satisfy the interests of all, equals may decide together to trade off, take turns, or alternately favor one party and then the other in decision-making. If that is the best way to assess compliance with the EDC, it will be even clearer why there is no general formula for deciding in any given instance.

Second, there is no publicly accessible and agreed-upon metric for assessing or comparing the weight of interests. As a result, the interests can’t simply be weighed up and the

heavier favored in some mechanical decision-making process. A less mechanical process might take several forms—such as allowing one individual to exercise some discretion in assessing the interests, or inviting everyone to deliberate about the best way to assess those interests. If allowing one individual that kind of discretion seems unfair or objectionable, as seems likely, that is a reason to favor a deliberative decision-making process.

Third, it is plausible that one interest that most everyone actually has is an interest in being recognized as an agent capable of making choices, and satisfying that interest may well require that important decisions be made in a way that is reflective of that recognition. Allowing individuals some say in the decision-making process expresses recognition of them as agents and not merely patients.

Over and above this, there is the obvious point that non-deliberative ways of trying to identify and weigh these interests involve asymmetries of power that themselves run counter to the ideal. By making the contours of relations of equality dependent upon the input of the members of the relationship, the deliberative view gives voice to a conception of society as a shared endeavor, a cooperative scheme that has terms its members can deliberate about and agree upon.

2.2. Actual Deliberation and Hypothetical Deliberation

It might appear as though the EDC requires that both parties actually deliberate together about every decision that is relevant to their relationship, especially considering that there is no strict formula for identifying and weighing their interests. If the normative ideal of relations of equality underdetermines the decisions the parties ought to make, as Scheffler has suggested (2003b, 2015b), then perhaps such matters can be settled only by actual deliberation.

Alternatively, one might argue that the deliberative view is compatible with a purely hypothetical form of deliberation, such that people relate as equals so long as the structure of that relation is justifiable to all. That could be expressed in contractualist terms—relations of equality are structured in ways that no one could reasonably reject (Anderson 1999b, 2010a; O’Neill 2013a; Scanlon 2014a). It is not clear from what has been laid out so far to what degree the EDC demands actual deliberation or only conformity to hypothetical deliberation.

There are two general types of cases in which the deliberative view seems compatible with a hypothetical deliberation test. First, in some instances the balance of interests is obvious and overwhelming. In such cases, there may well be a unique solution indicated by the EDC, and whether the relationship is governed by the EDC can be tested against a hypothetical deliberation. Second, parties may not need to actually deliberate together to decide whether to maintain and preserve existing practices and institutions. When social institutions are first being formed and multiple options would satisfy the EDC, there is a good case to be made for thinking actual deliberation is required. When permissible practices are already established, however, such that people have come to form reasonable expectations on the basis of those practices or beginning the process of deliberation anew would be costly, a requirement of actual deliberation may be rejected by the parties (e.g., because it would be onerous or counterproductive to their shared interests).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ On this, see Scanlon’s Principle of Established Practices (1998, 339). There are hard questions here about the full requirements of the view, given the path dependency of our social practices and institutions. It seems straightforward that before institutions are set up, parties who stand as equals would seek to choose together among the set of permissible institutional options. If a plurality acted to institute some permissible option (e.g., one property regime over another) while excluding a minority from deliberation about which option to pick, relying on the fact that they could later argue that this option could be justified in a hypothetical deliberative standard, they would plainly be acting contrary to the spirit of the EDC. Setting such cases aside, though, once a practice has been established, there may be good reasons to give it some deference, to treat it as more than just one permissible option among others. Of course, that a practice or institution is in place does not mean it need not pass a hypothetical deliberation test—if it could not plausibly meet the requirements of the EDC, individuals in that society have good reason to object to its preservation and to seek reform. Where it does, though, there may be good reasons to say it

There are a few advantages to acknowledging that a hypothetical deliberative standard is sometimes sufficient. First, it would be a significant problem for relational egalitarians if achieving equality required constant, unceasing political deliberation. Second, thinking of matters that are not actually deliberated on as still potentially relevant to the political relationship can help secure a better understanding of relations in a society of equals. Even matters that do not regularly feature in political deliberation, or perhaps matters that need not feature in political deliberation, can be relevant to the context of their relationship. Take, as an example, interactions in institutions of civil society like restaurants. The deliberative view does not automatically hold that such interaction is of little consequence or irrelevant to individuals' standing as equals. If such social practices are relevant to the relationship (and the rules governing public accommodations do seem relevant to the relationship between members of society), those practices are subject to the scrutiny of at least a hypothetical deliberation test.

Where individuals would not have good reason to accept a hypothetical test, the EDC requires they actually deliberate together to decide how to structure that aspect of the relationship. In those cases, such as where there are a class of permissible options—either because judgments of the weight of the various interests involved will be vague, or because there are options for how to balance particular decisions over time—we will not be able to say in advance how equals should decide. So the deliberative view of relations of equality may require both actual deliberation in some cases, and it may be satisfied by a hypothetical deliberative standard in others.

need not be the subject of actual deliberation. On the Principle of Established Practices, I am influenced by comments in Henry Richardson's *Articulating the Moral Community* (2018).

2.3. How the Constraint Identifies Objectionable Inequalities

This characterization of relations of equality does help to identify some salient relational inequalities. Since inequalities in power, status, or standing would be justifiable only if all reasonable parties could accept them, inequalities for which we cannot provide good reasons would be automatically suspect. Inequalities that run counter to the spirit of the idea of society as a system of fair cooperation could be objectionable, if they make it more difficult for individuals to cooperate in this fashion. (Some inequalities in esteem that serve a legitimate social function, such as to recognize and encourage the cultivation of talents, may still be objectionable for this reason). Inequalities that express a demeaning or disrespectful view of individuals would be incompatible with the equal respect built into the practice of the EDC. If relations of equality require that individuals actually deliberate and decide some matters together, then some inequalities may be targeted when they impede genuine participation in real deliberation.

Consider how differentials of power would be evaluated. There are plausibly many forms of power differentials that could be consistent with letting equally significant interests from all parties play equally significant roles in deliberation. Delegating authority for certain decisions to experts or those with much greater stakes in the decision may be justifiable in those cases. Differences in power endowed by offices are not generally objectionable if the institution or office is itself affirmed by citizens guided by the egalitarian deliberative constraint. Differences in talents or abilities would not in themselves be objectionable, so long as individuals are still able to abide by the egalitarian deliberative constraint in their interaction with each other.

Even so, the relational egalitarian could object to ceding broad decision-making authority to experts, if that generally undermined individuals' ability to genuinely engage in the egalitarian deliberative practice. Likewise, the relational egalitarian could object to power imbalances that

lead to domination, since relations of domination preclude interaction as free and equals (when one party can be imposed upon for arbitrary reasons by the other, she is not in a position to act as a deliberator at all; at best all she can do is relate her interests to the other as a supplicant).

Massive imbalances in power, no matter how initially justified, could be objectionable insofar as they made it harder for individuals to resist the temptation to ignore others' interests in deliberation or insofar as they made it harder to sympathize with others well enough to understand their interests.

Inequalities of status and standing could be judged in a similar manner. Gross inequalities of status, particularly disparities that contribute to stigmatization or feelings of inferiority, could be found objectionable. The relational egalitarian would reject those differences in status that were directly incompatible with taking others' interests to be equally important. Likewise, inequalities of influence or standing would be justifiable to the extent they did not interfere with the parties being able to adhere to the egalitarian deliberative constraint, to give equal weight to each other's equally important interests.

3. The Domain Question

Scheffler's description of relations of equality specifies that in such relations, "each person accepts that the other person's equally important interests . . . should play an equally important role in influencing decisions made *within the context of the relationship*" (2015b, 25, emphasis added). One obvious outstanding question is which decisions fall within the context of any given relationship. Which decisions ought the parties make together, and which need not be deliberated together in order for them to stand as equals? I refer to this as the domain question. A full working-out of the deliberative view of relations of equals requires that we have some way

of specifying which decisions are appropriately included within that domain. This cannot be simply a requirement that whatever decisions these individuals do happen to make together in a certain setting (e.g., decisions they make in a public forum) must be made in a certain fashion, governed by the EDC, since that would leave open the possibility that one party refuses to admit important questions for deliberation and joint decision-making. At the very least, then, there must be a minimal list of decisions that, given the nature of the relationship, ought to be made together.

We might begin with a list of questions that historically have been important for parties in such relationships, though a strictly historical criterion for the domain question is obviously insufficient. Looking at the kinds of decisions that have been treated as relevant to political matters is a useful starting point, at least in understanding how people have conceived those relationships. A historical standard doesn't provide good reasons for including or excluding some decisions, though, and it is both over- and under-inclusive. That questions about religious dogma have been addressed in political discussion doesn't mean they must be decided together; that questions about family life have been excluded doesn't show they are irrelevant.

A second, equally unsatisfactory strategy would be to leave the parties themselves to determine when some decision is within the domain of the relationship. Many kinds of relationships are fluid and open to self-interpretation—the variety of conceptions of friendship bears witness to this—so a voluntaristic standard might be attractive. Making the set of relevant decisions depend on when both parties agree a decision is within the domain, however, facilitates inequalitarian power imbalances, since one party can unilaterally exclude certain questions. Allowing one party to unilaterally decide that some decision is relevant to the relationship is no better.

A third possibility would be to look at the nature of the relationship: the point of the relation or what distinguishes it from other relations may well inform what decisions should be relevant to it.⁵⁶ We might try to connect the appropriate domain of decisions to a shared understanding about the particular goods secured by that relationship. Healthy long-term romantic relationships, for example, address individual interests in reliable caregiving, emotional support, intellectual connectedness, and so on; perhaps on that basis we could begin to demarcate when decisions are relevant to that relationship. This quasi-teleological approach would provide less arbitrary reasons for including some matters within the appropriate domain.

If the purpose of the political relationship is to organize social cooperation or to secure some goods only possible with a government, then decisions about how to structure elections, whether political parties should receive public funding, and generally what aims and projects the state should pursue would obviously be relevant. When social institutions that organize their coexistence and interaction also (a) exercise a profound and pervasive impact on members' life prospects or (b) influence their political interaction in some way, it will be particularly important that they collectively decide the shape of those practices.⁵⁷ A social-cooperation rationale could help explain why questions about production and distribution are within the domain of a relationship among members of a cooperative system of production. Contrariwise, it might also help explain why some questions are clearly not relevant to the relationship—for example, why

⁵⁶ This is in some ways similar to Bernard Williams's discussion of the "logic" of distribution—he claims that what counts as a relevant reason for distributing a good in a particular fashion depends on the nature of the good in question (2005 [1962], 108). One might also make comparisons with Michael Walzer's distinct spheres of social goods (1983).

⁵⁷ What constitutes political interaction is more difficult to say than it appears at first glance. Obviously how individuals interact in some explicitly political space—such as a town hall or debate forum—would count, but arguably any interaction that supports the informal deliberation stages of democratic discourse would be relevant. This reference to political interaction need not suggest that interaction as citizens or in a political context is more important than other kinds of interaction. (Some accounts of relational egalitarianism, particularly Anderson [1999a], seem to suggest that relational egalitarianism's concern with nonpolitical forms of interaction is limited.) Rather, social practices that influence political interaction in some way may be especially important subjects for collective decision-making insofar as inattention to them can undermine the equality of subsequent collective decision-making.

questions about what an individual eats for lunch are not relevant to his relationship with co-citizens.

One problem with this approach is that it presumes agreement about some of the very questions that are in dispute—citizens might very well have differing views about the purpose of political arrangements and what goods they should secure. Some liberal contractarians think the purpose of political arrangements is only to seek peace and stability. Some liberals think political arrangements can secure fair terms of social cooperation and economic production. Perfectionists think the political relationship can help cultivate and promote a variety of further excellences or goods. So answering the domain question by appealing to the point or purpose of the political relationship may just push back the dispute.

Although I do not have a comprehensive account of how to address the domain question, some general claims about how to address the problem will suffice here. (In the following chapters, I will argue that questions about informal social norms and practices undeniably belong within the domain, even if we lack a full theory of how to define that domain.) The voluntaristic suggestion above gets something right—it is at least partly up to the members of society to determine what they belongs within the context of their relationship. We can accommodate this by characterizing the domain as containing (a) a central core of non-negotiable decisions that must be subject to the EDC for members of that society to stand as equals, and (b) a periphery of optional decisions that the parties could choose to take up. Within the core context would be matters over which we think parties must decide collectively or must subject to demands of collective justifiability, if they are to stand as equals. They must subject decisions about the structure and aims of government to the EDC, at least. Within the peripheral context would be matters where it is unclear if individuals would fail to stand as equals if those matters were not

decided in a manner fitting the EDC. They could choose to coordinate more of their lives, where doing so is not necessary.

If there is a core of necessarily joint decisions, what is contained in it? Absent a better alternative, I am tentatively attracted to a pragmatic approach that echoes the kind of analogical arguments found in legal reasoning. Members of a society of equals need to fairly deliberate about what should be on the deliberative agenda itself—what decisions should be taken as within the domain of the relationship and so decided in a manner governed by the egalitarian deliberative constraint. One approach to specifying the set of decisions is to start with uncontentious, paradigmatic examples of relevant decisions and to broaden out only when cogent analogies can be drawn between those decisions and disputed decisions.⁵⁸ That provides a role for precedent without making it dispositive. Unfortunately this approach is no better at conclusively settling what decisions should be decided together, so the domain would continue to be an underdetermined part of the relational-egalitarian ideal and a source of continuing debate.

Finally, whatever criterion is best, saying some decision belongs within the domain does not indicate that the parties must actually discuss it together on a regular basis. People who relate as equals may choose to delegate some decisions that are relevant to their relationship. Some marital partners collectively decide all matters of household finance, including both large and small purchases, whereas others do not coordinate or deliberate to this extent. That some couples choose not to make small decisions together does not show that they have judged such matters fall outside the context of the relationship. They might decide that their interests are best served by delegating decisions. The question at issue—whether such decisions are within the relevant domain—is whether such deliberation or debate about whether to delegate should even be had.

⁵⁸ This suggestion assumes that the existing set of decisions within the domain captures a significant spectrum of political life, that it is not obviously unjust. Such a suggestion is less attractive if agreement some central core of decisions cannot be had, or if an objective answer to the domain question is available.

Likewise, decisions that belong within the domain of the political relationship may be delegated or subject only to a hypothetical deliberative test. Take as an example the nest of practices related to production and employment—who controls the means of production, how they are allocated, how individual roles in that system of production are created and defined, how workplaces are managed, and the norms governing interpersonal interaction in those spheres. All members of a society of equals ought to make these decisions together, at least in the sense that the EDC applies to these decisions.

Even though these practices are undeniably within the domain of the political relationship among members of society, that does not mean that individual job vacancies should be filled by a society-wide deliberative process, or that the allocation of all productive resources needs to be determined in such fashion. How jobs are assigned in a system of cooperative production and who gets which jobs are relevant questions to members of that system of production—that is a key feature of how that system is structured—but that does not mean it should be up for continual renegotiation or that individual assignments themselves ought to be subject to some joint decision-making process. A system in which employers have discretion over whom to hire for a particular job may be the only reasonably justifiable option. Once a practice is established, it may be unreasonable to reopen it to deliberation. The parties may have much stronger interests in seeing that such issues are settled without protracted, costly collective deliberation. In many cases, if the selection of some practice passes a hypothetical deliberation test among members of the society, and it would be unreasonable to insist on re-opening the choice up for debate, people who stand as equals need not continually debate the issue.

4. The Assessment Question

Scheffler describes a number of ways in which people can give everyone's interests fair weight when making collective decisions. When participants disagree or their interests diverge, they may split the difference, trade off whose interests are benefited from one decision to the next, delegate particular decisions to one partner, forgo making a decision, use a random process to decide, part ways, or take some other strategy for deciding in a fair manner. It is plausible that, absent some straightforward formula for determining which strategy is called for in every decision, people will have different intuitions or preferences regarding different decision-making strategies. If there is no general formula for determining what the EDC requires in any given circumstance, and the participants must exercise judgment to decide how to balance their interests, then there will likely be multiple acceptable options in many cases. That vagueness is likely to open up disagreement about which proposals are in keeping with the spirit of the EDC—disagreements about which interpretations of the EDC are reasonable or unreasonable.

If we need some means of identifying reasonable interpretations of the EDC, then it might seem that relational egalitarianism could benefit from drawing on the resources of contractualist ethics.⁵⁹ Some relational egalitarians have argued that their view is rooted in a kind of commitment to contractualism. For example, Elizabeth Anderson claims that

most relational egalitarians follow a *second-person* or *interpersonal* conception of justification. This follows from their contractualism. Contractualism is the view that the principles of justice are whatever principles free, equal, and reasonable people would adopt to regulate the claims they make on one another. (2010a, 3)

⁵⁹ 'Contractualism', in this context, refers a family of normative ethical views that share the claim that the rightness and wrongness of some acts are determined by appealing to what all members of the moral community could agree to, under suitably specified circumstances. Scanlon's contractualism, with its focus on what principles people could not reasonably reject, and Darwall's similar account, focused on what individuals could demand of others, might seem especially likely to help adjudicate reasonable from unreasonable claims.

We don't need to evaluate Anderson's characterization of the field to see how this might be appealing—if the deliberative view asks us to judge when the parties are interpreting the EDC in a reasonable fashion, we might stand to gain from looking at ethical views that prioritize ideas of interpersonal justification, agreement, and reasonable rejectability.⁶⁰ The suggestion here is that one way of fleshing out the requirements of the deliberative view of relations of equality is to ask which interpretations of the EDC would be acceptable to all reasonable parties (or, alternatively, which interpretations they could not reasonably reject). Although I do not have a full account worked out, I am sympathetic to the idea of appealing to contractualist resources to address the assessment question.

An appeal to contractualism to help address the assessment question would not show that relational equality simply reduces to the demands of contractualism.⁶¹ Doubtless there is some kind of relationship of equality built into contractualism. Contractualism already requires some description of a relationship among equals, in order to assess what people so situated would agree to or reject. In *The Second-Person Standpoint*, Stephen Darwall characterizes advocates of contractualism in normative ethics⁶² as sharing the view that “the content of the moral obligations we owe to one another as equal moral persons is to be explained as the result of a (hypothetical) agreement, choice, or ‘contract’ from some perspective that situates individuals

⁶⁰ Additionally, if Scanlon's own view about when inequality is objectionable “has at least a family resemblance to views advanced by Anderson [and] Scheffler” (O'Neill 2013a, 457n58), then we might expect Scanlon's contractualism could help buttress relational-egalitarian claims.

⁶¹ In a passage that follows the quotation above, Elizabeth Anderson almost suggests as much: “Principles of justice are principles for adjudicating the claims free, equal, reasonable, and mutually accountable persons make on each other, with respect to what they owe each other. They are the principles persons so conceiving themselves would reasonably adopt, or not reasonably reject, for regulating the claims they make on each other. When they successfully follow such principles, they constitute themselves as a free society of equals, and *thereby* realize the kind of relational equality demanded by justice” (Anderson 2010a, 5–6, emphasis added). Taken in isolation, this could be construed as saying that relational egalitarianism amounts to nothing more than the state achieved when individuals fulfill their second-personal obligations to each other. Her discussion of contractualism in *The Imperative of Integration* complicates that picture. There she suggests that some features of relationships are objectionable on contractualist grounds and some less “extreme” inequalities are objectionable in virtue of an understanding of democratic ideals (2010c, 17–8).

⁶² He includes in this group Rawls when he is discussing “rightness as fairness,” Scanlon, and himself.

equally as moral persons” (2006b, 303). There is more than just a coincidental resemblance between the description of relations in contractualist ethics and relational egalitarianism. Both start from some claim about basic moral equality; both put individuals into reciprocal relations where they can make identical claims on each other; both prioritize the importance of all parties having an equal say or voice. The contractualist relation among equals is not primarily a social or political form of equality, but one might suggest that the kind of equality captured by contractualism is prior to and explanatory of the political ideal of relational equality.

I think there are two reasons to doubt that the requirements of the political ideal of relational equality straightforwardly reduce to the requirements of contractualism. First, it is not clear that contractualism alone demands what relational egalitarianism demands. Second, it at least seems possible to subscribe to relational equality as a political ideal without accepting contractualism in normative ethics, so it should be possible to at least describe the political ideal without making that commitment. This is compatible with acknowledging that many relational egalitarians have contractualist commitments and that (as I have suggested) contractualist ideas might be useful in interpreting some aspects of the relational-egalitarian ideal.

First, contractualism alone is not equivalent to relational egalitarianism. Contractualism in normative ethics is a general theory of moral rightness and wrongness (at least with respect to what we owe each other), so it would be surprising if it led directly to a particular socio-political ideal at all, much less one that corresponds with relational egalitarianism. Scanlon and Martin O’Neill, in elaborating a kind of “contractualist egalitarianism” that in some ways resembles relational egalitarianism, look for particular reasons to object to inequality; even after accepting a contractualist framework, one has to find arguments for discriminating permissible and

impermissible inequalities in some way. Contractualism is a good deal broader than the political ideal of relational egalitarianism, and concerned with different things.

Still, perhaps some would find tempting the thought that the demands of relational egalitarianism are just a subset of the demands of contractualism—what we owe to each other in relevant political decisions, for example. That too is disputable, though. There are further commitments in the ideal of relational egalitarianism that are not contained in the bare idea of contractualism. For example, that contractualism asks whether acts would be objectionable from anyone's standpoint, and so gives a kind of voice to everyone in moral deliberation, does not require that political decision-making be made in a democratic fashion, as relational egalitarianism arguably requires.

Relational egalitarianism describes a kind of practice of joint decision-making that has to be actually performed at times. That commitment to decide some matters together may inform what is reasonably rejectable. Another way to put this is to say that relational equality makes a claim about the importance of equality as a political ideal, not just as a moral ideal of relations between free and equal persons. It is not the case that moral agents must always be governed by the EDC in their interaction with others; there is not a universal moral requirement to give other people's equally significant interests equal weight in decisions.⁶³ If this is right, then the EDC is not dispensable; we cannot just talk directly about what contractualism requires.

Second, contractualism is not necessary for relational egalitarianism. Even if relational egalitarianism cannot simply be reduced to demands of contractualism, it might still be argued that relational egalitarianism cannot be understood without contractualism. Because I want to appeal to contractualist concepts to help explain which interpretations of the EDC ought to be

⁶³ One may have a general obligation to consider the interests of others when acting, but in pedestrian decisions (e.g., which park bench I will sit on), I doubt one has a requirement to make other people's equally significant (but, given the circumstances, pretty trivial) interests equally influential over the decision one makes.

accepted, my view of relational egalitarianism could accommodate this possibility. All the same, we have good reason to doubt that relational egalitarianism is inseparable from contractualism, even if the relational-egalitarian ideal needs to be supplemented in some form or fashion to clarify what relations of equality look like.

It seems conceivable that one might be a relational egalitarian in the political sense while holding some other view about how to determine the content of normative ethics. That is, one might think that egalitarianism is best understood in terms of commitments to certain kinds of relationships, regardless of one's position on normative ethics. What should prevent a consequentialist from accepting that relational egalitarianism is a better conception of equality as a political value? We can describe the practice of deliberating as equals without committing to a view about how to assess the rightness of acts more generally.

I have suggested that contractualism might prove a useful supplement in determining which interpretations of the EDC should be acceptable. What is most useful here is not a formula that contractualism provides for determining what is reasonable or unreasonable, but rather that contractualists highlight the need for some substantive judgment about reasonableness. That is required in both the interpretation of the EDC and in the interpretation of reasonable rejection. Contractualism may be a useful supplement less because relational egalitarianism fundamentally depends upon it than because contractualists have already given thought to the kinds of evaluations of acceptable interpersonal negotiation that relational egalitarians need to consider.

I have not attempted here to conclusively settle how to answer what I am calling the assessment question—how a relational egalitarian separates reasonable from unreasonable interpretations of the EDC. In working out which proposals are in keeping with the spirit of the

EDC, though, relational egalitarians might productively avail themselves of some contractualist resources.

5. On Conditions Enabling Deliberation as Equals

Scheffler's description of the "practice of equality" is a helpful way to begin characterizing the substantive content of relational equality, even if at present there are significant gaps in its description (e.g., in how open-ended the process is, over what matters individuals must submit to joint decision-making, and how relations among members of a society of equals will differ from intimate egalitarian personal relationships). Further elaboration of that deliberative practice, along with answers to the domain and assessment questions, will help clarify what relational egalitarianism requires. In addition to thinking about what individuals would decide when engaging in this practice, we should also ask what preconditions the deliberative practice requires. Arguably, there are considerable material and social prerequisites that must be in place in order for individuals to genuinely engage in this practice as equals—conditions of possibility for egalitarian deliberation.

Strictly speaking, talk of preconditions is redundant: a social world in which the preconditions for everyone to genuinely participate in egalitarian deliberation are not met would not be one in which everyone's interests were given equal influence over collective decisions. Still, relational egalitarians who defend the deliberative view need to characterize the kinds of institutions and practices that make this egalitarian deliberation possible. We should not simply defer all questions about appropriate institutions to what interlocutors actually decide in deliberation.

Some of these preconditions correspond with the kinds of distributive concerns that feature in alternative forms of egalitarianism; indeed, in some cases, the relational egalitarian may want to say that some resource must be distributed equally so that parties can deliberate properly or that parties would always decide to distribute a resource equally. Christian Schemmel has argued that relational egalitarianism has considerable distributive demands. On his view, equal respect requires a defeasible presumption of an equal distribution of basic social goods, and the lack of good justifications for deviation from equality in many cases will mean egalitarian deliberation will generate demands for more equal distributions (2011a, 370). Along similar lines, one might say that in order to be able to genuinely engage in deliberation as equals, certain material conditions have to be in place.

It is false so long as individuals cooperate and deliberate with the right frame of mind, vast inequities in power, resources, or influence will be unimportant. Disparities in resources may render our needs and interests unintelligible to each other. At a certain point, such differences can prevent us from deliberating as equals just because we won't share an understanding of the social world. Unintelligibility is one worry.⁶⁴ Another is a threat to sincerity. When deliberating parties are grossly imbalanced, even when both members engage in good faith in an attempt to take up the other's equally important interests, one will have assurance of a better outcome if agreement cannot be reached. Finally, we might think that without an already established rough equality of resources, we will not be able to properly view each other as equals—such inequalities can infect our view of people's status.

Describing material preconditions for egalitarian deliberation does not attenuate the distinctiveness of the relational-egalitarian view, or render the description of the practice of equality superfluous. Relational egalitarianism would not reduce to the distributive prerequisites

⁶⁴ On this, see Daniel Putnam (2015).

or the distributive outputs indicated, even if relational egalitarians wound up making some distributive demands that were identical to what other egalitarians demanded. It is likely that the social prerequisites and outputs of the practice of equality will not be easily reducible to distributive requirements. Just as importantly, the description of the practice of equality as a kind of deliberation serves an important explanatory purpose—it indicates why egalitarians would make some distributive demands prerequisites or outputs of egalitarian deliberation.

How can we identify the relevant conditions of possibility for egalitarian deliberation? Which inequalities are targeted will depend on our understanding of the practice of deliberation and what it requires. If we have an independent conception of what it is for individuals to deliberate sincerely and what kind of obstacles might impede that deliberation, we can use that conception to help identify the preconditions. This will be developed further in chapter 4, when we look at some likely institutional requirements of relational egalitarianism.

CHAPTER 3

LIBERAL COMMITMENTS AND THE LIBERAL SOCIETY

In the previous chapters, I outlined the fundamental commitments of relational egalitarianism and gave reasons to favor a deliberative view of relational equality. In the next two chapters, I argue that thinking through the implications of that ideal raises questions about whether and to what degree relational equality is compatible with what are commonly construed as commitments of liberalism. Liberalism is a broad church, to say the least, and liberals have competing self-conceptions, but there is sufficient overlap—at least among liberal political philosophers—to justify discussion of a set of basic liberal commitments. This chapter will provide a characterization of those commitments. All that needs to be described here are some central ideas, particularly those that are likely to come into conflict with relational egalitarianism, so this is not an exhaustive description of the liberal worldview. On the basis of that characterization, in the next chapter I will lay out the compatibility worry—why one might think relational egalitarianism could come into tension with core tenets of liberalism.

The characterization of liberalism offered here emphasizes two components: the priority the liberal gives to a certain set of individual liberties, and the expectation that a liberal society will be able to reserve significant scope for individual discretion in what are categorized as personal or private decisions. Many characterizations of liberalism start from the claim that there is a limit to permissible, coercive state interference with the individual. This is not unreasonable; the individual liberties that liberalism protects do require restrictions on governmental power. What deserves more emphasis is that liberalism is not exhausted by an account of the relationship between the individual and the state. There is also a distinctly liberal view on the

relationship between the individual and justice—namely, liberals hold that principles of justice will not place requirements on every individual choice, that society can be arranged such that the demands of justice are not “fully directive.”⁶⁵ As will be drawn out below, this expectation is related to what some liberals call the division of moral labor.

To be clear, this characterization does not provide a historical reconstruction of liberalism or an interpretation of particular liberal texts. Given the variety of differing conceptions of liberalism, I do not aspire to give an account that could accommodate every fellow traveler. It may not capture every version of liberalism, but arguably many liberals share this common core. What follows is a stipulative schema of central liberal commitments, which would need to be filled in to get a complete view.⁶⁶ I will expand on all of these elements in the rest of the chapter:

[1] The Principle of Fundamental Liberties: Liberals hold that a certain set of individual liberties are of fundamental moral importance. What it means to be of fundamental moral importance may vary—it could be taken simply as a default presumption of noninterference, a particularly stringent bar to justify interference (e.g., perhaps fundamental liberties may only be infringed upon for the sake of other fundamental liberties), an absolutist commitment to individual freedom to

⁶⁵ Seana Shiffrin describes a “fully directive” view of morality as one that holds that “for any decision one could make, assuming there are no ties, it yields a specific requirement about how one is to act” (Shiffrin 2010, 136). There is some ambiguity in what it means for a view to impose a specific requirement. A requirement may leave an individual some room for discretion in fulfilling it (e.g., a soldier might be required to wear dress blues or battle fatigues at work). On the other hand, a requirement is not imposed any time one’s set of options is limited (e.g., one may be free to choose one’s own diet even if the sale of arsenic for consumption is prohibited). In this context, what I mean is that the liberal holds that whether a society is just will not be dependent on how individuals make a number of personal choices. Perhaps one could say that liberals think that society can be structured so that individuals can make a certain set of decisions for purely personal reasons, because principles of justice will not speak directly to those choices. In a similar vein, liberalism in this sense has been contrasted with “totalitarianism,” a view that “the public or political universe is all inclusive, *all* roles are public, and every function, whether political, economic, or artistic, can be interpreted as involving a public responsibility” (Benn 1984 [1971], 239).

⁶⁶ This description borrows language and ideas from Samuel Freeman’s “Capitalism in the Classical and High Liberal Traditions” (2011), Nancy Rosenblum’s *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (1989), and Amy Gutmann’s *Liberal Equality* (1980).

exercise those liberties that trumps any obligation that would impede that exercise, or a claim that generates an obligation on the government or others to provide means for effective exercise of those liberties.⁶⁷ The fundamental liberties of every individual in that society are accorded equal importance.

[2] Criteria for Specifying Particular Fundamental Liberties: A complete account will supply some rationale for identifying which liberties should be accorded this status. Liberals differ on what criteria should be used to select fundamental liberties (e.g., perhaps some conception of natural law, respect for personhood, the prerequisites for autonomy, or the requirements of reasonable pluralism help identify which liberties are paramount). Whatever the liberal chooses, though, these criteria ought to identify as fundamental at least freedom of thought, conscience, and speech; freedom of association; and freedom and security of the person (where that involves some freedom of movement and freedom from violations of bodily integrity).

[3] Expectations for the Liberal Society: Liberals believe that, generally speaking, justice can be achieved while leaving individuals broad latitude to pursue their own conception of the good. They hold that liberalism will not require pervasive (frequent or especially intrusive) interferences with individuals' associative choices, the articulation of their beliefs, or decisions to pursue one morally unobjectionable project over another. State coercion will not be necessary in these

⁶⁷ This is similar to but more noncommittal than Gerald Gaus's "Fundamental Liberal Principle," which he holds to be the foundation of "liberal public justification and tolerance": "Imposition on others requires justification; unjustified impositions are unjust. . . . The basic idea, then, is that freedom to live one's own life as one chooses is the benchmark or presumption; departures from that condition . . . require additional justification" (1996, 165). Gaus frames the fundamental principle in terms of a default presumption against interference generally; I only want to say that liberals are committed to giving some special, protected status to at least some particular individual liberties. I also want to leave open what that kind of special status looks like (i.e., whether it's a default presumption, a set of rights, a significant weighting of interests, or something else).

matters, and a just society can be realized without demands of justice extensively dictating the choices individuals make. To put it broadly, the liberal society recognizes that each individual has a life of her own to live. This does not just follow from the fundamental moral importance accorded to certain liberties—a high bar against interference is compatible with interference being frequently justified. Importantly, this is not merely a prediction. Rather, it is a necessary, constitutive feature of liberal societies in non-emergency circumstances.

What is crucial for the argument of subsequent chapters is that all liberals (a) prioritize some set of liberties, (b) include in that set a number of familiar liberties of association and speech, and (c) hold that the goals of liberal society can be achieved without continual or particularly intrusive demands on personal choices.

Does this accurately capture some core commitments of liberalism? It would be difficult to provide a substantive characterization of liberal commitments that all liberals would be willing to endorse. It is easier to identify influential liberals than it is to characterize liberalism—Locke, Smith, Kant, Tocqueville, Mill, Dewey, Hobhouse, Berlin, Rawls, and Dworkin should be counted as liberals if anyone should, but they do not share a uniform set of theoretical or practical political commitments. They disagree about the degree to which liberalism is a secular view, about the role of individual rights, whether the state should remain neutral about the good. When it comes to practical political commitments, liberals disagree about the importance of democracy, limited governments, private property, and the permissible extent of welfare-state programs. This heterogeneity isn't merely the product of considering both "classical" and twentieth-century "modern" liberals, either—these disagreements run throughout the entire history of liberalism. Steven Wall has recently suggested that, given the diversity of ideas

defended by liberals, it may be better to “speak of multiple liberal political traditions” rather than try to find some unifying core (2015, 1).⁶⁸ Even if there are multiple liberal political traditions, I think the stipulative schema above does capture some central commitments of many liberals, and we can draw out the appearance of conflict between liberalism and relational egalitarianism on that basis.⁶⁹ In order to defend this characterization of some of the core commitments of liberalism, I’ll elaborate on all three parts of the schema, though I’ll be brief in describing the first two, because the real appearance of tension between liberalism and relational egalitarianism is a product of the third feature.

1. Fundamental Liberties

The natural place to start is with the idea that liberals have some kind of commitment to individual liberty. The fundamental liberal commitment is to securing some forms of individual freedom for all, against governments and perhaps also social forces more generally.⁷⁰ It is difficult, though, to see how to draw out the substance of that commitment. Does this commitment only require noninterference by government or the provision of resources and opportunities that enable the effective exercise of freedom? Does it identify individual freedom as an ineliminable element of the good life, or is that commitment to noninterference grounded in

⁶⁸ Edmund Fawcett (2014) likewise thinks liberalism lacks a unified program, though instead of breaking it into multiple strands, he describes it in terms of characteristic attitudes or dispositions. What concerns me is philosophical liberalism, so variation in the commitments of politicians identified as liberals is not worrying. I suspect that my characterization of liberalism is abstract enough to fit into most accounts of liberalism in political philosophy and theory, but nothing is really lost if there are some liberals who fall outside the characterization.

⁶⁹ If this is better understood as a list of commitments shared by some large subset of liberals, the argument of this dissertation would not be substantially changed. Instead of saying that relational egalitarianism comes into conflict with the commitments of liberalism, we could instead simply say that it comes into conflict with a set of commitments important to many contemporary liberals.

⁷⁰ That interest in “social forces more generally” may come in the form of commitments to protect individuals against private forms of domination (e.g., debt peonage or exploitative labor contracts) or against social pressures more generally (e.g., Mill’s interest in the “moral coercion of public opinion” [1977 (1859), 223]).

obligations to respect rights or other constraints on the would-be interferer?⁷¹ Pointing out that there are a number of quite different ways to elaborate that fundamental commitment doesn't make it any less good of a starting point. Liberals provide a number of different reasons for valuing some set of fundamental liberties, and I don't need to adjudicate among them in order to advance this characterization.⁷² Even if we can bracket questions that divide liberals about why these individual liberties are important, to complete this characterization of fundamental liberties, I need to say something more about (a) which individual liberties will be identified as important and (b) what this special moral importance means.

Liberals disagree among themselves about which liberties are of fundamental importance. Consider, for example, the disagreement between libertarians like John Tomasi (2012) and Rawlsian liberals as to whether to include economic liberties (i.e., freedom to make contracts and transactions, or freedom to make them unimpeded by government regulation or taxation).⁷³ Likewise, liberals disagree about whether hate speech must be protected alongside other forms of speech. The full list of individual liberties that should be accorded special moral importance will

⁷¹ The task is even harder if one wants to distinguish contemporary liberalism from libertarianism or contemporary American conservatism, as Ronald Dworkin aimed to do in his essay "Liberalism" (1985). For our purposes here, we can think of liberalism as a large family of views, which would include traditional liberals as well as many though not all libertarians and socialists.

⁷² Some start from an avowedly religious perspective and ground a commitment to fundamental liberties on the equality of all before God. A greater number of contemporary liberals, in recognition of the irreconcilable diversity of religious views in modern societies, attempt to articulate a wholly secular account. Some liberals—particularly utilitarian liberals—disclaim any commitment to fundamental moral rights, whereas others begin from the assumption of individual rights as side constraints. Some ground commitments to individual liberty on a comprehensive doctrine about the good life. Liberal neutralists, by contrast, think such liberties help individuals to develop such conceptions of the good for themselves. It should be clear even from this brief description that there is no clear consensus among liberals about what fundamental principles ground their liberal views. This may go some distance toward explaining the difficulty philosophers encounter when trying to describe liberalism as a unified family of beliefs (for examples, see Dworkin [1985], Waldron [1987], and Gaus, Courtland, and Schmidtz [2014]). What is important is that philosophers can adopt a number of different fundamental moral principles and still end up with a recognizably liberal view. Unsurprisingly then, the apparent conflict between relational egalitarianism and liberalism does not appear at this level.

⁷³ The disagreement as I understand it is not whether any freedom of exchange and contract is an important individual liberty—Amartya Sen is speaking from a "high liberal" perspective when he endorses "freedom of exchange and transaction" as "part and parcel of the basic liberties that people have reason to value" (1999, 6)—but rather what economic liberty involves.

depend on the rationale for protecting them in the first place, but a few core individual liberties will be found in all liberals' lists—including freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and freedom of association.

These individual liberties—conscience, speech, and association—are vital to an individual's ability to pursue her own conception of what is important. Some form of freedom of thought and speech is necessary to allow individuals to develop their own views and decide for themselves what projects to pursue. Freedom of association is instrumental to the pursuit of these individual projects (and associative choices are often also partially constitutive of those projects as well). The power to select one's own company can be crucial to being able to coordinate with others who have shared interests, to define one's own social world or protect a certain space of one's own. Additionally, some form of freedom and security of the person—including freedom from intrusions on one's bodily integrity, freedom of movement, and freedom to use one's own labor in a range of morally permissible ways—can be integral to pursuing projects or to being respected as a potentially independent agent. These individual liberties are likely to figure in any account of liberalism.

Beyond claiming that there is a set of individual liberties that are of fundamental moral importance, a particular conception of liberalism needs to give an account of what that special moral importance requires. There is also room for disagreement here. The liberal could argue that these individual liberties should be treated as near-indefeasible rights or as side constraints that may be permissibly infringed only in rare instances. Liberals wary of rights talk might instead treat this special moral importance as giving the interests satisfied by these individual liberties greater weight in some utilitarian calculus. One common approach is to claim that the protection of such liberties should be the default position, and that the burden of proof is on any

agent who would interfere with these liberties. Gerald Gaus defines the core liberal principle in this manner (1996). Likewise, William Galston concisely captures the liberal commitment to individual liberty in such terms at the opening of *Liberal Pluralism*: “Liberalism requires a robust though rebuttable presumption in favor of individuals and groups leading their lives as they see fit, within a broad range of legitimate variation, in accordance with their own understanding of what gives their life meaning and value” (2002, 3).⁷⁴ Liberals sometimes argue that the reasons for interference must be the kind that could be acceptable to those who are affected. Jeremy Waldron’s explication of liberalism centers on this idea: “liberals demand that the social order should in principle be capable of explaining itself at the tribunal of each person’s understanding” (1987, 149).⁷⁵

Acknowledging that there are a variety of ways to characterize that special moral importance, we can nevertheless capture much of the field by saying that these fundamental liberties establish strong but not absolute restrictions on interference with individual action. Justifiable interferences must be justified in terms of reasons that are accessible to the individual. That may include action to prevent individuals from harming each other, to solve collective action problems or raise the salience of particular ways of coordinating, or to maintain a stable system of government.

So far, this schematic description of liberal commitments has emphasized that (a) the liberal will identify a certain set of individual liberties as having special moral importance, (b) that set will include liberties that are necessary to formulating and pursuing a conception of the good, and (c) the special moral importance accorded to such liberties may be characterized in

⁷⁴ His subsequent discussion of the need for “liberal public institutions” to help protect this liberty makes clear that this is a constraint on government interference, as well as a justification for political action to protect individuals’ capabilities to act.

⁷⁵ Waldron’s description may best describe a subset of theories of liberalism, as Rainer Forst points out (2012, 157).

terms of a justificatory burden on liberal governments. That does not yet say much about the resultant shape of society, which we should now address.

2. Expectations for the Liberal Society

Alongside a principled commitment to giving some liberties special moral status—limiting the range of cases in which governments or others may permissibly interfere with those liberties—liberalism is also characterized by a vision of what a society founded on that commitment would look like. Central to liberalism is a vision of society in which individuals are in fact left considerable room to lead their lives as they see fit.⁷⁶

In the envisioned liberal society, individuals have sufficient freedom of association to live and work with like-minded people and pursue projects in common. The liberal wants a society in which most associative choices are left to individuals. Liberals may be fine with regulating associative choices to ensure that no group is systematically excluded from the institutions of civil society, but they are loathe to otherwise curtail associative freedoms to remedy inequities or other social ills. Larry Alexander (2008) accurately describes a variety of purposes that association serves: individuals form intimate familial and romantic relationships, they organize politically to advance shared causes, they form creedal organizations to discuss and strengthen shared beliefs, and they form clubs in which they can collaborate on hobbies or celebrate virtues they recognize as important. The freedom to form voluntary associations allows individuals to pursue a number of goals. It has an expressive function as well, since such groups can underscore the importance of certain interests or forms of identity. The liberal society allows individuals to pursue all those purposes through their associative choices.

⁷⁶ This characterization echoes Gerald Gaus's claim that liberals are committed to a presumption of individual liberty absent some justification *and* the belief that the proper test for justification will not validate extensive interference (2014).

Such freedom of association necessarily involves the freedom to refuse to associate, to form exclusive communities and connections, to some degree—some forms of association, like intimate associations, are predicated on their exclusivity. Nancy Rosenblum has referred to this as the “dynamic of association and exclusion” (1998, 97)—the very process by which people form groups and find common causes and identities inevitably excludes others. Liberals can vary in their commitment to securing *effective* freedom of association for all—not all think that freedom of association requires that individuals have opportunities for inclusion in the existing voluntary associations of his or her society. Even so, the liberal ideal is one in which everyone is able to pursue their own conception of the good through such free associational choices. However the justificatory burden for interference may be met, liberals share the hope that justice will require neither (a) the government to frequently impinge on individuals’ freedom of association nor (b) individuals to make political considerations dominant over their intimate associational decisions.

Liberals hope that the constraints on interference they adopt will preserve sufficient freedom of expression such that individuals will be able to express unpopular or aberrant views if they are willing to bear mild social disapprobation. The liberal wants a society in which the state does not censor the content of individuals’ speech and in which there are open forums for deliberation. Setting aside prohibitions on certain speech-acts that incite violence or constitute fraud, liberals want to protect robust freedom of speech, especially when it comes to expressing political opinions. Likewise, liberals want to protect sufficient freedom of the press such that individuals can learn of a variety of different perspectives and make informed judgments about them. They extend that commitment to freedom of speech on nonpolitical matters as well.

One might not unreasonably suspect that discussion of the expectations of the liberal society is redundant—that commitment to the principle of fundamental liberties already guarantees a society in which individuals have broad discretion to lead their lives as they see fit. There are at least two reasons why these expectations about the liberal society are not superfluous.

First, many plausible interpretations of the principle of fundamental liberties only impose a high justificatory bar on interference. If you accept such an interpretation, you won't automatically know when or how often that justificatory requirement will be satisfied. It might be that we should balance reasons not to interfere against other concerns and commitments. Liberals would at least recognize that liberties may be limited to protect the liberty of others. Ensuring order and security will meet the justificatory demand for interference in many cases. It is possible that unfortunate circumstances would justify the significant curtailment of such freedoms without undermining that society's commitment to foundational liberal principles. Instability, widespread violence, the collapse of civic trust, or unwillingness to tolerate others may make it impossible for the liberal state to guarantee a wide berth for individual liberties and also protect their lives. In conditions of real and persistent threat to the existence of the society, then, extensive and somewhat intrusive government action may be required to protect individuals' security. This would nevertheless be lamentable from the liberal perspective. The liberal hopes that such cases are exceptional; if they were routine, that would be a significant blow for the attractiveness of the liberal view. So one reason why description of expectations for the liberal society is not redundant is that the principle of fundamental liberties still permits some kinds of coercive interference, and the prediction that such interference will be rare is an important part of the liberal view.

Second, the liberal is concerned not just with limits on coercive interference but with justice-related demands on the exercise of fundamental liberties. The description of the liberal society expresses the expectation that justice can be achieved without comprehensively dictating how individuals should exercise those liberties. This does not immediately follow from a commitment to the first liberal principle. Suppose government interference in occupational choice was prohibited, but in order to realize a just society, each individual would have to pick a particular occupation on the basis of political considerations. Such a requirement would not be compatible with the vision of the liberal society. The expectation of broad discretion might be described in terms of a hope that the just society could be ordered around principles of procedural justice, in which however individuals act (within a range of options delimited by principles of justice), justice will be secured. Of course, the liberal society does constrain the choices that individuals make in some ways—a just social structure shapes the options that are available.⁷⁷ The expectation is not that individuals' personal choices should be completely unhindered by considerations of justice, but rather that individuals should be able to act on personal reasons in deciding with whom to associate or what projects to pursue. Liberals think that individuals working cooperatively can construct institutions and practices that help realize and defend a just society, in ways that allow them to make many intimate decisions about private association and projects for purely personal reasons. This expectation is an important, constitutive feature of the liberal ideal.

⁷⁷ See Rawls's discussion of how the conceptions of the good and plans of life that individuals (in well-ordered societies) choose will be shaped by the requirements of justice (1999a [1971], 492).

3. The Liberal Division of Moral Labor

Some twentieth-century liberals have used the metaphor of a division of labor to describe how they conceive the appropriate partitioning of moral responsibility among individuals and the state. Just as a division of labor in the economy encourages specialization, increases efficiency, and produces greater wealth overall, a division of moral labor allows individuals to attend to moral matters that may have been otherwise foreclosed. The idea is not simply that individuals should have no responsibilities to help secure justice, but rather that institutions like the state can organize collective action that individuals could not perform when acting in isolation. Institutional action also allows individuals to attend to other personal projects and responsibilities. The idea is present in John Rawls's work, and it is explicitly articulated by Thomas Nagel and Samuel Scheffler.⁷⁸ This is not an idea that can be attributed to all liberals, although I do think the idea is consistent with the general aspirations of liberal politics. The division of moral labor can help to explain *why* the liberal has the expectations for the liberal society I've described above—liberals hope that individuals can be left broad latitude so that they can attend to other valuable matters.

The nascent idea in Rawls comes out in the description of the basic structure of society as the "primary subject of justice" (1999a [1971], 3). Rawls does not argue that the basic structure is the only proper subject of justice, but rather that it has a unique, central role in distributing the benefits and burdens of social cooperation. The institutions that comprise the basic structure of society do important moral work in creating an environment in which fair social cooperation is possible. The principles of justice considered in the original position are specifically applicable

⁷⁸ I suspect the intellectual lineage can be traced further back if we aren't looking just for the idiom of a division of labor. For example, Kant's treatment of property rights as provisional in the state of nature and in need of concretization by a government perhaps has elements of the same idea—there is important and distinct moral work for individuals and for a government or state to do.

to and uniquely formulated for the basic structure, in virtue of the unique role it plays. This is not to say that Rawls thinks individuals do not have any responsibility to help secure justice—far from it—but rather that the principles of justice that govern basic-structure institutions are not directly applicable to individuals’ personal or private choices.

In Nagel’s view, the importance of a division of moral labor⁷⁹ follows from the more central distinction between a personal and impersonal standpoint, which he thinks every individual moves between (1991, 3). The personal standpoint reflects an individual’s partial commitments, special concerns, desires, and interests that are justified by their importance to the individual herself. By contrast, the impersonal standpoint represents the impartial concerns of the collective. The task of a division of moral labor is to “externalize through social institutions the most impartial requirements of the impersonal standpoint” so as to avoid the prospect of “an inordinate takeover of the individual’s life in their service” (53–4). Its goal is not to free the individual from any moral concerns or even from concerns about broader social justice, but by assigning to social institutions the task of pursuing social justice, a liberal division of moral labor is meant to spare individuals from having to constantly attend to such questions or to subordinate all personal interests to impersonal concerns. Nagel’s account helps to explain the attraction of being able to externalize individuals’ duties to secure a just society. The liberal insistence on a public/private divide (where the commitments and concerns that are salient from the personal standpoint belong to the private sphere) is a way of trying to reconcile and accommodate both the personal and impersonal standpoints.

⁷⁹ Nagel uses the phrase “moral division of labor,” but seeing as this is ambiguous between the idea being described here and the idea of a fairer allocation of occupations, I favor Scheffler’s “division of moral labor.” This is also now the more commonly used term.

In Scheffler's version, the division of moral labor is best understood as a response to the recognition of value pluralism.⁸⁰ Certain values and concerns appropriately govern "small-scale interactions among individuals"—such as loyalty, politeness, responsibilities driven by proximity, duties of neighborliness, and the principles that guide reasonable partiality generally. He refers to this as personal morality (2005b, 111). Different values and concern appropriately govern some political relationships—such as justice, fairness, equality, and human rights, all of which call for a kind of concern that extends beyond those with whom we interact. It is in recognition of this pluralism of value that we construct a division of moral labor, in the hope that both demands of political morality and demands of personal morality can be appropriately accommodated. Like Rawls, Scheffler depicts this division of moral labor as a matter of designing different principles to govern different agents and institutions. Political and economic institutions will be tasked with the duty of achieving justice and equality, so that individuals can attend to the values of personal morality in their own lives.⁸¹ Liberal egalitarians hope, Scheffler argues, that the basic structure can be arranged to preserve social justice so that individuals can appropriately respond to "the values and norms governing human interpersonal relations" (2005b, 249). Importantly, though, Scheffler consistently portrays this as an *ambition* of the liberal; it is not immediately obvious from the idea alone that any division can successfully or perfectly accommodate both sets of value.

⁸⁰ Scheffler distinguishes the "division of moral labor" from the "institutional division of labor" to help capture this idea about value pluralism. The "institutional division of labor" concerns the differentiation of rules that apply to institutions and rules and principles that apply to individual action. For example, the rules that structure the economic system as a whole, in order to preserve background justice, do not apply to individual economic transactions. The "division of moral labor," by contrast, concerns the values and principles that govern the basic structure of society and individual action.

⁸¹ Individuals attending to what Scheffler calls the values of personal morality are not wholly unconstrained by principles of justice, because the shape of social institutions (which are governed by principles of justice) already permits and forecloses some options on the basis of considerations of justice.

The idea of a division of moral labor is not unique to these philosophers, because however much they are responsible for making it explicit, it resembles central convictions in liberal political thought about the need to distinguish between the public and the private and to find some limits of what may be demanded of individuals.⁸² Liberalism does not claim that individuals should be free from the demands of morality in some spheres, but for a variety of reasons liberals hope it is possible to structure society so that individuals do not have to subordinate all their decisions to the demands of political morality.

This should provide a sufficient characterization of liberal commitments for the purposes of the argument of this dissertation. Doubtless there is considerable room for further debate about the essential commitments of liberalism. One could argue, contrary to this characterization, that liberalism requires a much more specific package of institutional commitments or that the set of features I've highlighted are only characteristic only of a particular strain of liberalism. At a certain point, that discussion is uninteresting—all that we really need to say is that a large number of liberal relational egalitarians accept the set of liberal commitments I have described, and since that is true we can and should ask whether those commitments are compatible with their commitment to relational equality.

⁸² Judith Shklar has argued that it is not so much where the line between public and private is drawn as that a line is recognized that distinguishes liberalism. On her view, liberalism “must reject only those political doctrines that do not recognize any difference between the spheres of the personal and the public. . . . The important point for liberalism is not so much where the line is drawn, as that it be drawn. . . . The limits of coercion begin, though they do not end, with a prohibition upon invading the private realm” (1989, 24).

CHAPTER 4

THE COMPATIBILITY WORRY

Durable inequalities of power, status, or influence can be created and maintained in a variety of ways. Such inequalities can be deliberately imposed by the state or by groups acting in concert. They can also arise and endure through unintentional processes. Patterns of personal choices, informal norms and customs, and accidental or emergent features of social structure can play a considerable role in affecting the power and status people have. Consider a few examples of how such disparities can be created: Residential stratification along lines of income, occupation, or ethnicity, however it is created, can produce social networks of uneven power. Homogamy on the basis of socioeconomic status, education, or religion can likewise produce inequalities in social resources. How individuals spend their off-hours, how they form associative ties and casual friendships in the course of pursuing certain projects, how they care for and what they give to their children, and what they esteem in others—all of these can contribute to uneven distributions of social goods, informal social influence over collective decision-making, and status and recognition. Not all of these inequalities will be worrisome from a relational egalitarian perspective, but some may be, even when they do not produce severe differentials in wealth, opportunity, or welfare.

One of the aims of this chapter is to argue that the relational egalitarian should be concerned with inequalities that result from informal social norms and practices. Consideration of the positive demands of relational egalitarianism raises questions about whether and to what degree relational egalitarianism is ultimately compatible with liberal political commitments. The possibility that they are incompatible has not yet been addressed in depth by relational

egalitarians, though it is fairly easy to see how such a worry might arise.⁸³ Unlike a theory of equality that demands, say, the equal distribution of some resource, relational egalitarianism is directly concerned with the relationships people stand in, and fulfilling those demands may require substantial changes in personal choices. Since these kinds of demands may impinge on the liberties that liberals find important, the possibility of such a tension is serious enough to warrant a full and careful response. In chapters 5 and 6, I will argue that liberals can at least realize an imperfect but justifiable form of relational equality; the apparent conflict described here can be at least partially resolved. In the present chapter, however, I am only concerned to show why there is at least a *prima facie* worry about the compatibility of liberalism and relational equality.

Why suspect there might be any tension between commitments to liberalism and relational egalitarianism? In short, the worry is that relational equality cannot be fully realized without imposing extensively on individuals in their private lives. The imposition in question need not be legal nor coercive. The compatibility worry would arise if individuals were under duties of justice to help realize relational equality that significantly restricted the latitude in personal choice that is a feature of the liberal society. If relational equality is not just an admirable, optional goal but a demand of justice (if we would say that a society where people do not stand as equals is unjust), and likewise liberal commitments are nonnegotiable elements of a just society, then their incompatibility is cause for concern.

⁸³ The three most noteworthy discussions to date are in Carina Fourie's "Justice and the Duties of Social Equality" (2006), Elizabeth Anderson's "Toward a Non-Ideal, Relational Methodology for Political Philosophy" (2009), and Christian Schemmel's "Distributive and Relational Equality" (2011b). Fourie does not directly discuss the prospect of incompatibility but calls for the Rawlsian to add to individuals' duties some requirements of fair personal choice (which she thinks involves treating others with respect, extending basic courtesies, and tolerating some differences of opinion and taste). Anderson observes that inegalitarian attitudes will persist in the liberal state and will need to be addressed by social movements, since the state cannot effectively or justly eliminate them. Schemmel distinguishes a liberal and a radical version of relational egalitarianism but doesn't provide a full assessment of the comparative merits of each.

In order to be able to draw out the compatibility worry, we need to consider the distant implications of relational egalitarianism. In work to date, relational egalitarians have focused on more immediate, pressing inequalities—state denial of equal civil liberties for all, the domination of the poor, racial discrimination, and avoidable deprivation. In order to focus on the social inequalities created by personal choices and informal norms, I assume a fairly idealized state of affairs. The primary concern here will be with relational inequalities that can arise even when the state and related institutions are meeting all the typically identified relational egalitarian requirements. This idealization is useful as a way of examining the full demands of relational equality. Informal social relations are likely to be quite different in a society with egalitarian political institutions,⁸⁴ so drawing out an incompatibility worry for nonideal societies like our own would be inconclusive—massive institutional changes are likely to change what is demanded of individuals. By looking at what work would be left over in the wake of considerable egalitarian institutional reform, we get a better glimpse of the robust requirements of the ideal.

My explanation of this compatibility worry will be broken up into five stages, the first three of which are mostly preliminary. First, I sketch a provisional list of the institutional requirements of relational egalitarianism. Reflection on what could not be accepted by parties governed by the EDC can help generate such a list. Second, I explain why it is reasonably clear that relational equality cannot be achieved by institutional measures alone. Third, I argue that relational equality may not be achievable unless most individuals reject certain expressly inegalitarian attitudes.

⁸⁴ For example, high levels of economic inequality can disfigure relations and encourage social practices that would not exist under different circumstances. The gap between rich and poor and the precarity of the lower and lower-middle class in the contemporary US gives upper-middle class parents reasons to seek exclusive schools, affluent neighborhoods, and social circles that provide professional connections for their children, as Richard Reeves (2017) describes.

Once those preliminary steps are taken, the compatibility worry can be laid out. Fourth, I argue that full relational equality may not be achievable unless individuals adopt something like an egalitarian ethos with regard to all their social choices. Depending on the contours of such an ethos, that requirement by itself may be difficult for liberals to accept. Fifth, I argue that even an egalitarian ethos may be insufficient, because full relational equality may also require individuals to carefully attend to the possibility of emergent social inequalities.⁸⁵ Achieving relational equality may require that individuals adjust their informal social behavior as they discover distant, unintended consequences, even if that means subordinating personal choices to political considerations. Insofar as a commitment to relational equality involves a commitment to taking the necessary means to accomplishing relational equality, the relational egalitarian may find that the demands of equality conflict with the ambitions of the liberal society.

I should note at the outset that what is presented here is only a *prima facie* case for considering the compatibility worry, not an argument intended to show conclusively that relational egalitarianism and liberalism are incompatible. In particular, though I will describe the kinds of institutions relational egalitarians routinely envision as part of an egalitarian society, there may be more that institutions should do in light of the problems discussed in this chapter. Chapters 5 and 6 consider some of those institutional possibilities, so this merely serves to introduce the worry and explain why relational egalitarians need to take it seriously.

⁸⁵ See Kevin Vallier's (2013) discussion for similar use of the language of emergent properties. Unlike Vallier, I am not exclusively concerned with social injustice as an emergent property; the emergent social inequalities that I will be concerned with in section 5 are differentials in power, influence, and status that may or may not be objectionable in the final analysis.

1. The Political Structure of a Relational Egalitarian Society

The deliberative view argued for in chapter 2 is cast at a fairly abstract level. It says that individuals relate as equals if their relationship is structured by the EDC. As a political ideal, it says that in a society of equals, the members of that society collectively make the decisions that are relevant to their membership in that society under the guidance of the EDC. Different institutional schemes might work equally well to satisfy the basic demands of relational equality, and the shape of each society's institutions will be justifiably path-dependent—that is, there are good reasons to defer to the shape of existing institutions when deciding among several permissible options. Even so, we can outline some fundamental institutional commitments of all relational egalitarian societies.

Most obviously, since the deliberative view requires egalitarian deliberation and decision making, such societies will have flat structures of political authority—perhaps only anarchist or robust democratic structures will meet the demands for deliberation as equals.⁸⁶ I will assume that relational egalitarianism requires some form of democratic decision-making, at least when it comes to decisions about the basic structure of society.⁸⁷ (The degree to which particular

⁸⁶ See Kolodny (2014b) and Viehoff (2014) for arguments that a society of equals requires robust democratic structures (although Kolodny does also briefly consider whether anarchism could realize the egalitarian ideal). Kolodny argues that social equality would demand that individuals have equal and positive formal and informal opportunity for informed influence over the decision-making process. In the rest of the chapter, I will exclude further explicit discussion of anarchist ways of realizing this kind of relationship. If an important anarchist criticism of democracy concerns the use of unconstrained majority-rule decision procedures, though, that concern may be reflected in what follows, because a society of equals will clearly not be one in which all collective decisions can be decided on such lines (e.g., the protection of equal rights will not be subject to a majority-rules vote).

⁸⁷ “Some form of democratic decision-making” means a decision-making process that allows all the members of the society equal positive say. That leaves open questions about whether direct and representative democracies both satisfy the ideal, whether simple majoritarianism is sufficient or whether greater forms of consensus are needed. Anderson (2008a) has argued that bureaucracies, at least involving a person/office distinction and something like rule of law, can sufficiently constrain hierarchies of command where we would benefit from having some such organizational authority. See also Richardson (2002) on the compatibility of deliberative democracy and administrative rulemaking. I also mean to leave open questions of procedure and institutionalization here. That relational egalitarianism requires democratic decision-making is not obvious; Jessica Flanigan (2017) argues to the contrary that democracy institutionalizes inequalities of power that relational egalitarians should find objectionable. I don't engage with that for reasons of space.

political decisions can be delegated to government agencies or experts would depend on the actual decisions the polity makes and the degree to which delegation satisfies the EDC. The relational-egalitarian ideal need not rule out institutional divisions of labor that delegate some decision-making to administrative bodies.) The EDC itself, in calling for a process by which equally important interests play equally significant roles in influencing decisions, does not explicitly call for a democratic decision-making process. However, if individuals are the best judges of at least some of their interests, or among the important interests of all is an interest in being recognized and respected as a self-directing being, then the EDC will require a decision-making process that permits the inclusion of every member of society.⁸⁸ Part of that democratic ideal would require that the structure of government be open and transparent, so that its mechanisms and actions are subject to scrutiny. The relational egalitarian interest in nondomination requires the rule of law, and the interest in protecting the dignity of all members of society requires permanent, publicly recognized rights (as could be enumerated in a constitution).

Members of a society of equals could also justifiably demand that they maintain collective control over systems of property and exchange, even if that just amounts to a standing option to intervene and actively shape the rules of those systems (e.g., to prevent, rectify, or limit domination). To the degree that a government is already enforcing some system of property, decisions about how to direct that governing power will be made together. Collective control could be exercised only at an initial stage, organizing such systems along lines of pure procedural justice (so long as members of society retained the right to revisit such questions).

⁸⁸ This is such a central (and perhaps obvious) element that many relational egalitarians don't even make a direct argument for it. Of course, Anderson's view (1999a, 2010c) starts from the idea that the relevant individuals should relate as participants in democratic politics. Fourie (2006, 125) and Schemmel (2015, 154) have also explicitly discussed the requirements of inclusion in democratic decision-making.

This leaves open a broad swath of options about economic structures (from full public ownership of major resources to regulatory review of the market). The point here is such systems will be treated as proper subjects for political decision-making, and decisions about economic structures that cannot be defended as giving equal influence to everyone's equally important interests will be rejected. Decisions about resultant distributions will be treated similarly. Relational egalitarians have argued that their view demands economic redistribution when wealth inequality can be translated into inequalities of power or authority.⁸⁹ That might be done through redistributive taxation that dampens the range of wealth inequality, "predistributive" measures that prevent inequality from arising, or other mechanisms.

Third, when necessary, a society of equals will regulate its civil society, its voluntary associations, public accommodations, and semi-public spaces to prevent discrimination and exclusion. Members of a society of equals treat decisions about such institutions as within the context of their relationship, since discrimination can impede the practice of equality. The prohibition of racial or sex segregation in education, housing, and employment can be grouped under the heading of antidiscrimination law. The society of equals can likewise regulate what the owners of private commercial spaces and membership organizations can do, at least when major social activity moves through their spaces or organizations.⁹⁰ Antidiscrimination law in the United States has developed in a responsive fashion to correct for existing injustices, but we can think more broadly about the role for law and policy that shapes civil society in an ideal setting. The relational-egalitarian rationale for that institutional commitment is straightforward: antidiscrimination law and policy works to ensure that institutions treat every citizen with equal

⁸⁹ See for example Anderson (1999a), 326; Anderson (2012b), 54; Scheffler (2010a), 192–3; Schuppert (2015a), 120.

⁹⁰ See Koppelman (1996, 2009) and Grady (1999) on the aims of antidiscrimination policy and the treatment of voluntary associations like the Jaycees and Boy Scouts of America as public accommodations.

concern and respect, and the protection of an inclusive public sphere (even where that restricts some associative freedoms) is vital for genuine egalitarian deliberation.

Relational egalitarians have discussed a handful of other kinds of political institutions, from public education to workplace co-determination and basic income.⁹¹ These are not justified in isolation; whether they should be adopted depends on whether the society is taking other measures to avoid objectionable hierarchies and what will result in their absence. Relational egalitarians could demand public provision of some resources when failing to do so would lead to domination or marginalization.⁹² Public provision of goods such as education or healthcare can be justified even where they are not required to avoid objectionable hierarchies. When public programs satisfy the demands of the EDC as well as any alternatives, they would be permissible though not mandatory.

For example, unconditional sufficientarian supports of various kinds might be introduced by public institutions as a means of combating domination and protecting political equality.⁹³ Further measures could protect democratic political equality, such as material and in-kind support to ensure that everyone had the effective freedom to exercise rights to participate.⁹⁴ With

⁹¹ See Anderson (1999a), (2004), (2007), (2008b), (2015), (2017a), and Schemmel (2011a) for examples, as well as the citations in the next paragraph.

⁹² Several relational egalitarians—including Elizabeth Anderson, Christian Schemmel, and Carina Fourie—have described the requirements of relational equality in terms of what is necessary to avoid such forms of oppression. This can be accommodated in the deliberative view. If the EDC requires that members of society make decisions to create, maintain, or revise major social institutions together, then the persistence of oppression [however it is caused] reflects a social decision to allow it to continue. That social decision does not give the interests of the disadvantaged sufficient influence, assuming that the EDC can be interpreted in a way that prohibits simple utilitarian aggregation of interests. Scheffler claims, without providing an argument but appealing to pre-theoretical intuitions about egalitarian societies, that “an unrestricted principle of utilitarian aggregation is incompatible with the ideal of a society of equals” (2015b, 41). While I agree that an unrestricted principle of aggregation could lead to disrespectful and exploitative arrangements, it is an open and difficult question when interests should be aggregated.

⁹³ It is not immediately clear when such measures would be required to secure relational equality. See Schemmel 2015, 161; Schuppert 2015a, 114n20. For a contrasting view, see Anderson’s criticism of Philippe van Parijs’s UBI proposal in 1999a, 298–9. Whether a basic income is justifiable on relational egalitarian grounds at least depends on the shape of the economy, the availability and type of opportunities to meet one’s needs by other means, and the relevant stigmas around unemployment—which is to say it may be required in some societies and not in others.

⁹⁴ See Anderson 1999a, 320; Scheffler 2010a, 192.

the aim of supporting and encouraging that participation, a relational egalitarian society could justify supplying educational resources, public infrastructure or transit systems, workplace regulations, or policies that shield individuals from dignitary harms. Some relational egalitarians have called for further redistribution as a means of acknowledging interdependence in a complex economy.⁹⁵ The state may be permitted to encourage and offer incentives for private action conducive to relational equality (such as providing support for integration projects).⁹⁶ Whether these institutions are required or permissible depends on whether they can alleviate objectionable inequalities and whether other means of addressing those inequalities are less burdensome. The point here is simply that there are a variety of institutional means of advancing relational equality that are available.

Obviously, a good deal can be done by the laws and governing institutions to help realize relationships of equality. Political measures can secure formal democratic equality, legally guaranteeing each person a vote and supplying the institutional structure to facilitate the exercise of that right. Redistributive systems can reduce the risk of dependency and domination. It can hardly be overstated how such measures can dramatically reshape social relations.

Antidiscrimination laws can shape the rules of civil society, avoiding some of the grosser forms of marginalization that can occur when a powerful majority would otherwise discriminate against and exclude minority groups. Indeed, some of the most severe forms of relational equality can be eliminated through the coercive force of the state alone.

⁹⁵ See Anderson 1999a, 321ff.

⁹⁶ See Anderson 2010c, 190.

2. The Futility of Wholly Institutional Relational Egalitarianism

On reflection, however, it seems enormously unlikely that relational equality could be completely realized merely by reforming and restructuring political and economic institutions, even if those reforms were quite radical in nature. A society of equals is also dependent on patterns of informal social interaction and individual choices—it matters how individuals treat one another. This by itself does not establish a point of tension between liberalism and relational egalitarianism. Liberals can and do argue that individuals have duties to help accomplish justice, so if relational equality requires some kind of individual cooperation, that is not problematic on its own. Once we acknowledge that relational equality depends on how individuals interact, though, we can ask exactly what must be demanded of individuals to achieve relational equality.

Imagine a society that possesses the political and economic institutions described in the previous section. It has a healthy set of democratic institutions, such that all citizens have formal rights of participation, and the market is regulated and economic resources are distributed in such a fashion that market-driven domination is eliminated.⁹⁷ Nondiscrimination clauses regulate the institutions of civil society, such that it is impermissible to exclude citizens from public accommodations on the basis of ascriptive identity. In short, the common institutional (i.e., governmental or legal) goals of relational egalitarians have been accomplished. We cannot infer from this alone that relational equality itself has been achieved. For all the work that government policy can do, relational equality still seems to be the kind of thing that is not directly achievable by institutions alone. It is, as David Miller put it, “a matter of how people regard one another.”⁹⁸

⁹⁷ To be clear, I am not claiming that all relational egalitarian societies must be market-oriented, only sketching out a particular set of institutions that could satisfy the ideal. Anderson (2017a) describes how the vision of a market society in which most individuals would be self-employed inspired some eighteenth-century egalitarians and largely failed to anticipate how industrialization would lead to workplace domination. I am assuming that there are ways to tame the command hierarchies of industrial and post-industrial market economies and redistribute their products without sacrificing their efficiency, but whether that is justified would require further work.

⁹⁸ Miller 1997, 232.

A relational egalitarian society is characterized by a set of cultural norms directing the interaction of citizens,⁹⁹ which are only upheld if individuals take up those norms.

As salutary as these institutional reforms would be, it is clear that in many circumstances relational equality could be undermined by the attitudes citizens continued to hold toward each other. Hierarchies of esteem and standing—concerning how people are valued and their power to speak and participate, respectively—can be created and maintained by decisions to exclude and by inequalitarian personal attitudes. Consider how Elizabeth Anderson describes hierarchies of esteem:

In these systems, those occupying inferior positions are stigmatized—subject to publicly authoritative stereotypes that represent them as proper objects of dishonor, contempt, disgust, fear, or hatred on the basis of their group identities and hence properly subject to ridicule, shaming, shunning, segregation, discrimination, persecution, and even violence. (2012b, 43)

Perhaps the kinds of hierarchies involved when stigmas are endorsed by public officials are worse than hierarchies not based on officially recognized stigma,¹⁰⁰ but widespread acceptance of those stereotypes is almost always sufficient to create the kinds of harmful relations described. Even when the public authorities officially disclaim stigmatic beliefs, citizens in their private capacities can communicate attitudes of dishonor and contempt, and acts that shame, shun, and otherwise discriminate can often easily be hidden behind the veneer of superficially neutral rhetoric. The same can be said for hierarchies of standing. Even where individuals are all publicly invited to participate in public deliberation, it is possible for whole groups to be

⁹⁹ Anderson 2010c, 111.

¹⁰⁰ This is one way to interpret “publicly authoritative stereotypes,” but I do not think Anderson is committed to it. “Publicly authoritative” could also just mean that the stereotype can be appropriately characterized as publicly known and accepted.

marginalized by widespread unofficial beliefs that membership in that group is disqualifying. Something similar might even be said for hierarchies of authority, as well; even where the legal structure does not grant some groups power over others, informal social norms and practices can introduce relations of domination. Wherever the social system permits dependencies (e.g., linking job opportunities to personal recommendations, letting the distribution of important resources hinge on charity or personal discretion), hostile majorities can wield arbitrary power over minorities in contravention of the spirit of the official policies. Even in the absence of relations of domination, the informal attitudes people adopt can lead to uneven and objectionable distributions of power.

In view of these possibilities, a society in which people stand as equals doesn't seem achievable unless the requirements of relational egalitarianism extend beyond government policy and structure to impose on individuals as well. At this point, it isn't clear what relational egalitarianism ought to say is demanded of individuals, only that it requires *something* of individuals.

3. Expressly Inegalitarian Attitudes

One uncontroversial starting point is that relational egalitarianism demands that individuals reject expressly inegalitarian attitudes—attitudes that imply some subset of the population deserve inferior treatment, fewer rights, a smaller voice in public affair, or less respect or esteem on account of their identity. Relational equality cannot be achieved so long as a significant enough number of individuals continue to profess and defend (for instance) racist, sexist, or classist views that support hierarchies of esteem, standing, and authority. This should not be surprising. If relational equality is a matter of how people stand to one another, and

stigmatization and marginalization are salient examples of inequality, then of course the accomplishment of relational equality can be prevented by widespread hostility and resistance to its goals. A society in which a large segment of the population rejects the very idea of letting their relationships with other members be governed by the EDC fails to be a society of equals.

In some cases, the presence of such attitudes is itself sufficient to establish a status hierarchy. Such attitudes can also produce inequalities of influence, if the stigmatized are given diminished credence or ignored. Individuals who are excluded from informal social circles will suffer inferior standing—they will not be as able to make their voice heard equally well, since the first stages of democratic deliberation often take place in private spaces.¹⁰¹ We can also see how this translates into inequalities of power. Even if equal legal rights are secured, unless every opportunity in the society is regulated by extremely rigorous formal processes (excluding any discretionary power whatsoever), widespread inegalitarian attitudes will affect what some are able to do.

This is not offered as a novel insight. The idea that we have reasons to abjure inegalitarian attitudes like racism and sexism is as fundamental as anything in our shared set of moral convictions. The claim is not, however, simply that attitudes like racism and sexism are morally objectionable. Rather, it is that when held by enough numbers of individuals, such attitudes are an impediment to the realization of relational egalitarian justice.¹⁰² This is true regardless of the structure of the state or its public pronouncements. A society in which the government adheres closely to the recommendations of the relational egalitarian while large

¹⁰¹ See Christiano (1996), 171, and Richardson (2002), 180, for examples of this conception of democratic processes as involving an informal deliberative stage.

¹⁰² Expressly inegalitarian attitudes pose a serious threat to relational equality only when they are sufficiently widespread. The lone racist or sexist in a society that by and large rejects such attitudes is a hateful crank, not a serious impediment to the realization of social justice. It is important to distinguish individual interaction from the larger patterns of interaction that structure society. Solitary acts of disesteeming and exclusion are insufficient to disqualify a society from being properly labeled relationally equal.

groups of private citizens act in ways that undermine the construction of the relevant forms of equality of authority, esteem, and standing will not be a society with relational equality.

It isn't immediately obvious how the relational egalitarian should respond to this. To say that relational equality requires the absence of such expressly inegalitarian attitudes is not to say that committed relational egalitarians must argue for the *legal* proscription of such attitudes. Besides being intrusive and authoritarian, the legal policing of attitudes is obviously futile.¹⁰³ Perhaps one thing the relational egalitarian might be tempted to say is that the *expression* of some explicitly inegalitarian attitudes should be legally limited. Advocating a legal proscription on speech would obviously produce tension with liberal commitments, even if there is debate among liberals about the degree to which restrictions on so-called "hate speech" would conflict with liberal commitments. The coercive prohibition of the expression of explicitly inegalitarian views would restrict political discussion, and an open and frank political deliberation is one of the central reasons for protecting freedom of expression in the first place. Even if there was a justification of legal limitations of freedom of expression, however, that would be insufficient to accomplish what is needed to secure relational equality. Certain speech-acts can play a pernicious role in creating and reinforcing stigmatizing hierarchies and relations of subordination,¹⁰⁴ but inegalitarian attitudes do not need to be publicly expressed to have an effect on hierarchies of esteem and the inclusiveness of a society.

One way to respond is to simply accept that the accomplishment of justice hinges on whether egalitarian attitudes prevail, even though little can be done to guarantee or enforce those

¹⁰³ On this point, Nancy Rosenblum observes that compelled association can drive animus underground without eradicating it (1998, 86). More straightforwardly, it does not take much argument to show this futility—legal measures can at best enforce signs of attitudinal conformity, but (a) there is no reliable measure for distinguishing insincere pledges of conformity from real attitudinal change and, more importantly, (b) individuals cannot decide to change their attitudes simply to obey a legal mandate.

¹⁰⁴ Maitra (2012).

attitudes. This calls to mind a point from Samuel Freeman's characterization of Rawls's *Political Liberalism* as containing speculative hypotheses about the dwindling of unreasonable comprehensive doctrines in a well-ordered society.¹⁰⁵ In Rawls's work, the accomplishment of a stable order depends upon an overlapping consensus among reasonable comprehensive doctrines, where reasonableness is understood in part as a willingness to treat other citizens as free and equal and to engage in public reason. Should it be the case that a sizable portion of society clings to unreasonable comprehensive doctrines, a stable order will remain out of reach.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps something similar could be attributed to the relational egalitarian view—perhaps it is true that the accomplishment of the relational egalitarian society depends upon the absence of certain attitudes that nevertheless are not appropriately regulable.

Elizabeth Anderson has indicated that since the coercive reform of personal beliefs is not an appropriate project for the liberal state, there is work for individuals and groups to do in civil society:

Liberalism, I shall argue, is grounded in a certain diffidence about the capacity of the state to correct all injustices, particularly those that arise from widespread conceptions of the good that people advance through informal social norms. . . . The plurality of conceptions of the good that are likely to survive in a world in which the state has done all it can be reasonably and justly expected to do will include a host of unreasonable conceptions of the good, some of which may well be patriarchal. . . . In the face of such injustices, liberals counsel feminists to redirect their claims from the state to those promulgating such unreasonable conceptions of the good, and to redirect their activism

¹⁰⁵ Freeman 2007a, 193–4.

¹⁰⁶ Rawls 2005 [1993], 489.

from a focus on state action to other domains, including civil society, churches, and the family (2009, 131).

Anderson is writing from the perspective of a liberal feminist, so she is endorsing this “counsel” to focus on the work that social movements can do in civil society. I agree with much of what she says here about how individuals ought to respond to the continued presence of inegalitarian attitudes,¹⁰⁷ and I would not deny that persuasion, protest, and noncoercive social-movement tactics may be the best options for individuals. My point is rather that if widespread inegalitarian attitudes can obstruct the realization of a society of equals, then relational egalitarianism makes significant demands on individuals not to hold or express such attitudes.

When it comes to expressly inegalitarian attitudes such as racism and sexism, that individuals have duties of justice is not so concerning—there are good reasons to think there are moral duties to abjure such attitudes that follow directly from some assumption of fundamental moral equality, regardless of one's position on relational egalitarianism. Furthermore, the liberal need not claim that justice is utterly indifferent to how individuals exercise their fundamental liberties: the liberal can say that the conceptions of the good that individuals settle on should be “framed within definite limits” set by principles of justice (Rawls 1999a [1971], 493). Since individuals have independent moral duties not to treat others with the disrespect that such inegalitarian attitudes communicate, I suspect liberal relational egalitarians will not find this worrisome.

This, however, is not the principal worry about the tension between relational egalitarianism and liberalism. Not only is it the case that relational equality cannot be achieved

¹⁰⁷ That said, I don't think a liberal needs to make a claim about the capacity of the state to reach the conclusion Anderson reaches about how liberal feminists ought to respond to these illiberal attitudes. It's possible for liberals to argue instead that state interference on these matters would be inappropriate, because of the special significance of individual liberties.

unless individuals reject certain attitudes, it may also be that relational equality requires that individuals positively adopt a specific set of attitudes.

4. The Relational Egalitarian Ethos

Relational equality may not be achievable (or sustainable) unless individuals adopt specific attitudes and beliefs that go beyond just rejecting expressly inegalitarian attitudes. These specific attitudes and beliefs, what we could call a relational egalitarian ethos, would govern all informal social interactions. In some ways this would be quite different from the primarily economic or occupational focus that others have associated with an egalitarian ethos.

The discussion of whether egalitarianism requires that individuals adopt a certain ethos has a long history at this point, and the worry for the relational egalitarian is slightly different than for other kinds of egalitarians, so I'll be brief in describing this history. As it is used in this literature, 'egalitarian ethos' refers to a prescribed outlook, characterized by attitudes and values, which would lead individuals to make personal choices in ways that advance egalitarianism. Joseph Carens (1981, 1986) argued that individuals' duties to support just institutions include a moral obligation to contribute to the productive output of society in ways that make "good use" of their own talents, such that they would take up more demanding labor even without differential compensation. G. A. Cohen advanced a similar, albeit more complex, argument about the necessity of an egalitarian ethos (1991, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2008). Cohen's central claim was that individuals committed to certain principles of distributive justice ought to bring those principles to bear on their personal choices; on his view, the "site of distributive justice" includes individuals' legally unconstrained choices (1997, 3). Cohen argued that individuals committed to the Rawlsian Difference Principle should be willing to forgo incentive payments to use their

talents productively, because there would be a kind of inconsistency in affirming that the Difference Principle should govern the basic structure while denying it any purchase over one's own personal decisions (or acting in ways that undermine its inequality-minimizing aims). On this basis, Cohen argued that the Difference Principle would permit relatively few economic inequalities, there being few that are strictly speaking necessary in order to benefit the least advantaged. Although toward the end of his life, Cohen began to elaborate how an egalitarian ethos might inflect social interaction more generally,¹⁰⁸ he focused primarily on how commitments to egalitarianism ought to affect individuals' decisions in the labor market. Following Carens and Cohen, many people use 'egalitarian ethos' to refer to a set of attitudes toward material inequality and a willingness to make egalitarian occupational choices. Cohen sometimes described the converse of an egalitarian ethos in terms of the "self-seeking choices of high-flying marketeers" (2008, 118), which gives some indication of the focus of his discussion.

Whereas Cohen's egalitarian ethos concerns attitudes toward economic choices, a relational egalitarian ethos would be concerned with a broader set of social attitudes and choices, especially those that affect how individuals interact with others. The kind of ethos discussed by Jonathan Wolff (1998, 2010) and Seana Shiffrin (2010) similarly concerns the attitudes individuals ought to hold toward each other. Wolff (1998), drawing on Tawney's description of a society of equals, argues that individuals in such a society should have a certain level of respect for each other. Shiffrin suggests that an egalitarian ethos may require more than just forgoing labor incentives; it may influence the beliefs, habits, dispositions, attitudes, and motives people take up in their daily lives. To be achieved, relational equality may require that individuals adopt a set of such attitudes and dispositions. Beyond merely treating others civilly or with respect, it might involve a concern for seeing to it that one's relationships had a certain egalitarian

¹⁰⁸ I have in mind particularly the essay "Notes on Regarding People as Equals" (2012, 193).

character. This could amount to a spirit of solidarity or neighborliness, or something like Cohen's principle of community (2009, 34ff).

Why suspect that relational equality requires a kind of egalitarian ethos? The characterization of relational egalitarianism given in chapter 2 provides an explanation: structuring relations around the EDC would require a complex attitudinal disposition and several deliberative virtues. In some cases, those in relationships governed by the EDC will have to actually deliberate about matters of collective importance (e.g., when an issue must be collectively decided and there are multiple permissible options). Genuine participation in collective decision-making requires certain deliberative virtues, such as charity, patience, and open-mindedness. The EDC requires that deliberators take each other's interests into account, and that will require a willingness to learn what is necessary to make others' interests intelligible, insofar as that is possible. The appropriate deliberative stance may even require a kind of care for those with whom one stands as equals—perhaps expressed as a form of solidarity, fraternity, or community—since allowing the equally significant interests of others to play an equally significant role in decision-making requires a nuanced, sympathetic appreciation of those interests.

Reflection on how patterns of social interaction can contribute to social hierarchies supplies further reasons for thinking a relational egalitarian ethos might be required to fully realize a society of equals. A relational egalitarian ethos may require not only that *when* we choose to interact with others, that we do so in a spirit of solidarity; it could have implications for the degree to which and the terms on which we ought to be willing to engage with others. Patterns of social interaction can contribute to the kind of power that individuals have (by virtue of having influential social connections), to the kind of standing they enjoy (in informal stages of

deliberation), and to the kind of status they can attain (insofar as such interaction affects their opportunities for being esteemed). If society is stratified into sharply differentiated social groups that do not mix, for whatever reason, certain groups may enjoy outsize influence and power, so relational equality may require that individuals be willing to socialize in ways that break such stratification. Finally, such an ethos might demand changes in the most personal of relationships, if relational equality as a political ideal directly requires that those relationships be structured along egalitarian lines, or if conduct in personal relationships has spillover effects that could affect relational equality in that society. For example, a committed relational egalitarian would want to avoid behavior in romantic relations that furthered a gendered hierarchy of power—that may mean a relational egalitarian ought to find some traditional romantic norms unattractive, or that they ought to aspire to Mill’s “principle of perfect equality” in marriage (1984 [1869], 261). Similar considerations could be applied to relations with friends, neighbors, and strangers in civil society. Where attitudes and dispositions ultimately influence the kind of power, status, and standing individuals have in society, relational egalitarians have reasons to care about them.

So there are several reasons to think relational egalitarianism requires that individuals adopt a certain ethos that affects their willingness to engage in extended collective deliberation and to create inclusive informal social spaces. How does this contribute to the compatibility worry? G. A. Cohen held the view that the requirement of a certain ethos separated socialists from liberals (on his view, liberals denied the need for such an ethos). Even though he was considering an egalitarian ethos that would prompt talented individuals to reject incentives of income differentials to work at their maximum potential, the same considerations apply when thinking about a more specifically relational egalitarian ethos:

The ideal liberal society is not the same as the ideal socialist society. In the ideal socialist society, equal respect and concern are not projected out of society and restricted to the ambit of an alien superstructural power, the state. . . . In the Marxist hope, it is the *separation* of state and society, the duality itself, that goes. There is not, then, on the one hand, as there is in the Rawlsian perception, an economic structure that is organized to achieve a certain form of justice, and on the other, a set of individual economic choices that need show no respect for that justice. The Marx-inspired question is whether a society without an ethos in daily life that is informed by a broadly egalitarian principle for that reason fails to provide distributive justice. To that question, Rawls, being a liberal, says no: here is the deep dividing line between us. (2008, 1–2)

Of course the details of the account change when we are talking about a relational egalitarian ethos. It is not specifically economic choices or the distributions of material resources that matter but the connection between a social structure that is committed to seeing to it that individuals stand as equals and the attitudes that individuals take up toward that project.¹⁰⁹

I think the principal tension between relational egalitarianism and liberal commitments here concerns the expectations about the liberal society. The liberal vision is of a society in which individuals' associative and expressive choices do not regularly have to be dictated by political principles. That is not merely the hope that such spheres do not have to be regulated by coercive legal forces, but that such choices need not be decided on the basis of political objectives. The liberal characteristically hopes that social structures can free individuals to pursue idiosyncratic or wholly personal goals in paradigmatically "private" spheres. The

¹⁰⁹ As with the discussion of rejecting expressly inegalitarian attitudes, the claim is not that every individual in a society must adopt a relational egalitarian ethos if the society is to achieve relational equality—the odd dissenter does not disrupt that possibility. Rather, the claim is that relational equality cannot be had unless many or most individuals adopt such an ethos.

imposition of requirements on such personal matters may interfere with individuals' abilities to shape their own identity in important ways. Paula Casal has made this point with regard to a Cohenite ethos in occupational choice, but it would seem to apply equally well to social choices about one's associates and social activities:

There is perhaps no other question quite as important as the one we are often asked in childhood, 'What do you want to be in life?' Answering it involves reflecting on almost everything we know about ourselves: our character, talents, flaws, values, commitments and ambitions. It is a choice with far reaching consequences for our chances of self-realization and one that is intimately connected to the development of our potential, our personality and identity, our friends and social network . . . and our conception of the good. It is a choice that can entirely change our life. These facts lend plausibility to the claim that, like a marriage, an occupation should be chosen freely, without the interference of either legal or moral sanctions. (2013, 13)

Compared to an egalitarian ethos imposing on occupational choice, an ethos imposing on our social choices directly is considerably more intrusive, and the reasons to think a liberal would want to preserve "occupational autonomy" (to use Casal's phrase) would also be reasons to think they would want to preserve "social life autonomy." The list of personal choices that would be affected by a relational egalitarian ethos could be sweeping: individuals would need to keep relational equality in mind when engaged in formal political debate and casual conversation about political matters (to protect democratic equality),¹¹⁰ in making associative choices (to protect just distributions of power), in raising their children and relating with romantic partners, and in deciding where and how to spend their time. At least at first glance, there looks to be a far-reaching conflict between these ideals.

¹¹⁰ See Kolodny (2014b) on social equality and informal influence.

5. Emergent Social Inequalities

To say that relational equality might require that individual citizens carry an egalitarian ethos into their private lives is not the whole of the compatibility worry. Relational equality can also be impeded by *emergent social inequalities*—disparities in power, status, and influence that arise not from the wrongful or vicious acts of any individuals but from patterns of social choices.¹¹¹ A society of well-intentioned people guided by an egalitarian ethos of solidarity, care, and respect may still inadvertently produce these emergent social inequalities by simply going about their own lives and making seemingly innocuous social choices. The basic idea is that our social positions can be changed by the cumulative effects of everyone's uncoordinated informal social interactions, and relational equality may be threatened by some disparities in power, status, and influence that result in this way. If the requirement to adopt an egalitarian ethos in one's informal social life generates a *prima facie* worry about the compatibility of relational egalitarianism and liberalism, the prospect of emergent social inequalities exacerbates it. In some cases, entirely eliminating emergent social inequalities could require subordinating all personal choices, no matter how superficially innocuous, to political considerations.

Emergent social inequalities are likely to arise in any system of informal social interaction in which people are free to choose their own associates, to speak their mind, and to measure others by personal standards. To be clear, not all emergent differentials of power, status, and influence are worrisome. Small differences that are idiosyncratic in origin—that arise not on the basis of ascriptive identity or social position but as a matter of happenstance or fairly random

¹¹¹ These are *social* inequalities because they are differences produced by social norms and practices (as opposed to natural inequalities such as differences in strength). They are *emergent* because they are produced as a result of the accumulation of individual choices, none of which aim at producing this result. On this way of characterizing things, emergent social inequalities are not all objectionable in themselves on relational egalitarian grounds (since relational egalitarianism does not demand absolute homogeneity), but they may pose a threat to relational equality in some circumstances.

bad luck—are not worrisome.¹¹² Relational egalitarians have reason to worry, though, when those differentials are significant, durable, and systematic.¹¹³ The presence of such differentials can indicate that the social world is structured in a way that reliably disadvantages the members of some group.

To clarify the nature of this worry, I will sketch out a few examples of how informal social interaction can produce worrisome emergent social inequalities. The first three examples are concerned with associative decisions—decisions about which neighborhood to live in, whom to befriend, and whom to marry. The last three examples all concern patterns of appraisal respect and credibility evaluation—decisions about what one finds admirable and praiseworthy, who should be trusted and on which matters, and how to express those judgments.

In all of these cases, I want to make a few idealizing assumptions, in order to draw focus to the way ordinary social choices can produce these emergent social inequalities. First, I assume that the basic political structure of a relational egalitarian society discussed above is already in place.¹¹⁴ Second, I assume that the citizens of this society reject expressly inegalitarian attitudes and adopt at least an ethos of respect toward each other in civil society, not because I think that such individual behavior would automatically follow from this institutional setup, but to emphasize how inequalities can emerge out of otherwise unobjectionable social interaction. It is obvious that objectionable differentials in power, status, and influence can be created by

¹¹² For example, an idiosyncratic difference between the influence two people have over informal political deliberation might arise because one has a smaller social network, simply because she happened to meet a higher number of curmudgeons and unsociable types. Miranda Fricker makes a similar distinction between incidental and systematic testimonial injustice (2007, 27), though incidental testimonial injustice conflates the idiosyncratic with the merely local (because systematic testimonial injustice “[tracks] the subject through different dimensions of social activity”). I think some local emergent social inequalities—differentials that only affect one social context—could still be worrisome, if the differential is large enough or reliably produced as a consequence of social norms.

¹¹³ The language of durability comes from Tilly (1998) and is discussed in Anderson (2010c), 7. Tilly defines durable inequalities as “those that last from one social interaction to the next, with special attention to those that persist over whole careers, lifetimes, and organizational histories” (6).

¹¹⁴ There may be other projects that institutions in a relational egalitarian society should adopt in light of these emergent social inequalities, which will be addressed in the next two chapters.

prejudice and malicious attitudes. The concern here is strictly with the way patterns of innocuous informal social interaction on their own can generate these inequalities. If ordinary informal social choices can generate real impediments to relational equality, the worry is that relational egalitarianism will require extensive intervention in informal social choices.

Residential Segregation: The residential choices that individuals make can contribute to emergent social inequalities. It is worthwhile to distinguish the ways that actually existing residential segregation emerged from the ways it could emerge even under ideal circumstances, since in many actual societies residential segregation along lines of class, race, or religion is a byproduct of existing, unjust inequalities of wealth or power. For instance, residential segregation by race in the United States has been promoted and at times enforced by government policy,¹¹⁵ and the residential choices Americans make now are affected by a long legacy of injustice and deep material inequality. Elizabeth Anderson (2010c) has examined how racially homogeneous social networks, under these circumstances, can multiply the disadvantages black Americans face: in addition to wealth and income gaps, associative segregation creates social networks of vastly unequal power and influence. In such nonideal circumstances, it is relatively easy to see how the exercise of free association and other private choices can exacerbate existing differences in social standing, reliably disadvantaging some groups.

Even starting from the ideally just society, though, residential choices can result in a world in which some groups reliably have inferior access to relational goods over the course of their lives. To the extent that residential patterns affect the composition of informal social networks, group stratification by neighborhood can have an impact on relative power and influence. Suppose there are some permissible differentials in power, influence, or material wealth in a society of equals. (There are several reasons to expect some: relational egalitarianism

¹¹⁵ See Rothstein (2017).

is not committed to the total elimination of a natural, uneven distribution of talent; it is not necessarily committed to perfect material equality; and large societies arguably need some delegation of responsibility to officeholders and administrators.) Residential patterns could be easily affected by such differentials without any individuals acting on objectionable motives. Those with greater wealth might wind up clustered in the same neighborhoods because they can pay more for certain amenities or desirable locations. Members of certain religions might unintentionally self-segregate because they have a weak preference for living near other members.¹¹⁶ Officeholders and administrators may cluster as they look for homes near their work. Preferences for certain types of neighborhoods, neighbors, or commutes might lead to considerable residential segregation, even if no one has explicitly segregative preferences. General tendencies to form group identities along any number of traits could produce associative preferences that create similar sorting effects.¹¹⁷

If residential patterns are such that those with more power or influence live together, then those who are advantaged will likely get the further benefit of having a more powerful or advantaged social network, as they will have more frequent opportunities to meet and develop connections with their neighbors. If some neighborhoods are diverse and others more homogeneous, people in the diverse neighborhoods will have greater “bridging” social capital and potentially wider influence.¹¹⁸ Even in a society in which individuals have an egalitarian ethos (a lack of inegalitarian attitudes, a set of deliberative virtues, an attitude of care toward

¹¹⁶ Thomas Schelling’s abstract model of the dynamics of segregation (1971) might be instructive in this regard. Schelling describes how individuals’ preferences to live in neighborhoods in which a significant portion of the population shared their race (any feature of identity would work) could produce gradual sorting toward completely segregated neighborhoods. In his example, individual motives that are fairly innocuous—desires to live in relatively diverse communities, where only 30% of the population shares the relevant criterion of identity with the individual—can produce systems in which the final patterns are considerably more segregated.

¹¹⁷ Wolff (2017) canvasses a similar theme.

¹¹⁸ See Anderson (2010c, 33) on types of social capital.

those with whom one interacts), patterns of residential choices can lead to inequalitarian outcomes.

Occupational Stratification: Individuals' decisions about whom to befriend could produce emergent social inequalities, given a division of labor and social norms that make work-based social connections easier than others. Sociologists have found evidence of social stratification along occupational lines in contemporary societies (Stewart, Prandy, and Blackburn, 1980; Bottero, 2005), and it is easy to imagine ways such stratification might develop nonmaliciously, even under more egalitarian circumstances. Suppose that the relatively ideal society is large, that complex tasks require a division of labor, and that concerns for efficiency make it sensible for people to specialize professionally. In such circumstances, occupational stratification could be facilitated by the way work brings colleagues into close, regular, casual interaction and by social norms that make informal social relationships easier under those circumstances. Individuals with no intention of deliberately discriminating on the basis of education, profession, or social position could all the same wind up creating informal social networks full of people just like themselves.

As with residential segregation, occupational stratification could amplify otherwise permissible differentials in power, status, and influence, so that members of prestigious professions wound up with much more influential or powerful social networks. This need not be an all-or-nothing affair; occupational stratification could occur if it were the case that lawyers were more likely to be close friends with other lawyers, welders with other welders, and so on.¹¹⁹

A social world in which people tend to form close informal associations with coworkers will

¹¹⁹ To some degree, this might even be an explicit feature of Rawls's ideal society, since he thinks "the plurality of associations in a well-ordered society, each with its secure inner life, tends to reduce the visibility, or at least the painful visibility, of variations in men's prospects" (1999a, 470). The existence of these noncomparing groups only downplays the painful visibility of differences in "circumstances" to the extent that members of each group tend to socialize in private life with each other.

reliably disadvantage some, sometimes just in small ways, so long as individuals can call on friends for favors or begin informal processes of political deliberation in casual settings (e.g., when lawyers can call on acquaintances for representation or advice, or political journalists can share grievances with friends who can broadcast the issue).

Educational Homogamy: Just as residential segregation and occupational stratification can produce social networks that disadvantage some groups, patterns of assortative mating along educational lines can contribute to emergent social inequalities. If the college-educated tend to find romantic partners of similar educational attainment, several emergent social inequalities are possible. In our own nonideal circumstances, economists have pointed out how assortative mating contributes to income inequality (Greenwood et al., 2014), and there is some evidence that, contrariwise, economic inequality and lower social mobility encourages patterns of educational homogamy (Mare, 2016). Similar patterns might persist in more egalitarian circumstances, though. Suppose that in a relational egalitarian society there is still a need for specialized forms of education. Elizabeth Anderson argues that there will need to be a system of education for “elites,” people who occupy positions of responsibility and leadership, in a society of equals (2007). If informal norms and practices are such that people wind up partnering with others of similar educational backgrounds (e.g., because the socially appropriate time to meet such people is while one is a student¹²⁰), then some groups may predictably have access to greater power and influence on the basis of their intimate associations. The disparities involved here may be similar to those caused by residential and occupational stratification—intensifying existing differentials of power and influence by pooling resources—but they may also be more severe, insofar as the latitude people have to exercise reasonable partiality in such intimate

¹²⁰ The desire to marry someone with similar formative experiences may be another motivating factor, beyond social norms that indicate an appropriate time for finding a marital partner.

relationships is greater. The kinds of favors one can ask of a partner are considerably greater, as is the amplified influence one can receive as a result of such a relationship. The emergent social inequalities might extend beyond what one individual receives from his or her romantic partner, to systematically advantage the children of more educated couples.

The distribution of social connections that results from associative choices—where to live, whom to befriend, whom to marry—can lead to disparities in power. Members of some groups may, as a result of these processes, reliably wind up with far more powerful connections and on that basis have the ability to do considerably more than others. Such patterns can create disparities in influence; some individuals may wind up with far more social connections that amplify their voice. They may lead to disparities in status: most straightforwardly, having larger (or more prestigious) social networks can confer higher status on individuals. Worryingly, these disparities may predictably disadvantage certain groups—those who already have less responsibility or power in society, less social prestige, or less education.

Just as patterns of associative choices can give rise to emergent social inequalities, patterns of otherwise innocuous informal evaluation and praise can also have cumulative inequalitarian effects. This includes the expression of esteem, but unexpressed evaluation can also contribute to emergent social inequalities. Individuals have reason to be wary about the kinds of esteem and disesteem they endorse, since such evaluations may contribute to objectionable inequalities in power, status, and influence. Patterns of esteem and disesteem may set up appraisal-related conditions of indignity; they may converge to create large gaps in the status and power people have; or they may systematically disfavor certain groups in ways no relational egalitarian could endorse.

Appraisal/Recognition Conflation: First, patterns of esteem might be worrisome when appraisal on some particular matter (for talents, achievements, or other features of the person) comes to stand in for a general societal judgment of the individual, such that being found deficient on that matter can cause shame or lack of self-respect. This can happen when the members of that society converge on highly valuing some particular trait, when possession of that trait is held to be exceptionally important, or when the method of expressing esteem connects it to basic respect (e.g., by prioritizing that kind of esteem in public communication or connecting that trait to essential civic virtues). However stringently we insist that recognition respect for others as moral equals is distinct from how they are esteemed by others or appraised for their talents and accomplishments, significant disparities in esteem on some matters can make it difficult to maintain self-respect or self-esteem. One would hope that when individuals are free to form and communicate their own judgments, the result will be a diverse, variegated pattern in which everyone is found praiseworthy on some metric, but that will not necessarily (or usually) be the case. Neither official, institutional judgments nor expressly inegalitarian personal attitudes are necessary to create this dynamic; all that is required is that informally people accept the same or similar standards and assign a high value to the trait.

Take for example the esteem accorded to individuals for their social contributions (which in many market societies is just correlated with the occupational role someone occupies). Timo Jütten has pointed out how in a modern capitalist society, social esteem is often dependent on one's employment or what one can bring to market (2017, 260), to the degree that being involuntarily unemployed, precariously employed, or employed in marginal, low-paid positions can be a source of indignity. That indignity depends at least in part on the importance that others put on economic contributions when evaluating others. (Of course much of the indignity also

depends on institutional failures to provide for basic needs, ensure living wages, and prevent domination in the workplace, as well as the expressive disrespect of tying the provision of necessary social services to employment.) Jütten is largely concerned with the damage actually existing market societies can do to individuals' dignity,¹²¹ but we might also consider the degree to which patterns of appraisal could continue to threaten individual self-respect and self-esteem in considerably more ideal circumstances.

In a relational egalitarian society, people might esteem others for what marketable skills they have and what social contributions they can make. There are good reasons to praise people for making such contributions and to encourage the talents and hard work that enable those contributions. Such esteem can distinguish individuals and highlight their unique talents and comparative advantages; recognizing these kinds of contributions can be one way of conferring a desirable form of individualizing recognition.¹²² Individuals who praise others on those grounds need not be acting on expressly inegalitarian attitudes, and may in fact be motivated by an egalitarian ethos of a kind. (After all, the egalitarian ethos of Joseph Carens and G. A. Cohen calls on talented citizens to choose occupations that make best use of those talents.¹²³) Perhaps most people are able to make social contributions, but it is possible that some groups won't have the means of making a contribution that will be recognized and valued. That could arise simply

¹²¹ Jütten does briefly consider the degree to which this kind of recognition order might persist in a Rawlsian property-owning democracy.

¹²² See McBride (2013), ch. 3.

¹²³ Carens defends an ideal in which "people believe that it is good (i.e., morally praiseworthy) to use their talents and skills to contribute to the well being of society. Normally, the more one contributes, relative to one's capacity, the more praiseworthy one's actions, the more praiseworthy one's actions (in this respect)" (1986, 35). He denies they have an obligation to contribute as much as they can, instead claiming they only have to make "good use" of their talents. Cohen does not argue that people should be obliged to take up the most socially beneficial occupations their talents allow, but he does argue that if someone would be willing to take up a socially beneficial occupation (e.g., practicing medicine) for high pay, they ought to be willing to take up that occupation over less socially beneficial alternatives (e.g., gardening) without the financial incentive (2008, 185, 368). With some constraints, then, both argue that an egalitarian ethos orients individuals toward making occupational choices with social contributions in mind. Emily McTernan has argued along similar lines that Cohen's version of the egalitarian ethos would produce work-related inegalitarian status hierarchies, disadvantaging carers and the untalented (2013).

because they have skills and talents not well suited to current societal needs (e.g., when the labor market has little use for manual labor or a quick sense of humor), because unaccommodated impairments prevent them from making use of those talents, or because the talents of others render their own contributions unnecessary or trivial.¹²⁴ To the degree that other people esteem social contributions highly, being shut out of such esteem can appear like a societal judgment of their overall value. This does not require that individuals actively criticize those who are shut out, either—simply being denied the kinds of positive esteem accorded to others may be a sufficient threat to one’s self-respect.¹²⁵

Appraisal judgments might affect self-respect in a number of other cases, wherever some trait is taken to be essential to one’s value as a member of society. It could be martial ability in a warrior culture, or intelligence as measured on a standardized exam (as in Michael Young’s meritocratic dystopia).¹²⁶ If a sufficient number of individuals accept the central importance of that esteem, it can be a matter of shame and indignity to fail to meet the standard. Such patterns of esteem could arise as a cumulative effect of individuals making decisions for themselves about what to esteem, without any expressly inegalitarian attitudes affecting that judgment.

Reputational Feedback Loops: The previous example concerned how perceived deficiencies on some evaluative measure, communicated as a societal judgment that emerges from many individuals’ judgments, can create inequalities of status. A second issue concerns the

¹²⁴ Contemporary worries about what would replace sources of esteem for the involuntarily unemployed in a largely “post-work” world may come to mind here, but more generally it could be an issue whenever there is structural unemployment.

¹²⁵ The damage such exclusion or disesteem has on self-respect could be cast in different ways, depending on one’s commitments regarding self-respect. The early Rawlsian view that self-respect involves some confidence in one’s abilities and plans, which some argue conflates self-respect and self-esteem (e.g., Thomas [1977-8]), might make it trivially easy to show how disesteem can affect self-respect. Even if one wanted to draw a sharp conceptual distinction between “evaluative self-respect” and “recognition self-respect,” one might still think that, in practice, they are interconnected in our mental lives (Ferkany [2009]). Even if a widely disesteemed person can maintain the belief that she is entitled to the same basic rights as the esteemed, such a social position is apt to affect her “prereflective, unarticulated, emotionally laden presuppositional interpretive framework,” what Robin Dillon calls “basal self-respect” (1997, 241).

¹²⁶ Young (1958).

tendency individuals' evaluative judgments have to cluster for social reasons. In many circumstances, there is evidence that social status builds on itself and affects subsequent evaluations. Initially small differentials can be exacerbated by reputational feedback loops (sometimes also called instances of cumulative advantage or the Matthew effect), where antecedent positive evaluations of someone's performance or quality make it more likely that others will also positively evaluate the performance.¹²⁷ When individuals are esteemed, they often obtain greater opportunities to earn further esteem—in some cases because the initial evaluation is grounds for selection of leadership roles, high esteem increases the resources an individual can draw upon, and positive esteem may attract more attention to the individual.¹²⁸ Further, individuals do not usually appraise others in a vacuum, and their evaluations are sensitive to social influence.¹²⁹ Sociologists have argued that reputational feedback loops help to explain social status hierarchies in which a few scientists enjoy outsize status and influence in their discipline, the evaluations of students' performance in the classroom, and the success of some businesses over others.¹³⁰ These tendencies do not depend on the unique structure of institutions in our society; reputational feedback loops could arise wherever people are left to make their own evaluative judgments of others.

The accumulation of undeserved or outsize esteem is not always a problem for relational equality by itself. Where feedback loops give rise to predictable, durable status hierarchies, though, there is a case for thinking they impede relational equality. The existence of reputational

¹²⁷ See Merton (1968) and Rigney (2010).

¹²⁸ Cory Doctorow characterizes this feature of reputation economies in particularly colorful terms: "once a lot of people hold you to be reputable[,] other people bend over backwards to give you opportunities to do things that make you even more reputable, putting you in a position where you can speechify, lead, drive the golden spike, and generally take credit for everything that goes well, while blaming all the screw-ups on lesser mortals" (2016). Bracketing the accusations of egocentrism and bad faith, one might still recognize the pattern in which success begets success as a feature of many actual informal reputation economies.

¹²⁹ Gould (2002). The discussion of the scarcity of observer attention in Brennan and Pettit (2004, 153) helps to explain some of this social influence.

¹³⁰ Rigney (2010) provides an overview of research.

feedback loops would not predictably advantage the same group in every setting—the advantages may be contingent on how early evaluations are performed, and so be deeply situational. But the central worry here is not that some group will be regularly disadvantaged by the process. Rather, it is that this process will create large gaps in status, power, and influence clustered on small groups. Large gaps in status, even where they originate in the correct appraisal of traits that are socially valuable and worth encouraging, can reinforce and widen other inequalities. Those with much greater status will be able to draw on that status to do more, and they are likely to be given greater standing and credibility on the basis of that status. Larger inequalities of power and influence will make it harder for people to relate on terms of equality and to understand each others' interests. That said, we can bracket for the moment what inequalities in appraisal esteem the relational egalitarian should say are justifiable. The point here is that where reputational feedback loops affect appraisal, uncoordinated patterns of esteeming will tend to create large inequalities in status (and correlated power and influence).

Appraisal Bias: Finally, we can consider how the uncoordinated distribution of esteem can lead to outcomes in which certain groups are in fact systematically disadvantaged, even if people reject expressly inegalitarian attitudes and adopt a relational egalitarian ethos. Where individuals' evaluations are colored by unconscious bias, people may be shut out of valuable forms of esteem or undervalued on the basis of their ascriptive identity.

Consider, for example, how implicit attractiveness biases can affect individuals' opportunities. Considerable research already indicates how assessments of physical attractiveness correlate with professional success in our own societies; it seems plausible that unconscious bias disposes evaluators to rank individuals more highly a range of things

depending on their attractiveness.¹³¹ Deborah Rhode (2010) has surveyed the extent to which a “beauty bias” colors the evaluation of women in particular in our society, and we can imagine that some similar (perhaps more gender-neutral) bias could persist even in considerably more egalitarian circumstances. Just as judgments of professional competence are colored by attractiveness biases, that bias might well affect a number of other evaluations of unrelated traits—beautiful people may be more likely to be generally esteemed as competent, talented, and generally meritorious (and contrariwise those who are not can be subjected to unmerited disesteem). Such bias can generate emergent social inequalities in power and standing. It might be no objection to relational equality at all to think that those considered physically attractive are more fortunate and have greater options in romantic relationships, but arguably such good fortune should not influence one’s overall power, influence, and status in society.

This is one example of possibly many appraisal biases—unconscious inclinations to misrecognize or miscalculate some criteria due to the presence or absence of other features. Doubtless, some unconscious biases are dependent on or exacerbated by deep institutional injustices. There is no reason to think an ideal relational egalitarian society would be characterized by the implicit racial bias present in the contemporary West, for instance. That should not alleviate the worry that people might be subject to unconscious appraisal bias even in ideally just circumstances. Something as simple as slight in-group bias would affect informal evaluations, to the disadvantage of minority out-groups. That people might make objectively bad evaluations of certain criteria, when left to their own devices, is not in itself a worry. Rather, the worry is that groups could be systematically disadvantaged across multiple domains of evaluation on the basis of their ascriptive identity or other irrelevant features, even if people reject discriminatory attitudes and attempt to act on an egalitarian ethos.

¹³¹ Mobius and Rosenblat (2006), Rhode (2010), Hamermesh (2011).

Hopefully these six examples make clear that there are a number of ways in which informal social interaction can give rise to significant differentials in power, status, and influence, even when individuals are motivated to treat each other with respect and want to engage in egalitarian deliberation. By way of summarizing these examples, I will suggest that we could also classify them not by the kind of informal social choices involved (i.e., associative choices, patterns of appraisal), but by the way social norms and practices facilitate emergent inequalities:

- Some social norms and practices can have *sorting effects*—they separate and organize individuals into groups in ways that (a) create new differentials of power, status, and influence or (b) turn acceptable differentials between individuals into objectionable social-group disparities. The examples of residential segregation, occupational stratification, and educational homogamy all exhibit these sorting effects.
- Social norms and practices can have *expressive effects*—they can organize ordinary informal social interaction in ways that allow objectionable social dimensions and meanings to develop out of patterns of otherwise innocuous individual actions. What I call appraisal/recognition conflation provides an example of this.
- Social norms and practices can have *compounding effects*—they can organize social interaction in ways that enable or even encourage runaway differentials in power, status, or influence. Reputational feedback loops exhibit compounding effects.

- Yet others can have *favoring effects*—they can systematically and pervasively disadvantage some groups in the distribution of power, status, and influence. Even where the resulting differentials are not extreme, the unfairness in the process may be objectionable in some cases. What I call appraisal bias fits into this category.

As is evident in the descriptions above, there may be multiple ways to describe each example in terms of sorting, expressive, compounding, and favoring effects. All the same, these rough categories might be useful to keep in mind as an abstract characterization of how informal norms and practices can generate emergent social inequalities.

These are far from being the only conditions in which objectionable emergent social inequalities can arise. On the contrary, it seems that emergent differentials of power, status, and influence will routinely result as people make associative decisions and evaluative judgments for personal reasons. Having sketched a few brief examples of how emergent social inequalities could persist under considerably idealized circumstances, I will explain under what circumstances the deliberative view of relational equality should object to such emergent differentials, before addressing why this is relevant to the compatibility worry.

5.1. Emergent Social Inequalities and Relational Egalitarianism

It is easy to see how the course of ordinary social interaction among people pursuing their own conceptions of the good would disrupt what I earlier called vulgar relational equality (a state of completely equal power, undifferentiated social status, and exactly equal influence).¹³² Even rough equality of power would be undermined as people made social connections that extended

¹³² This point bears resemblance to Robert Nozick's argument that liberty will continually upset patterned distributions of goods (1974, 160–4).

their capabilities and resources. As people evaluate each other's qualities and achievements, an unequal distribution of appraisal will emerge. Individuals will gain greater experience and expertise on some subjects than others, and the differential esteem they are accorded is likely to give them greater influence in public discourse. A state of homogeneity in power, status, and influence would be evanescent in the face of everyday social interaction.

Of course, I have argued that vulgar relational equality is ersatz—not every difference in power, influence, or status that emerges from informal social interaction is a serious obstacle to relational equality. Even so, we have reason to think that ordinary social interaction can generate inequalities that really do threaten relational equality. If one individual can call on resources through informal connections that others cannot, he will have a greater ability to weather a patch of bad luck, start a new career or project, or take other opportunities not open to those with less well-resourced social networks. That one individual's friends are more powerful or influential may make a difference in how much exposure or sympathetic coverage her interests receive in public discourse. Members of socially isolated minority groups will be less well understood, and it will be harder to take their interests into account in political deliberation. Differences in status may be objectionable when they are connected with greater power or resources, or when they affect basic self-respect.¹³³

The deliberative view of relational equality provides a way to think about objectionable emergent social inequalities, since it conceives of relational equality as a practice that members of society engage in: emergent social inequalities could be objectionable when (a) they make

¹³³ In recent work, Carina Fourie comes to a similar conclusion about why the relational egalitarian should worry about esteem: some inequalities of esteem may be objectionable insofar as they make people feel inferior; undermine forms of “civic friendship” (2015, 97); or connect to “compounded hierarchies of esteem” (103), by which she means clusters of disadvantage.

deliberating as equals difficult, or (b) the social structure that reliably produces them could not be justified by parties governed by the EDC.

First, large inequalities of power, status, or influence could make it difficult for individuals to engage in egalitarian deliberation, no matter how those inequalities arise. Trivial differences in the amount of power people have do not prevent them from deliberating as equals, but significant power differentials can create relationships of domination (which is straightforwardly incompatible with relational equality). Large differences in social status can communicate judgments of overall inferiority or create informal hierarchies at odds with relational equality. Status differentials may also undermine an individual's self-respect or self-esteem in ways that make their participation as an equal in deliberation more difficult or impossible. Likewise, when some have vastly more influence over decisions, it is hard to see how the parties could meet the demands of the EDC.

Second, even when the inequalities are not great, emergent social inequalities would be objectionable if (a) they are relevant to decisions that people should make together and (b) they could not be justified under the EDC. Emergent social inequalities are features of the social world that members of society choose together, even if they do not intend to create those inequalities.¹³⁴ If informal social networks are created and maintained by the uncoordinated choices of individuals, then there is a sense in which the members of that society affirm that their coordination is not necessary. If those practices reliably lead to the marginalization, stigmatization, or deprivation of certain groups in that society, one might argue that the interests of the disadvantaged haven't been treated equally and they don't stand as equals with others. So

¹³⁴ To say they "choose them together" is not to say that, where they emerge, they were deliberately intended, but that society faces some decision about whether to take backward-looking responsibility for the collateral effects of informal social practices. Deciding to take no action or refusing to consider the matter can amount to tacit endorsement of the existing social structure. My language here is influenced by Aas and Wasserman (2015), though I am not committing myself to their broader view about which inequalities societies is responsible for correcting.

the EDC may demand collective deliberation about those informal social practices. If they choose that social system over alternatives that would not generate those inequalities, they need to be able to justify that choice. A successful justification might appeal to some good that is secured by permitting those inequalities, or to an assessment of the costs involved in removing them. There might be a variety of reasons why such inequalities serve everyone's interests. Differences in influence can be justified by the extent to which everyone's interests can be better satisfied when those with greater insight have greater influence. Differences in power can be justified by appeal to the need to divide up labor and delegate responsibilities to some individuals. In other cases, however, where no good is served, or the harms involved are significant, there may be no good reasons to permit the emergent social inequality to persist.

In many cases, even in an ideal world, the ordinary course of informal social interaction will distribute resources and opportunities in ways that undermine individuals' ability to relate to each other as equals. Even if they ardently desire to engage in egalitarian deliberation, that distribution and their positional status will affect their relationships. The composition of their social networks will affect how their views are heard and propagated in early stages of political deliberation. Differences in available resources will give some greater alternatives should the parties fail to find agreement in deliberation. Such differences can also make it harder to empathize and understand each other's interests. Positional esteem can affect how well some are able to see themselves as equals. Social effects and biases in appraisal may even obscure individuals' interests (e.g., they may not be aware of how they are disadvantaged or denied full recognition of their capabilities). Sometimes these emergent social inequalities are obvious, sometimes they subtly inflect relations, but the general point holds regardless: even when people have good intentions, uncoordinated informal social interaction can upset relational equality.

5.2. Emergent Social Inequalities and the Compatibility Worry

The previous sections have tried to outline some ways in which informal social choices (and more generally, the organization of informal social practices) can give rise to emergent social inequalities, and why that is a concern for relational egalitarians. Deeply uneven access to informal social goods through friends and associates, the amplification of some voices through informal social networks, emergent status hierarchies are all worrying because relational equality is a matter of whether individuals deliberate on an equal footing.

What would be required to eliminate or appropriately respond to emergent social inequalities? Perhaps such emergent hierarchies would be avoidable if individuals always kept an eye on how informal social choices would redound to greater social inequality—if they made every decision about whom to befriend, where to live, what associations to join, or how to evaluate and praise others only after judging its contribution to emergent social inequalities. Of course, this seems like an impossible task. Accurate judgment in such matters is out of reach. How could an individual know whether a single decision to socialize with this group of friends rather than others contributed to emergent social inequalities? Such inequalities are by definition not directly linked to any single decision that contributes to them. If individuals cannot see how such quotidian decisions contribute to social inequalities, how could they ever hope to avoid contributing to them?¹³⁵ It is hard to see how individuals could completely address them without sacrificing considerable liberty in their personal lives.

Some inequalities, such as the relative marginalization and inferior influence that the less wealthy will experience as the result of fairly predictable patterns in residential stratification, can

¹³⁵ Of course, one may have some knowledge of generally how such quotidian decisions create cumulative effects. For instance, it may be fairly predictable that exclusively associating with fellow members of the upper middle class will contribute to widespread informal social segregation along economic lines. In many other cases, it may be unclear (and beyond the ability of the individual to see) whether there will be pernicious downstream effects.

be addressed even if individuals cannot appropriately judge how individual decisions will contribute. In fact, when we shift focus from individual obligations not to act in ways that contribute to emergent social inequalities to look at what obligations individuals might be under to respond to patterns of emergent social inequalities, there is a considerable range of options. Perhaps most important for the compatibility worry, the society of equals could decide to reshape informal social norms and practices quite considerably. More deliberate, collective control over informal social organization might mitigate the creation of such inequalities. Among other things, this could involve collective decisions to reshape informal social norms—to make it socially inappropriate to choose one’s associates or romantic partners in some fashions, or to express some kinds of appraisal respect or to do so in particular ways.

If relational egalitarianism demands that such inequalities be eliminated or mitigated, that will put a considerable strain on the liberal commitment to broad individual discretion in personal decisions. That is true even if relational egalitarianism does not impose a direct obligation on individuals to make each informal choice by reference to a relational egalitarian standard (given the impossibility of meeting such an obligation). Reshaping informal social practices to prevent such inequalities would still intervene dramatically on what are considered personal choices. Standing as equals can be understood in terms of what could be accepted on a deliberative-practice standard, and in many cases that will require that members of a society of equals actually deliberate together. Genuine participation in that deliberative practice requires a complex set of attitudes and dispositions, which will in part dictate how individuals interact in the spheres of society where informal social deliberation takes place. Even beyond demanding a particular ethos for engaging with others, relational egalitarianism may require individuals to give thought to the long-term, downstream consequences of their informal social choices.

Attending to the possibility of emergent social inequalities, even if it does not require that individuals make every choice on the basis of how they would ultimately redound to relational equality, may well involve deferring to political considerations when making a number of personal, intimate decisions. The worry, then, is that successfully addressing emergent social inequalities would require that such choices be pervasively dictated by the demands of political morality. Would individuals have an obligation to avoid choosing their own neighborhoods, social circles, or romantic partners for wholly personal reasons? Do they have obligations to moderate their expressions of esteem, or even to refrain from making some personal evaluations altogether?

The liberal society, I argued in chapter 3, is one in which individuals have significant discretion about how to structure their lives. This, as commonly recognized, means that the state refrains from coercively interfering in personal choices, but it also means that individuals are not required by the demands of justice to organize their lives in one specific fashion. On this point, the compatibility worry is that relational egalitarianism and the expectations of a liberal society will pull in opposite directions. The following chapters will present what I take to be the most promising response to the compatibility worry—namely, a defense of the propriety of pursuing a limited realization of relational equality.

Before defending that response, though, it is worthwhile to explain why the compatibility worry matters. One might ask at this point whether the compatibility worry raises any unique difficulties for liberal relational egalitarianism. In the introduction, I mentioned Larry Temkin's claim that "any reasonable egalitarian will be a pluralist. Equality is not the only thing that matters to the egalitarian" (2003, 63). Thinking primarily about forms of distributive egalitarianism, Temkin argues that there are cases where we should pursue equality only to a

degree, trading off greater equality for the sake of compassion or efficiency. So one might ask whether this particular conflict with the liberal ideal raises any unique worries. If conflicts among values abound, why focus on this one? More importantly, why think that any particular conflict raises worries about the viability of a set of commitments? Why not simply say that liberal relational egalitarians will pursue liberal freedoms and relational equality as far as they can, and then decide which to prioritize where they come into conflict? Daniel Putnam has expressed this in similar terms: reasons of relational equality are *pro tanto*, so relational egalitarians are not in favor of maximal relational equality but rather as much relational equality as is possible given other values (2019, personal communication).

There is no real compatibility worry with reasons of relational equality if they are *pro tanto*, but what I want to point to is a tension between the long-range *ideals* of liberalism and relational equality. To the extent that we find a conflict between the ideal of relational equality and the ideal of the liberal society plausible, we have reason to refine our conception of relational egalitarianism. First, this should be a surprising development for relational egalitarianism, so it would be worth articulating even if the ultimate position does not differ considerably from Temkin's pluralism. Some describe relational equality as a kind of societal ideal from which we can derive principles of justice, not one principle or value among others (Jeppe von Platz, personal correspondence, 2018). If relational equality is a kind of overarching summary descriptor of just relationships, it is harder to see how it is fairly traded off against other values. Alternatively, relational equality is sometimes described as being about some agential virtue, not a valuable state of affairs (e.g., Anderson [2010a]), and it is likewise difficult to see how emergent social inequalities could be a problem on such a picture. Second, I think the compatibility worry gives us reason to reframe certain justice-based accounts of the value of

relational equality (denying that relational egalitarianism holds that a society is just only if people fully relate as equals, as Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen has recently argued). Insofar as relational egalitarianism is a demand of justice, that distinguishes the compatibility worry from some conflicts among pro tanto values. Relational equality is not simply one value that has to be traded off against others. Rather, I defend an account in which we have an obligation to pursue relational equality up to the point at which further efforts would compromise other ideals of justice. Finally, the compatibility worry merits attention because we should not simply conclude that we can only pursue equality so far or to a certain degree. In the face of likely conflict, relational egalitarians need to reflect on and develop a relational ideal that is suitable for liberal societies. They need to say more about what it is we can reasonably hope for, to explain why we can reconcile ourselves to an imperfect realization of relational equality, and to help identify when we should not directly pursue a perfect realization itself.

CHAPTER 5

FAIR RELATIONAL EQUALITY

The compatibility worry presents the liberal relational egalitarian with a challenge. On the one hand, the liberal society is one in which individuals are left broad discretion over a range of choices about how to plan and manage their lives. Not only is it inappropriate for the state to compel association or choose particular life plans for individuals, it would be a problem if the demands of justice extensively dictated those choices. On the other hand, a society of equals seems incompatible with some of the inequalities of power, status, and influence that can be produced by patterns of uncoordinated informal social choices. Emergent social inequalities can proliferate when individuals are left to make those associative and evaluative choices on their own. In societies that have informal social structures like ours,¹³⁶ some individuals will consistently have less of a voice in collective deliberation, fewer options and capabilities, and less opportunity to earn the esteem of others, partly due to unfortunate effects of social arrangements. While isolated associative decisions or expressions of esteem may produce only trivial or insignificant social inequalities, in the aggregate such choices can reliably result in profound, objectionable differentials. It is not obvious how to reconcile these ideals. If a commitment to equality required individuals to adopt a certain ethos with regard to all social interaction or make all personal decisions on the basis of egalitarian concerns, we might conclude that liberalism and relational egalitarianism are at odds.

¹³⁶ At this point, by ‘informal social structures’ I mean to refer to systems for organizing informal social relations. Those systems include institutional frameworks for informal social interaction (e.g., private property, marriage law, the regulation of public space) and cultural norms and practices (governing friendship, residential choices, reasonable partiality, and so on). In section 2 of this chapter, I provide a more detailed explanation and an argument that we should consider the informal social structure as part of the basic structure of society, in the Rawlsian sense.

There are several ways one might respond to the compatibility worry. One might concede that these ideals are incompatible and then reject relational egalitarianism or liberalism wholesale, treating the incompatibility as evidence that liberalism or relational egalitarianism is mistaken. Chapters 1 and 2 present my case for thinking there is a coherent, attractive version of relational egalitarianism that is preferable to rival conceptions of egalitarianism, so I will not pursue the first option. The second option—rejecting liberal commitments—might look something like John Baker’s “equality of condition” (2015) or Christian Schemmel’s “radical relational egalitarianism” (2011b), but I doubt even Baker intends to throw out commitments to individual liberties of association.¹³⁷ While many egalitarians would reject certain political and economic institutions that are regularly associated with liberalism (e.g., loosely regulated capitalist labor markets, private ownership of necessary basic goods, the use of coercive force to defend large inequalities in property¹³⁸), the aspiration to protect the autonomy of social life has broad support.

Alternatively, one could respond to the compatibility worry by denying that there is any real tension. Perhaps liberalism does not require what I have suggested in chapter 3, and a liberal view could demand more of individuals. Perhaps relational equality is not threatened by the

¹³⁷ Baker contrasts liberal conceptions of social equality with what he calls “radical egalitarianism or equality of condition” (2015, 65), but it is not clear exactly what the radical version he prefers would require. He describes what he takes to be salutary features of a world that has achieved this radical egalitarianism—“restricted inequalities of appraisal respect” (72), more equal distributions of love and care (77), and the elimination of “power over” altogether (81)—but his concrete proposals do not depart so radically from liberal institutions. Likewise, Baker and Lynch (2012) and Lynch, Baker, and Lyons (2009) start with radical ideas about achieving greater “affective equality” but do not propose radical departures from our own informal social practices. Schemmel does not advocate for radical relational egalitarianism; he just calls attention to the possibility, which could be excavated from the writing of older utopian socialists, anarcho-communists, Jacobins, some Marxists, perhaps alongside ideas from Thomas More, Gerrard Winstanley, Rousseau, and others (personal correspondence, 2016). Emily McTernan (2018) interprets this distinction in a different fashion; she treats the contrast between Schemmel’s liberal and radical relational egalitarianisms as being primarily about institutionalism about justice—holding Rawls to be a liberal and Iris Marion Young and Fabian Schuppert as radicals. Schuppert (2015b) has described an ambition to describe a distinctively republican conception of equality, which might stand apart from liberal accounts, but a neorepublican account of relational equality would not be radical in the Schemmel sense.

¹³⁸ As should be clear from my description of liberal commitments in chapter 3, I do not think a liberal society necessarily involves these features.

emergent social inequalities described in chapter 4, such that these differentials in power and status do not affect standing as equals. I will take the accounts of liberalism and relational egalitarianism in chapters 2 and 3 as at least roughly correct and sufficient to establish the plausibility of the compatibility worry. Whether liberal relational egalitarians could develop institutional responses that adequately and completely respond to emergent social inequalities is a good question and one I pursue in this chapter and the next. What I hope to have established in chapter 4 is that these emergent social inequalities cannot be waved off as wholly irrelevant to whether relational equality is established.

Instead, I work from the presumption that these characterizations of liberalism and relational egalitarianism are roughly correct and that the prospect of incompatibility should trouble the liberal relational egalitarian. In response, I argue that liberal commitments are at least compatible with the achievement of what can be called *fair relational equality*, which is more robust than merely formal relational equality but weaker than full or perfect relational equality.¹³⁹ I will explain in what follows how I understand those distinctions. The basic idea, though, is that liberal relational egalitarians have reason to endorse a set of practices and institutions that imperfectly realize relational equality, and that this in itself is not a capitulation to injustice. An ideal of fair relational equality accepts some recalcitrant inequalities in power, status, and influence as regrettable but ineliminable, in virtue of commitments to fundamental liberties. That said, fair relational equality does not simply endorse our informal social practices as they are. One of the implications of this view is that, in addition to accepting the usual

¹³⁹ I owe the phrase ‘fair relational equality’ to Madison Powers, though any infelicities in the idea are my own. The contrast between these forms of relational equality roughly parallels different forms of equality of opportunity in Rawls’s work. To be precise, I don’t think Rawls contrasts ‘fair equality of opportunity’ with ‘full/perfect equality of opportunity’. Rather, he says “the principle of fair equality of opportunity can be only imperfectly carried out, at least as long as the institution of the family exists” (1999a [1971], 64). ‘Fair’ indicates a richer version of the ideal than merely formal versions, but I want to use it for the further purpose of distinguishing an imperfect but justifiable version of the ideal from one that is perfectly or fully carried out. This is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

package of relational-egalitarian institutions and practices, members of society have a greater responsibility than has been previously recognized to create and maintain a fair system of informal social norms.

A complete account of fair relational equality should answer two questions. First, it must explain how to define fair relational equality and how it could be achieved (i.e., how the moral labor would be divided among individuals and institutions). Second, the account must show how this meets the demands of justice (why it is not an unjust compromise) while still amounting to merely fair relational equality. The first question is addressed over this chapter and the next; the second can only be addressed afterwards, at the end of chapter 6. In section 1, I provide a fuller explanation of the idea of fair relational equality. In section 2, I argue that the liberal relational egalitarian should be concerned with what I call the informal social structure of society—the combination of formal institutions and informal norms and practices that organize informal social life. We cannot simply enumerate the specific informal social norms that would govern a society of equals, but we can describe in broad terms why the norms and practices of informal interaction, taken as a package, need to be justifiable to all.

This leaves open difficult questions about the appropriate division of moral labor. In chapter 6, I argue that institutions and individuals both must play a role in helping produce an egalitarian culture: fair relational equality requires that we use the power of institutions (states and nongovernmental organizations) to shape the social atmosphere and that we develop informal norms and conventions that dampen emergent social inequalities. Whether the fair relational equality approach is a viable response to the compatibility worry depends on what it would require of individuals and what a society with fair relational equality would look like in

practice. Consequently, a final evaluation of the prospects of fair relational equality will necessarily have to follow that.

1. The Idea of Fair Relational Equality

1.1. Rawlsian Fair Equality of Opportunity

The idea of fair relational equality is an inexact analogy to how Rawlsian liberals respond to the threat the family poses to equality of opportunity, so a brief explanation of fair equality of opportunity will help illuminate the strategy at work here. The degree to which this is an inexact analogy will become clearer during the explanation. Rawls argues that parties in the original position would select a principle of fair equality of opportunity over a principle of merely formal equal opportunity.¹⁴⁰ Some conception of equality of opportunity is needed to interpret the second half of the second principle of justice, which holds that the social and economic inequalities permitted by the difference principle must be attached to positions and offices open to all (Rawls 1999a [1971], 53). Merely formal equality of opportunity, a principle in which careers are “open to talents,” interprets that to mean everyone has the “same legal rights of access” to those positions (62). Formal equality of opportunity is realized when there are no laws prohibiting individuals from occupying those positions on the basis of personal features that are not genuine requirements of the role. To be truly open to all in the formal sense, that system probably also requires rules formally prohibiting the use of discriminatory selection criteria

¹⁴⁰ Again, Rawls uses ‘fair equality of opportunity’ simply to mark out an ideal more substantive than formal equality of opportunity, but the parties in the original position ultimately endorse *imperfectly realized* fair equality of opportunity (they choose a set of principles and a lexical ordering that will foreseeably result in the imperfect realization of equality of opportunity), once it has been paired with the difference principle. I will use ‘fair equality of opportunity’ as shorthand for ‘imperfectly realized fair equality of opportunity’ and refer to the perfectly realized ideal as full or perfect equality of opportunity.

(Mason 2006, 71). The selection process for jobs and educational opportunities should be the “qualifications relevant to performing the tasks of that position” (Freeman 2007b, 88).

The Rawlsian liberal argues that a defensible conception of equality of opportunity will be stronger than the merely formal version. Although formal equality of opportunity prohibits some of the more grievous, systematic ways in which qualified candidates might be excluded from positions or offices, it still permits a number of social contingencies to affect who has a genuine opportunity to obtain them. Merely formal equality of opportunity is consistent with inequalities in education and upbringing that advantage the wealthy, for instance.¹⁴¹ Parties in the original position could object to allowing such social contingencies to affect whether people with the requisite natural aptitudes have the same real chance of obtaining a position.

Fair equality of opportunity is defined in contrast to the formal conception. It aims to ensure that those with equal natural talents¹⁴² have real equal chances to obtain such positions and offices, regardless of their social position at birth:

Positions are to be not only open in a formal sense, but that all should have a fair chance to attain them. . . . More specifically, assuming that there is a distribution of natural assets, those who are at the same level of talent and ability, and have the same willingness to use them, should have the same prospects of success regardless of their initial place in the social system. (Rawls 1999a [1971], 63)

Fair equality of opportunity, then, aims to correct for social contingencies but not for differentials in natural abilities and talents. Achieving fair equality of opportunity would

¹⁴¹ One commonly cited hypothetical example is from Bernard Williams’s “The Idea of Equality” (2005 [1962]). In a society in which great prestige is accorded to being in a warrior class, formal equality of opportunity could be achieved if membership in the class was determined on the basis of a competition of strength. That formal equality of opportunity would be preserved even if the rich dominate competitions because they enjoy better nourishment (110).

¹⁴² Of course, the supposition that there are natural, measurable talents that can and should play this role in differentiating aptitude for such positions may not be harmless.

arguably require massive interventions—investment in early childhood environments and neighborhoods, substantially more public education, and much more careful regulation of the selection process for positions that are associated with social and economic inequalities.

Even if such efforts were undertaken, Rawls notes that this ambition (to ensure that those with equal talents and willingness to use them have the same prospects of success) will be stymied “as long as some form of the family exists” (1999a [1971], 64). The reason for this is straightforward: families can transmit unequal resources and opportunities that cannot be easily corrected. So long as children are generally raised by their parents in discrete family units, there will be an uneven distribution of such resources. As Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift have noted, parents can provide a considerable variety of advantages to their children, from better schooling, food, health care, housing, to more abstract goods of cultural capital and social connections (2014, 29). Even if the state could step in to provide public versions of many of those advantages (Richard Arneson imagines the state providing every child with “special tennis lessons and fancy tutorial assistance” to match what wealthy parents provide their children [2015]), there are less easily replicable goods that well-educated, well-resourced parents can give their children.¹⁴³ As such, it is not just that it would be enormously expensive to try to correct for all social contingencies; it is simply impossible to secure equal opportunities so long as these kinds of relationships exist.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Here are a few examples of less easily replicable goods: the subtle signals of cultural capital and “good breeding,” a demeanor or comportment that is well-fitted for successful environments, genuine tastes or preferences for high-status activities, personal connections to those in positions of privilege, and a kind of confidence generated by being raised by someone particularly successful or adept at navigating social and professional challenges. Of course, some of these goods are only valuable in worlds of significant inequality and competition for positional advantages, but it seems plausible that correlates would be found in any world with uneven education or training, differentials in talent and power, or social groupings that recognize distinctions in status or esteem.

¹⁴⁴ This is not the only impediment to full realization of equality of opportunity. Joseph Fishkin (2014) points out several other obstacles: it will be impossible to cleanly distinguish merit from circumstantial advantages that contribute to one’s talents and dispositions, there will be trouble distinguishing at what point individuals should be

If individuals' basic liberties of association (including the liberty to form families and to conduct the internal life of those families on their own terms, within certain limits) take lexical priority over a principle of equal opportunity, then equality of opportunity cannot be perfectly secured. Fair equality of opportunity is significantly more robust than merely formal equality of opportunity, but it does not realize perfect equality of opportunity, where all social contingencies would be entirely corrected for in the social system (Freeman 2007b, 97). Imperfectly realized fair equality of opportunity allows some persisting inequalities in how positions and offices are filled, though it would not remotely resemble the disparities we see today.¹⁴⁵

Rawls argues that fair equality of opportunity is an ambition parties in the original position would conclude is reasonable given their other commitments (i.e., to give the liberty principle lexical priority and, further, to address the arbitrariness of favoring natural contingencies by adopting the difference principle). This context is important; if it is justified to pursue fair equality of opportunity, then that is because it is part of a just system. Supposing that justice evaluates social institutions as a whole, and this imperfect equality of opportunity is necessitated by a commitment to individual liberties, it can be part of a package that is evaluated as just.

This does not show that full equality of opportunity is not valuable. One might be tempted to say that if realizing full equality of opportunity under these circumstances would require unjust sacrifices of individual liberty, then we are mistaken to think full equality of opportunity is valuable at all (in the way that vulgar relational equality is best described as ersatz). However, where there are limited positions or offices correlated with special advantages,

held responsible for choices that limit their opportunities, and there will be trouble determining what opportunity set must be equalized.

¹⁴⁵ Greater public investment in providing an equal education and massive compression of economic inequality would significantly curtail the kinds of advantages parents could give their children.

there is good reason to want full equality of opportunity, on grounds of fairness.¹⁴⁶ It should be regretted if it cannot be fully or perfectly realized, and it would be a better world if we could achieve full equality of opportunity. This is true even if it would not be permissible for us to sacrifice individual liberties in order to achieve it.

Imperfectly realized fair equality of opportunity is still a principle of equality of opportunity, despite its tacit acceptance of something short of the full ideal. It does not offer a wholly novel conception of how we ought to distribute opportunities for positions; rather, it is characterized by its acceptance of partial success. Fair relational equality pursues a similar strategy. In virtue of the impossibility of achieving full relational equality without requiring that we abandon central liberal commitments, we have reason to accept a set of practices and norms that will imperfectly realize relational equality.¹⁴⁷

It is worth noting that we lack a freestanding account of the value of imperfectly realized fair equality of opportunity—that is, we cannot defend it in isolation from other commitments, which are relevant to understanding justice. We can only conclude that imperfectly realized fair equality of opportunity is justified by determining what is possible in light of other commitments and then evaluating the options. Likewise, an ideal of fair relational equality will not be freestanding, as it is articulable as part of a complex of principles. The interest in pursuing such strategies is not an exercise in nonideal theory. On the contrary, imperfectly realized fair equality of opportunity is presented as part of an ideal-theoretic conception of justice, but it can only be identified in relation to other commitments. If a fair relational equality strategy is an appropriate response to the compatibility worry, then there is work to be done in finding out what

¹⁴⁶ That is, assuming that a structure of select positions and offices is ineliminable or best all things considered.

¹⁴⁷ This subordinates the achievement of relational equality to some other demands of justice without denying that it is relevant to justice. It is only contingently subordinated—in circumstances where relational equality can be fully realized without compromising other ideals of justice, doing so is required.

conceptions of fair relational equality are justifiable, since not all imperfect realizations will be satisfactory.

1.2. Formal, Fair, and Full Relational Equality

In virtue of commitments to allowing individuals to plan and lead their own lives, perhaps liberals cannot achieve perfect or full relational equality, since there will be emergent social inequalities that resist easy rectification. That does not mean they must abandon relational-egalitarian commitments. They can continue to pursue an ideal of relational equality that is more substantive than what I call merely formal relational equality, even if it does not amount to full relational equality. Since fair relational equality is understood in terms of those contrasts, I will briefly describe how I understand those ideals. The distinctions between formal, fair, full, and vulgar relational equality focus on what matters are considered relevant for the achievement of relational equality and the degree to which they are achieved.

The society of *formal* relational equality is one in which equal citizenship is officially recognized.¹⁴⁸ The members of that society have an equal legal right to participate in collective decision-making, to use public spaces and resources, and to call upon the protection of the law. The state does not discriminate on the basis of ascriptive classes like race or sex, and the law protects against discrimination in the workplace. The society of formal relational equality does more than pay lip service to the ideal of relational equality; its institutions actively endorse egalitarian principles. Merely formal relational equality, though, claims that the structure of

¹⁴⁸ I do not claim that there is a contingent of relational egalitarians who defend the merely formal version of the ideal. It is useful to describe this for comparative purposes. Some relational egalitarians emphasize relationships among citizens or the obligations people have to each other as citizens (cf. Anderson 1999a, 314), but that is not sufficient reason to think such relational egalitarians are proposing a merely formal ideal. Emily McTernan suggests that relational egalitarians who adopt an institutional approach, focusing on the basic structure of society, are apt to miss some types of relational inequalities (2018, 262), so she might make a stronger claim about whether any relational egalitarians have a merely formal view.

political institutions and the content of the law exhaust the concerns of relational equality. It is exclusively concerned with how people relate as *citizens*, which it presumes is wholly captured by the rights and responsibilities created by the law.¹⁴⁹ Doubtless, restructuring legal institutions so that they fully recognize the equality of all citizens would require considerable effort. This focus, however, would overlook objectionable inequalities that arise in civil society and in private through the actions of individuals or through other aggregative mechanisms.¹⁵⁰ For instance, a legal structure that secures formal relational equality is compatible with the persistence of widespread, explicitly racist hostility in private. This alone is sufficient to construct objectionable hierarchies of status and influence. However much it is important to secure a relational-egalitarian legal structure, people in that society would not stand as equals. If individuals are effectively shut out of informal public deliberation or civic life by private discrimination, that does not necessarily affect whether they enjoy formal relational equality. So long as such private discrimination does not impede their official, legal rights, they may still stand as equals in society in the formal sense. If justice demands a commitment to relational equality and it is possible to address the inequalities that arise outside formal structures, the society with merely formal relational equality is not just.

The society of *full* relational equality is one in which people perfectly realize standing as equals. Using the criteria provided by the deliberative view, that would mean there must be no aspects of the relationship about which members could reasonably object to in egalitarian deliberation or which could impede that deliberative practice. All inequalities of power, status, or

¹⁴⁹ This might be thought of as a relational-egalitarian parallel to the move Kok-Chor Tan makes as a luck egalitarian in *Justice, Institutions, and Luck* (2012), as claiming that relational egalitarian principles only apply to institutions. Alternatively, it might be thought of as claiming that the only kind of relational equality worth wanting is captured by some kind of formal equality under the law. David Schmidtz's "Equal Respect and Equal Shares" (2002) might express a similar view.

¹⁵⁰ Alternatively, if it does concern itself with such inequalities, it is concerned only to the degree they compromise the value of legal, formal rights.

influence that are relevant to that deliberative relationship must be successfully eliminated. This vision can be drawn out in contrast to (ersatz) vulgar relational equality, which calls for the elimination of all inequalities of power, status, and influence whatsoever. Any uneven distribution of talent or ability, variation in social networks, or disagreement about what is valuable is apt to offend against vulgar relational equality. By contrast, full relational equality is only concerned with what is necessary for egalitarian decision-making (relevant forms of power, status, and standing are equalized). All the same, its successful realization would require considerably more than formal relational equality: if some groups had access to informal social resources that gave them dominating power or outsize influence over public deliberation, that would threaten full relational equality.

We might also think of full relational equality not just as a set of requirements but as a description of a state of affairs where an ideal is realized, with certain contingent, fortunate features of society in place. In such a society, nothing ultimately prevents the members from structuring their shared life in line with what could be agreed to under the EDC. They are able to understand each other's interests, and those interests are not irreconcilably at odds. In describing the egalitarian deliberative constraint, Scheffler claims that differences in fundamental values may make it difficult to sustain a deliberative practice (2015b, 27), and that "even the sincere efforts of the parties are no guarantee of success [in meeting the demands of the EDC]" (30). Although full relational equality does not require social homogeneity, some shared starting point or similarity may be necessary for them to fully understand each other and so weigh each other's interests appropriately. For those reasons, diverse societies whose members have fundamental disagreements about what is valuable may struggle to maintain that egalitarian deliberative practice.

Fair relational equality, by contrast, would be more demanding than merely formal relational equality and less demanding than perfectly realized full relational equality. This alone does not tell us what should qualify as fair relational equality, what institutional arrangements it would require, nor why fair relational equality should be counted as a form of relational equality. The basic idea of fair relational equality, as a response to the compatibility worry, can be understood in terms of three claims: (1) Patterns of informal social choices can genuinely impede relational equality. (2) Institutions and individuals can be asked to do more to mitigate informal social inequalities than is acknowledged by other accounts of relational egalitarianism. (3) The resulting set of relations would not perfectly realize full relational equality, but it is not unjust or an abandonment of relational egalitarian commitments to accept fair relational equality in the face of the compatibility worry.

Finally, it is worth noting the way this is only an inexact analogy to fair equality of opportunity. There is no precise analogue to vulgar relational equality in the conversation about equality of opportunity, so there may be some differences between full relational equality and perfectly realized equality of opportunity. Perhaps one could distinguish the forms of equality of opportunity that are desirable and yet unachievable in a liberal society (i.e., what we can call perfect or full equality of opportunity) from forms of equality of opportunity that are not even desirable. A strictly literal interpretation of equality of opportunity (what comes closest to vulgar equality of opportunity) might require leveling down natural talents and the unrelenting homogenization of the population so that each individual has exactly the same opportunity set. Whether we can extend the parallel is ultimately not important; the reason for making this analogy is to help explain the idea of fair relational equality. To tie off this discussion, I'll summarize the analogy in the table below.

Table 1. The Formal/Fair/Full Analogy.

	Equality of Opportunity	Relational Equality
Formal	Careers open to talents	Official recognition of equal status, no legal castes, etc.
Fair	Those with similar abilities have similar life chances (imperfectly realized)	Relationships structured by the egalitarian deliberative constraint (imperfectly realized)
Full (Perfect)	Perfect/unhindered attainment of FEO	Everything requisite for egalitarian decision-making is secured
Vulgar	(If there is a parallel) Homogenizing of option sets	No variations in power, status, or influence of any kind

1.3. Criteria for Fair Relational Equality

In order to be able to defend a fair relational equality strategy, we need some standard for adjudicating what, short of full or perfect relational equality, might still appropriately constitute a form of relational equality at all. What distinguishes so-called fair relational equality from a simple failure to achieve relational equality? So far nothing has been said about what would satisfy the description of fair relational equality. Most relational egalitarians already defend a view more demanding than merely formal relational egalitarianism, inasmuch as many agree that interaction in private and in civil society can upset standing as equals.¹⁵¹ It does not follow that all the available accounts of liberal relational egalitarianism will count as meeting the requirements of fair relational equality. What will be considered throughout the rest of this

¹⁵¹ Although relational egalitarians may give the impression of only being committed to formal relational equality when they use language of how “citizens” relate or the claims citizens can make on each other, there is consistent evidence of wider concerns. Elizabeth Anderson claims, in the context of discussing recalcitrant patriarchal attitudes, that “inequality consists in hierarchical social relations among people. . . . It is propagated through various unjust practices of social interaction” (2009, 132). Scheffler describes relational equality as claiming that “*human relations* must be conducted on the basis of an assumption that everyone’s life is equally important” (2003b, 22, emphasis added). Even a tightly circumscribed concern for how citizens relate requires more than merely formally equal treatment by the state and equality of legal rights. The language of citizenship is more often used not to stake out a commitment to a merely formal version of relational equality but to limit the size of the egalitarian community.

chapter and the next are ways liberal relational egalitarian accounts should respond to the threats to relational equality described in chapter 4.

Fair relational equality should be understood in terms of two criteria, which I can begin to explain here. First, there is a *reasons-for-failure* requirement: a society only realizes fair relational equality if failure to realize the full ideal is due to other demands of justice. Second, there is a *reasonable approximation* requirement: if the society in question cannot eliminate severe inequalities of power, status, and influence, we should instead say that relational equality is impossible under those circumstances.

The first criterion, subject to further qualification, implies that members of society should be asked to do everything they can to dampen or eliminate residual inequalities, up to the point at which further demands on them would conflict with other fundamental commitments of justice. While this is vague, it picks out the idea that a society is not meaningfully committed to relational equality if its members refuse to take the available liberal measures to eliminating recalcitrant, objectionable inequalities. Such a refusal would reflect a lack of sincere commitment to the relational egalitarian ideal. (A similar feature characterizes acceptable versions of imperfectly realized fair equality of opportunity—FEO might be accomplished in spite of inequalities caused by commitment to a liberty principle but not if the society failed to achieve equality of opportunity simply out of apathy.) On that basis, we can provisionally set the standard for fair relational equality in terms of the compatibility worry.¹⁵² That would demand that society take all available steps to achieve relational equality, up to the point at which further efforts would threaten the liberal commitment to fundamental individual liberties.

¹⁵² Should there be conflicts between the relational-egalitarian ideal and other demands of justice, of course, what constitutes fair relational equality would have to be further adjusted.

The second criterion, which also requires further specification, recognizes that there are some circumstances that simply should not count as satisfying any form of the relational egalitarian ideal. For instance, suppose that (after all available liberal measures have been taken) there is still a profound inequality in power among social groups at the end of the day, such that the weaker is always at the mercy of the stronger. In such a circumstance, these social groups will not stand as equals, even if their relationship might otherwise be decent and acceptable given the circumstances. If recalcitrant inequalities are relatively minor, however, the parties might yet achieve an imperfect but recognizably egalitarian relationship. Both of these criteria will be discussed further in the context of more concrete examples.

2. Informal Social Interaction and Relational Equality

The previous section introduced the idea of fair relational equality, but to properly assess its promise as part of a response to the compatibility worry, we need an account of what it requires. More specifically, we need to know what relational egalitarians could do to dampen or eliminate emergent social inequalities that would not simply abandon the liberal commitment to leaving individuals significant discretion in their informal social lives. Only after giving an account of what could be done to eliminate or mitigate emergent social inequalities will we be in a position to see what would satisfy the first criterion of fair relational equality. In chapter 6, after this account is completed, we will also be in a position to judge whether the result instantiates an imperfect but recognizable form of relational equality.

The overall goal in the second part of this chapter is to argue for a focus on the informal social structure of a society—the system of norms and practices by which a society organizes

informal interactions and relationships.¹⁵³ The informal social structure consists of the norms that give informal social life its predictable shape, and the practices and institutions that facilitate certain types of interaction. The account I defend will argue that institutions and individuals must focus on helping to create and maintain an informal social structure that mitigates emergent social inequalities.

In the first subsection, I argue that the prospect of emergent social inequalities calls for a responses that focus on the structure of informal social interaction, instead of just on choices that individuals make in isolation. Second, I offer some working definitions of ‘norms’ and ‘informal social practices.’ In the third subsection, I describe how the norms of informal social interaction could be viewed holistically, as a system that defines basic social categories and mediates interaction generally. This system plays an important role in organizing social cooperation and can be categorized as part of the basic structure of society. Fourth, I then argue that members of a society of equals have reason to subject informal social norms to egalitarian deliberation, to treat those norms as an important part of the institutional framework of their society. What they should treat as apt objects for collective decision are the basic contours of that informal social structure, not every single informal social norm. Members of a society of equals need not make every personal decision a matter for public, collective deliberation, but they should treat the informal social structure itself as something to be built and refined together. Individuals have responsibilities to help build a fairer system of informal social practices. Those responsibilities

¹⁵³ There is some resemblance between the focus here and Iris Marion Young’s account of “social-structural processes” (2011, 52). Young is interested in explaining how the unintended consequences of combinations of actions, practices, and developed environments can be unjust. Young’s account of social structure is more capacious than my account of the informal social structure—her examples of social-structural processes include laws, housing markets, and public services as relevant. As will become clear below, I characterize the informal social structure as a complex of norms and practices of informal interaction. Such a complex might be in interaction with laws, contingent developments in the economy, or public institutions, but it does not include them. However, I share with Young an ambition to identify how we might have a responsibility to change otherwise innocuous social norms and practices.

have a different shape and justification than simple duties to make all informal social choices in ways that promote relational equality. A focus on the informal social structure, I argue, thus provides a way to think about how liberal relational egalitarians can respond to the compatibility worry. Finally, in the fifth subsection, I summarize and explain the connections between fair relational equality and a focus on the informal social structure.

2.1. The Insufficiency of Focusing on Individual Choices

Before developing an account of what duties individuals and institutions have to help create fair relational equality, it is worth noting why fair relational equality is particularly focused on the structure of informal social interaction. An alternative response to the compatibility worry might argue that individuals simply have obligations to make different informal social choices (i.e., to choose different people as friends and romantic partners, to adopt different avocations, to move to a particular neighborhood, to spend their time in particular activities, to adopt particular conceptions of value or express praise only when it is politically convenient). On this view, they would be required to choose options that would eliminate or best mitigate emergent social inequalities. A view like this is alluded to in chapter 4, when discussing whether the achievement of relational equality might require a thoroughgoing egalitarian ethos or constant calculation. This kind of strategy might make the imposition on individuals' social choices one part of a multi-pronged response to emergent social inequalities, or one might argue that if everyone made those choices with an appropriate ethos, that would be sufficient to realize relational equality.

The individual choices response is obviously not compatible with the liberal commitments described in chapter 3, since it demands the subordination of all individual social

choices, but it would also fail to realize relational equality. First, there is a calculation problem—individuals lack the resources to accurately judge how their informal social choices would aggregate with others to produce emergent social inequalities, so there is no way for them to choose in a manner that avoids the threat of such inequalities. One of the problems posed by emergent social inequalities is precisely that, at the individual level, the choices look perfectly innocuous. The causal contribution each individual social choice makes to larger problems of differentials in power and status is far too difficult for individuals to determine.

Second, depending on how the duty is specified, there may be a problem squaring such duties with the dignity of others. If the individual choices response simply directed people to choose their friends, romantic partners, and associates from a predetermined social circle or in a fashion dictated by relational-egalitarian concerns, or worse, if it directed individuals to select specific people as friends or lovers on the basis of those concerns, it would undermine the creation of genuine relationships and impose dignitarian harms on the supposed “beneficiaries” of such direction. Duties to befriend people on the basis of their likely marginalization, or conversely a duty to befriend someone on the basis of their comparative inclusion, is not compatible with treating them respectfully.¹⁵⁴

Assigning individuals duties to make personal social choices in particular ways could create objectionable status hierarchies. Duties to treat members of some group differently in informal social settings because of their unlikability, social ineptness or bad fortune, or other need for special favors would foster less extreme but still objectionable status hierarchies.

Informal relationships require a certain spontaneity or “natural” formation; genuine friendships,

¹⁵⁴ That is distinct from the claim that one has some responsibility to show compassion or concern for someone on the basis of likely marginalization. I think this worry is separate from worries about the best responses to historic segregation (see Anderson 2010c and Shelby 2016), since this could well be an issue in societies without a legacy of injustice. I will draw out the connections between those problems in chapter 7.

for instance, are predicated on genuine mutual attraction or shared interests. To generalize, in the sphere of intimate and informal social relationships, genuine relationships are rooted in appropriate reasons, which we generally take to involve unforced emotion or responses to apt qualities like charm, attractiveness, or admirability. At best, one can put oneself in situations where it is more likely genuine relationships with people from a broader spectrum of society will be cultivated.¹⁵⁵ Even that can threaten to create dignitarian harms in some circumstances. If the duty is for high-status individuals to go “slumming” and spread their valuable social connections to less advantaged people, for example,¹⁵⁶ the resulting action could exacerbate unhealthy, inequalitarian relations. At least for these reasons, people deliberating as equals could not demand that others make social choices in this way.

2.2. *The Vocabulary of Informal Social Norms*

My account of fair relational equality will instead focus on what would constitute fair social norms and practices.¹⁵⁷ The fact that emergent social inequalities can be the reliable product of certain social practices is partly because there is a structure to those practices—a set of explicit or implicit rules and expectations. How individual social choices are made, how their influence is felt in the aggregate, and the expressive significance of those choices are at least

¹⁵⁵ Chiara Cordelli takes a similar line in recent work, arguing that “relational resources” are goods that distributive justice should be concerned with, and that the appropriate response to this concern is to equalize opportunities for relational resources rather than the resources themselves (2015a, 2015b). Cordelli approaches the subject from a distributive-egalitarian framework, and I think her attempt to absorb relational-egalitarian concerns into such a framework fails, but I agree with her claim that relational “resources” cannot be directly distributed.

¹⁵⁶ I am assuming for the sake of argument that even in a society of equals there may be sufficient differences between people that could justify a description of some as advantaged. I do not suggest that a society of equals would have such disparities that would justify classes of rich and poor or that such a society is compatible with the persistence of slums. Liberal relational egalitarian views like Anderson’s and Scheffler’s countenance the possibility of some limited economic inequalities (justified by something like the difference principle), and that would be sufficient for this purpose. Even setting that aside, differences in natural talent, achievement, and fortune may give some greater power, resources, status, or influence.

¹⁵⁷ To be clear, I am not claiming that fair relational equality requires *only* that we create and maintain fair social norms and practices. Fair relational equality requires the sociopolitical framework already described in chapter 4, along with further institutional and individual responses to emergent social inequalities.

partly dependent on that informal social structure. The horizon of social possibilities (what people take to be their set of options) is influenced by these norms and expectations, such that individuals may not even consider alternatives to norm-compliant behavior. Those who act contrary to expectations are likely to be met with confusion, surprise, or frustration. So the normative structure of informal social interaction can play a role in making some emergent social inequalities more or less likely.

The language of the structure, norms, or practices of informal social life is relatively vague and may call to mind a number of different, possibly incompatible research traditions,¹⁵⁸ so I will specify what I have in mind before proceeding with an account of fair social norms.

First, we need some explanation of ‘social norms’ and ‘informal social practices.’ At the most general level, a social norm in this sense is a rule of behavior accepted by a group, which licenses injunctions and criticism. The understanding of ‘social norm’ at use here is relatively simple and nontechnical.¹⁵⁹ The important components are (a) a kind of imperative or ‘ought’

¹⁵⁸ I will draw on philosophical treatments of the nature and function of norms as necessary to advance this argument, but a fuller treatment of the literature on norms, much less a survey of the extensive work in sociology or social psychology, is not possible for reasons of space.

¹⁵⁹ Its dimensions might be best seen in contrast with other definitions. Cristina Bicchieri distinguishes “social norms” from social customs, conventions, and other patterns of activity built on conditional preferences (such as fashions). On her view, a social norm is at work when individuals prefer to conform to it if they believe that (a) relevant others also conform to it and (b) those others endorse the norm as a rule of behavior that licenses sanctioning (2017, 35). For my purposes, I do not need to distinguish norms from more general conventions and ways of organizing behavior. (My use of ‘social norm’ might better fit with the recent, more general definition given by Brennan, Eriksson, Goodin, and Southwood—they describe social norms as rules that impose general requirements, which have been accepted by the relevant community, and which serve to enable some practice of holding each other accountable (2013, 3, 13). The idea that informal social norms indicate what is appropriate seems to track how they describe norms as clusters of normative attitudes—beliefs that people must behave in certain ways, expectations of conformity, or disapproval for inappropriate or aberrant behavior (29–30).) Some theorists draw a sharp distinction between moral norms and social norms (e.g., Brennan, Eriksson, Goodin, and Southwood 2013, 6; Anderson 2000, 170), but aside from agreeing that moral norms are not compatible with the kinds of conditional preferences for compliance that characterize many social norms, I don’t need to draw a sharp boundary. Bicchieri also reserves the term ‘social norm’ for prescriptions that generally require individuals to act against narrow self-interest (2006, 2). I don’t need to distinguish norms that run counter to narrow self-interest—I am happy to include some conventional ways of behaving that serve self-interest by coordinating behavior or facilitating communication (e.g., in societies where we wave or nod our heads to acknowledge each other, wagging our elbows instead would just fail to communicate). If that warrants distinguishing social norms from conventions in all cases,

that indicates appropriate behavior, (b) acceptance by a group, and (c) some system of responses by which group members can hold each other accountable or respond appropriately.¹⁶⁰ Social norms can indicate ranges of appropriate behavior (they need not pick out particular actions as uniquely appropriate). The strength of the imperative can vary: some norms identify noncompliant behavior as absolutely prohibited; others identify noncompliant behavior as merely distasteful or abnormal. Whether a norm is in place is not a matter of whether the members of the community would explicitly articulate it as a rule they follow; rather, whether a norm is operative depends on whether individuals' responses to compliant and non-compliant behavior vary as the norm indicates, such that they could endorse it on reflection.

A social practice can be understood as a relatively stable, norm-governed activity that a group engages in. 'Social practices' may also refer more generally to the way informal social interaction is organized, which helps individuals coordinate their behavior even if departures from customary ways of acting do not license criticism. Reference to practices may be useful when we want to talk about the norm-guided activities (and not just the norms themselves). By 'informal social practices,' I mean social practices that do not have a fully codified set of rules, that are not managed by a central organization (like the state), and that take place in our relationships with each other as private individuals.¹⁶¹ That includes some interaction with

my use of 'informal social norms' can be read as shorthand for the conjunction of informal social norms and conventions.

¹⁶⁰ This is similar to Elizabeth Anderson's ecumenical account of social norms in "Beyond *Homo Economicus*": "A social norm is a standard of behavior shared by a social group, commonly understood by its members as authoritative or obligatory for them" (2000, 170). Those three elements are also the central components that Jon Elster identifies as central to social norms in *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (1989, 113).

¹⁶¹ A quick word on the distinction between 'formal' and 'informal': At the moment I am relying on vague but commonly understood intuitions about the distinctions between formal and informal practices, since a clear and systematic distinction would constitute an independent project in itself. Formal norms and practices are explicitly defined, backed by law or organizational charters; they tend to be regulated and enforced by states and organizations. Examples of formal norms of interaction would include the rules of order for deliberation in a town hall forum or the legally enforced norms governing transactions between proprietors and customers.

strangers in public, as well as the internal life of our relationships with friends, neighbors, and partners.

Informal social norms indicate appropriate ways of interacting. In some cases, deviance from the appropriate way of acting may merely produce confusion (though it is usually joined to at least mild disapproval, if there is a genuine need to coordinate some social activity). In other cases, deviation from appropriate ways of interacting may open one to sanction or disapproval as rude or worse (e.g., consider the reactions to violations of distance-standing practices or the norms governing entrance into someone else's private space).¹⁶² Beyond norms of appropriateness, we also have expectations about how such practices go—strangers engage in small talk about shared experiences or common interests on the way to forming an acquaintanceship, for instance. Those expectations result in ease when the informal norms and expectations are followed and discomfort when they are not. Our evaluations of others may track violations of these norms, and even where we do not think less of a norm violator, their interactions may be less successful or understandable.

Social norms and practices can vary in how widely they are accepted. Some basic social norms might arguably govern interaction among all or most members of a society (e.g., *one ought to acknowledge the presence of another person when they enter the room*), whereas others may be accepted by particular groups or subcultures within that society (e.g., *one ought to salute a superior officer when she or he enters the room, one ought to signal acceptance of a peer by acknowledging them with an upward head nod*). Norms that a particular group adopts may not be

¹⁶² Much of the literature on norms is concerned with explaining why agents act as they do, describing their motives, and offering arguments as to how social norms affect agents' evaluations of outcomes (e.g., Anderson [2000] argues that people conform to some social norms as an expression of social identity, and Brennan and Pettit [2004] argue for explaining compliance in terms of supply of and demand for esteem). I am not primarily concerned here with why people do conform but with the normative structure of informal social life itself. Of course, I am assuming that social norms shape individuals' choices for a variety of reasons, that they do have some influence over how people act.

adopted by others outside the group, or even acknowledged as norms of appropriateness. There is certainly not consensus among everyone in society about exactly what kinds of behavior are appropriate in informal social practices, much less what kinds of behavior are even regulated by social norms.

These brief notes give an indication of what I mean by ‘social norms’ and ‘informal social practices.’ Explaining what I mean by ‘informal social structure’ requires a bit more of an argument, which I will turn to now.

2.3. Informal Norms as Part of the Basic Structure of Society

In this section, I defend two claims. First, we can view informal social life as being structured by a background framework of norms and expectations. Second, members of society can treat that background framework as an important institution of their society which they should shape and manage together.

What I call the informal social structure is a complex of norms and practices that organize social cooperation and set the terms of interaction.¹⁶³ If we recognize a set of shared informal norms and practices as an essential institution that works to organize informal social life, there is a space for liberals to consider individual duties not to simply make different informal social choices but to help build and maintain a just form of that institution. While there would certainly be difficulty in identifying the precise boundaries of such a set of informal norms and practices (i.e., identifying which norms and practices play this central organizing

¹⁶³ The informal social structure may be thought of as the way in which *all* operative informal social norms and practices work to provide some scaffolding for interaction, or we may think that the term is best reserved for a complex of fundamental social norms that are shared by (nearly) everyone. Since nothing in my argument hangs on the difference—individuals will have duties to support just informal social structures either way, and the way to fulfill that duty will be through indirect action in either case—I will not pursue further reasons for preferring one conception of the informal social structure over the other. The second option strikes me as more plausible, given that there may be norms of interaction among an incredibly small minority that do not make any appreciable difference on the way others in society interact.

role), it is less contentious that some informal social norms and practices are essential to social cooperation. Since evaluation of the informal social structure would center on how it fulfills the general function of organizing social cooperation, a justifiable arrangement could be one in which social behavior varies considerably by group or individual. What matters is whether the complex as a whole can be justified by the lights of the EDC.¹⁶⁴

Why think that our informal social life is organized or structured at all? The norms governing the internal life of some private associations and subcultures can diverge considerably from a society's mainstream culture: the Amish may have radically different conceptions of the appropriateness of asking for help from neighbors than other Americans, and members of the Haight-Ashbury community in 1967 may have thought quite differently about romantic relationships. In addition to variation in subcultures, there is also considerable variation among individuals in how they negotiate informal social expectations with personal preferences and dispositions.

Even so, we have good reasons to believe there is a shared (or overlapping) framework of informal norms. First, to put it simply, some shared conceptions of social life or very basic social scripts seem necessary for coexistence.¹⁶⁵ It seems doubtful that we could make sense of each other's actions or intentions or coordinate our lives in any meaningful way without some such

¹⁶⁴ This approach to inequalities created by informal social interaction is similar in some ways to the approach Emily McTernan (2018) adopts for dealing with microaggressions. On her view, relational egalitarians may need to change associated social norms and practices (such as norms of politeness) to address social interaction that facilitates status hierarchies. The big difference between McTernan's approach and mine is that the informal social structure is a way of reconciling an institutionalist approach to justice with attention to informal social interaction. I argue that understanding how aspects of informal social practices can be construed as part of the basic structure of society helps to delimit individuals' responsibility and make room for a liberal account.

¹⁶⁵ By 'social script,' I do not mean a fully specified set of instructions or dialogue for particular social encounters. Rather, I mean to refer to the psychological concept of social scripts as sets of general social norms that shape our understanding of events: "Our knowledge about the social and natural world is grounded in experience and structured into what are called 'schemata.' . . . Schemata for events are called 'scripts'. . . . Scripts are essentially prescriptive sequences of actions of varying levels of specificity that people automatically engage in (and are expected to engage in) while in particular situations" (Bicchieri 2017, 131–2).

conceptions.¹⁶⁶ Second, we can observe some overlap in the informal social norms that are accepted. The variations we see in how groups and subcultures organize themselves are identifiable against a wider field of agreement. In societies like ours, those norms distinguish general ideas of public and private space, formal and informal behavior, appropriate intimacy and partiality and characteristic internal behavior within broadly conceived kinds of relationships, and general norms of interaction and social scripts.

The informal social structure plays an important role in defining the broad contours of social life and appropriate ranges of behavior. Some set of informal norms are needed so that people have a shared understanding of what constitutes “social space” and how we inhabit it (e.g., how we move through spaces of civil society, norms governing physical contact and civil inattention). Norms that define social roles—what distinguishes strangers, acquaintances, friends, neighbors, lovers, business partners, buyers and sellers, service providers and clients—provide a set of expectations for reasonable behavior for all those who inhabit such roles. Practices of forming and maintaining friendships, making conversation, initiating and participating in romantic relationships, expressing esteem and disesteem, acting as parents and caregivers, and interacting with others in civil society are all shaped by implicitly understood norms that define appropriate types of informal social behavior. There is significant overlap in individuals’ understanding of when it is appropriate to meet people and form new connections—some kinds of gatherings invite individuals to “get to know” each other and form new social bonds, whereas in other circumstances too much or too casual conversation will draw negative

¹⁶⁶ Consider the tremendously subtle norms that guide the creation and maintenance of social “fronts,” stylized performances that communicate aspects of ourselves or how we wish others to view us (Goffman 1956).

reactions.¹⁶⁷ Likewise, there is a need for a shared understanding of the appropriate manner and substance of informal communication.¹⁶⁸

This structure provides a general background framework for social interaction, which groups and individuals can interpret and fill out in various ways as they pursue different goals and form a variety of relationships. A general background framework would not have to comprehensively specify how interaction should go. An informal social structure might provide some basic social expectations and scripts for how strangers interact, but middle-school girls and middle-aged professors will undoubtedly develop quite distinct ways of initiating new friendships.¹⁶⁹

The informal social structure is not usually as deliberately designed as political institutions. On the contrary, it usually develops gradually and without much collective deliberation at all. Since there are complex collective action problems involved in norm emergence and abandonment,¹⁷⁰ designing and implementing social norms may require more than just deliberative agreement. That they generally develop in this gradual and unintended manner does not show that they could not be made objects of discussion and justification,

¹⁶⁷ This is compatible with there being considerable vagueness in some circumstances. So long as the social world is loosely organized into spaces and circumstances where these general norms apply, even if the boundaries are contested, there will be good reason to think of informal norms as helping to facilitate our interaction.

¹⁶⁸ Even where there is significant disagreement about appropriate behavior, there are predictable points on which people will agree some social norms are necessary, even if they disagree about what particular norms should be adopted: how to negotiate appropriate physical contact and distance, how to communicate welcome and unwelcome forms of attention, how to make polite addresses and requests, how to distinguish “small talk” from more serious interaction, how to police the boundaries of relationships (e.g., whether we need social norms governing disclosure and “oversharing”), or how to express good will and pro-social intentions (e.g., through gestures of humility, self-deprecation, hospitality, or cooperativeness). These examples are mainly drawn from Karen Stohr’s *On Manners* (2012). While Stohr’s book does not deal with specific prescriptions on these issues, she does point to examples of guidebooks that set out explicit formulations of norms of politeness. We get along quite fine in communities where there are continuing disagreements about what kind of behavior is appropriate, but those disputes typically presuppose wider fields of agreement.

¹⁶⁹ I owe this particularly vivid example to Henry Richardson.

¹⁷⁰ See Bicchieri (2017, 109) and Sunstein (1996).

however. We have good reason to think we need to be able to justify the informal social structure to each other, as it can have a profound influence on individuals' ability to deliberate as equals.

The informal social structure ought to be treated as an institution of the basic structure of society, in the Rawlsian sense of 'basic structure'.¹⁷¹ The basic structure of society consists of a set of institutions, considered as a whole, that determine how the benefits and burdens of shared society will be distributed to the members of that society.¹⁷² The institutions of the basic structure organize social cooperation and mediate interaction among members of society. In liberal political theory, the idea of the basic structure can provide a focus for evaluations of justice and help specify what institutions individuals have a duty to support.¹⁷³

There is nothing in the definition of the basic structure as a set of *institutions* that rules out including informal social practices. Institutions, according to the Rawlsian view, are "public systems of rules" (Rawls 1999a [1971], 48), or rule-governed practices.¹⁷⁴ For something to qualify as an institution in this sense, it must have relatively settled, publicly accessible rules that

¹⁷¹ This is stronger than but related to Miriam Ronzoni's claim that it is false that "a focus on the basic structure necessarily ignores informal social norms" (2008, 205).

¹⁷² In some formulations, Rawls characterizes the basic structure as being not the institutions themselves but the "way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation" (1999a [1971], 6, emphasis added) or their "arrangement . . . into one scheme of cooperation" (47). In other formulations he defines the basic structure as "the main political and social institutions and the way they fit together" (2001, 4). These variations underscore that a holistic assessment is necessary, and institutions may be considered part of the basic structure in some capacity—insofar as they contribute to the distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation—such that not every feature of them will be relevant.

¹⁷³ Of course, some philosophers reject the usefulness of the idea of a basic structure altogether. Liam Murphy (1999) and G. A. Cohen (2008), for instance, have argued that fundamental principles of justice apply equally to individual conduct as to institutional design, so treating the basic structure as a separate subject is apt to illegitimately endorse unjust individual behavior. I think Samuel Scheffler's description of the division of moral labor as a way of addressing value pluralism (2005b), discussed in chapter 3, shows another way of understanding why institutions might merit such attention—they can do distinctive moral work. I do not engage the anti-institutionalist argument in full here, but I assume that Scheffler's account is plausible enough to at least warrant consideration of how the idea of a basic structure might be useful. The description of the informal social structure as an element of the basic structure will also help to show why Scheffler's deliberative conception of relational equality need not be in conflict with institutionalism about justice, as Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen has argued (2018, 145).

¹⁷⁴ C. M. Melenovsky's work on the notion of an institution is helpful here; he defines institutions as a subset of social practices, "patterns of individual action and expectation understood to accord with certain social rules" (2013, 602). On his view, an institution is a particularly important social practice that has more structure and settled rules than other practices—a difference in degree rather than in kind (608).

give it structure.¹⁷⁵ That said, the specificity and explicitness of the rules will vary from one institution to another. The typical list of institutions included in the basic structure—the political constitution, the economy, the family—have very different kinds of rules. The public system of rules that regulates the family as an institution is not and need not be written down or made explicit (however much family law regulates the practice in some limited aspects). Rather, the public system of rules that governs the family as an institution is more like convention—a pattern of actions and mutual expectations that each of us knows each other knows. Norms and practices of informal social interaction are not radically different, on that point.¹⁷⁶

The inclusion of an institution in the basic structure does not mean that every aspect of that institution is relevant. Although the political constitution is an institution of the basic structure, not every detail of that constitution matters for the purposes of evaluating the basic structure—only those that have some influence on the distribution of benefits and burdens of cooperation are pertinent. The family “in some form” is part of the basic structure (Rawls 2001, 10), because it plays a central role in facilitating socially necessary labor (the rearing of citizens and the reproduction of society), but not every detail about family life needs to be directly regulated by principles for the basic structure. Likewise, saying some informal social norms and practices should be included in our conception of the basic structure of society need not mean that all aspects of informal social life are relevant. Nor does the claim that some informal norms

¹⁷⁵ Even though they are mutable, institutions have a certain enduring quality (a one-off event will not count).

¹⁷⁶ Someone might reply here that the family is not properly considered an institution in the same sense as the political constitution. The place of the family in the basic structure in Rawls’s view is not transparent; some interpreters emphasize how it is indirectly constrained by principles of justice rather than directly regulated (see, e.g., Freeman [2007b]), so someone might take a line that the family is not properly considered one of the institutions of the basic structure any more than voluntary associations. If one resists calling the structuring norms of the informal social world an institution in the full sense because of the ambiguities in some of its norms (saying it fails to provide a public system of rules), I am happy to call it a *quasi*-institution instead and argue that it is an appropriate target of collective deliberation all the same. It is inarguable that some informal social norms governing association and interaction are clear to all, even if other norms are contested. The more well-defined parts of the informal social structure help to define the roles and responsibilities of people in a shared society, and for those reasons I think it merits consideration as *some* kind of institution. Whatever the case, where informal social norms can be identified and assessed, they can be the subject of collective deliberation by equals.

and practices belong in the basic structure imply that, for example, norms of friendship must be directly governed by principles of justice. We cannot judge the justice of the rules of the market in isolation from an evaluation of the system as a whole. Likewise, the norms and practices of informal social life are not assessed in isolation but as part of the larger whole.

The primary reason that the informal social structure ought to be included in the basic structure is that its norms and practices play an important role in organizing social cooperation. This criterion for basic-structure inclusion, or something like it, has been phrased in several ways by others.¹⁷⁷ What is decisive is that if we view society as a cooperative endeavor, the structure of our informal social practices will be as essential to that endeavor as any political constitution or economic structure. We need shared informal norms and practices at some level of generality in order to interact and communicate, to share space, to form and dissolve relationships, and to make plans. It might also be thought that the informal social structure should be included because it exercises a profound and pervasive impact on the life prospects of individuals in society.¹⁷⁸ The structure of informal social practices does have a significant influence over life prospects: the norms of association, romantic relations, and reasonable partiality can shape an individual's opportunities, their resources, and (to the degree social circles give meaning and

¹⁷⁷ Arash Abizadeh (2007, 319) and Samuel Freeman (2007b, 102) emphasize the role that basic-structure institutions play in organizing social cooperation. A. J. Julius includes those institutions that facilitate our "inevitable interaction" (2003, 328). Louis-Philippe Hodgson includes all institutions that individuals must navigate in order to exercise a conception of the good (2012, 306). The informal social structure will qualify on any of these views, since it plays an important role in setting the terms of productive social cooperation.

¹⁷⁸ One reason for treating the basic structure as the primary subject of justice is that "its effects are so profound and pervasive from the start" (Rawls 1999a [1971], 8), and some have read that language back into criteria for which institutions count, saying that having a profound and pervasive impact is part of what makes an institution a component of the basic structure. I don't see how that works, since Rawls is here talking about the basic structure as a whole; it may be that some institution ought to count as part of the basic structure only because in combination with other social institutions it comes to exercise a profound and pervasive impact (even if in isolation it would not do so). Something like a profound and pervasive impact criterion may motivate G. A. Cohen's argument for demands of justice in personal choice—as many have remarked, Cohen ultimately moves from the identification of the profound and pervasive impact of personal behavior on other individuals' life prospects to the conclusion that the principles that apply to the basic structure also ought to govern individual choices (see, e.g., Ronzoni 2008, 207-8, and Abizadeh 2007).

shape to their lives) their self-conception. What friends one has and how one is held up for esteem or disesteem makes a significant impact on one's well-being. Even if we heed Andrew Williams's point that a profound-and-pervasive-impact criterion on its own will not identify the institutions of the basic structure—since an additional criterion for Rawls is that the relevant basic-structure institutions are activities governed by public norms (1998, 233)—some aspects of activities in informal social life will qualify.¹⁷⁹

If the informal social structure can be counted as an institution of the basic structure, then an account of individual duties to help realize fair relational equality can be tailored around what it would take to support that institution. Such a set of duties might provide a principled way to restrict what is required of individuals, so that not every social choice need be made in a certain spirit or governed by political calculation. Members of a society of equals should at least treat the institutions of the basic structure as matters for collective deliberation. Whether and how to shape the informal social structure is a decision that falls within the context of their relationship.

A predictable, challenging rejoinder would be that the norms of informal social life are diffuse or vague, unsystematic, and highly contentious, unlike other basic-structure institutions. The reply to that objection is twofold. First, we can emphasize the difference between informal social norms as discrete, particular rules and the informal social structure as a whole. While there may be many informal social norms that are not uniformly adopted by all, the basic contours of the informal social structure can be treated as something we share and as a proper object of public debate. Where reasonable members of society could agree about the ways in which

¹⁷⁹ Some general ideas of appropriate and inappropriate interaction in civil society, for example, can influence the degree of social intermixing and the formation of friendships, and so contribute to patterns of association that may reinforce emergent social inequalities. Those normative expectations can be public in Williams's sense, in that individuals can see their particular requirements and the extent to which others conform to them can be observed. See also Williams (2008).

informal social norms structure their interaction, they could agree to treat those features as open to deliberation. Second, we could appeal to the importance of informal social norms and practices: they have as deep an influence on individuals' lives as other basic-structure institutions, and they are as essential in organizing social cooperation.

Finally, it is worth noting that the overarching ambition of the chapter would not obviously be frustrated if, at the end of the day, the informal social structure should not be considered part of the Rawlsian basic structure.¹⁸⁰ Setting aside the particularities of Rawls's project, we could say that the shape of these informal social practices are (a) important for all members of society and (b) mutable, and so they can be an object of collective deliberation. Given the general liberal ambition to be able to justify social arrangements to all individuals (Waldron 1987, 128), the liberal would at least need an argument as to why informal social norms need not be made an object of public justification. If some complex of central norms are appropriate objects of collective deliberation and they can only be established and revised with individuals' cooperation, then individuals will have some responsibility to support that establishment. If there is not sufficient consensus about which norms and practices structure informal social interaction, that does not mean it is a subject properly excluded from egalitarian deliberation.

2.4. A Relational Egalitarian Approach to the Informal Social Structure

If the informal social structure is part of the basic structure of society, then there is good reason to think that decisions about that informal social structure belong in the domain of decisions members of society should make together. Just as relational equality demands that they

¹⁸⁰ All the same, as a way of responding to the compatibility worry, it seems useful to start from duties that liberals (at least Rawlsians) already assign to individuals.

decide together what political structures to create and maintain, it also demands that they treat the basic contours of their informal social life as similarly up for deliberation. Where an informal social structure reliably produces emergent social inequalities, they have a prima facie reason to think it is incompatible with the relational-egalitarian ideal. The mere presence of an emergent social inequality would not show that they have an obligation to change their informal social structure: it may be that the preservation of that system of norms and practices is better than any alternative in respecting important interests. All the same, when emergent social inequalities are produced by patterns of social choices, enabled by existing norms and practices, they can respond by considering whether some collective reform of those norms is possible.

It is one thing to argue that the informal social structure is an appropriate object of deliberation in a society of equals and another to imagine how this should be handled in practice. I want to briefly consider two questions about how egalitarian deliberation could be extended to the informal social structure: (1) what would such deliberation look like? and (2) what would constitute a justifiable informal social structure?

2.4.1. Collective Deliberation about the Informal Social Structure

In general, the deliberative view leaves open several alternatives for how members of a society of equals could deliberate and make decisions together. Deliberation about the informal social structure is not fundamentally different from deliberation about political and economic structures, in some senses. As with those cases, deliberation about the informal social structure that sometimes require actual deliberation, and in others it will only require that the structures pass a hypothetical-deliberation test. That some matters about the informal social structure should be decided collectively does not establish exactly how those decisions should be made.

To say that the informal social structure is an object of deliberation is to say it must be justifiable to all (that individuals could rightly demand justification of the complex of central informal social norms and practices that organize interaction) and that they ought to find a process for collectively deciding what to maintain and what to revise.

Deliberation about the informal social structure could take places in various fora, official and unofficial. It may be discussed in town halls, semi-public civic spaces, and private homes.¹⁸¹ The claim that some issue is rightly considered a matter for collective decision in a society of equals does not require that all discussion must be conducted in a formal public setting, and we may do better at finding satisfactory arrangements through trial and error than we would at settling norms in a quasi-legislative fashion. The decisions made need to be clear, explained in accessible reasons, and open to contestation, but that is compatible with a variety of procedures.

Deliberation can start by examining existing social norms and practices. Members of society would not need to start *de novo* and reimagine every detail of that structure.¹⁸² There are good reasons to keep existing institutions that are not objectionable: informal norms and practices are difficult to change, and people form reasonable expectations on the basis of existing institutions and develop plans and projects around them. So we can see how taking the informal social structure as an object of collective deliberation is compatible with accepting many inherited elements. Where at least some of their social practices are justifiable, something like a

¹⁸¹ When deliberation takes places in formal settings (e.g., town halls and legislatures), there are explicit decision procedures and rules of order. When deliberation takes place in informal settings (e.g., living rooms and coffee shops), the proper procedure is less clearly defined and the results are less obvious. Both types of settings are useful. Informal settings offer individuals opportunities to test out their own views and learn the interests of others in ways that are not possible in formal settings (Christiano 1996, 110–6, 191), and some division of deliberative labor is facilitated by allowing groups to discuss matters of particular interest to them at greater length.

¹⁸² I am assuming that people already organized as a society will be able to draw upon existing informal norms and practices, that they will inherit some informal social practices, because such an informal social structure is apt to arise in a society's prehistory. It is interesting to think about what people could do if they had no history of association and wanted to create a new society whole cloth, but it is not a question that we ever face.

principle of established practices gives them reason to conserve what they can.¹⁸³ Deliberation will be driven by the identification of problems, then. The list of emergent social inequalities in chapter 4, for example, would give members of society reason to examine their norms and practices and ask whether there are acceptable alternatives that would not generate these inequalities.

Treating the informal social structure as an object of collective deliberation does not mean that all informal social norms or practices should be determined by the public. The object of deliberation is the informal social structure as a whole, not each particular norm in isolation. It need not be the case that every norm of social interaction be designed in such a way that it manifestly satisfies the EDC, so long as the system as a whole can satisfy that constraint. Some informal social norms and practices amount to internal rules of subcultures or voluntary associations, which in many cases can be excluded from society-wide determination and left to their members. Even if some of the internal behavior of voluntary associations is not appropriately considered up for public debate, however, the informal social structure as a whole, as an institution of the basic structure, is appropriately treated as such a subject. Whether particular social norms are justifiable depends on how they interact with the rest of the informal social structure, and the extent to which groups can permissibly maintain autonomy over those practices depends on their externalities.¹⁸⁴ Where the internal behavior of some group (or its decisions about whom to admit and exclude) does not contribute to emergent social inequalities, its members have a good claim to define their own norms and practices.

One issue with deliberation that does not occur in an explicitly political, formal body is that it is not clear or unambiguous when a decision has been made. The uncoordinated process

¹⁸³ See Scanlon (1998), 339.

¹⁸⁴ This is indirectly influenced by Brettschneider's "principle of publicly justifiable privacy" (2007, 25).

by which a society adopts new norms is slow and gradual, and deliberation about the informal social structure does not automatically require abandoning gradualist change. As part of the process of deliberation, groups and “norm entrepreneurs” may develop novel alternative practices on their own and gradually persuade others of their benefits. Social change may occur simultaneously in many small groups, or the eventual consensus norm or practice may emerge only after several populations test out alternatives and refine some societal consensus. Unless all decisions about informal social norms and practices are run through a highly formal deliberative body (unlike any way of managing informal social practices ever seen), it will not always be obvious that there is a societal consensus, or that some final decision has been made. Treating the informal social structure as an apt object of collective deliberation does not require it be contained to a highly formal deliberative body. In practice, collective determination of informal social norms and practices would look like an ongoing conversation, in which the reasons for some practices are continually questioned and revised, as small changes in those practices are made. For the sake of clarity, members of society may adopt deliberation-stopping procedures and formal mechanisms that help to settle when they agree a decision about the informal social structure is reached, so long as those procedures are consistent with the EDC.

Questions about implementation are significantly harder when it comes to the informal social structure, compared with collective decisions about political and economic structures. When the members of society decide that some change is needed to their political or economic institutions, such changes can be imposed directly by law. Decisions to change the informal social structure are not so straightforward. They are not making decisions about what norms and practices to legislate or what to punish in the criminal law. Rather, deliberation about the informal social structure involves questions about what behavior to praise or sanction, what

expectations to make of others, and which standards they should adopt in everyday life. Norms of behavior admit of exceptions, so that they decide to revise their norms and practices does not mean that each noncompliant act should be sanctioned. When members of society decide to revise some informal social norms and practices, they can first ask whether institutions could do more to compensate for individual action or change the incentives for individual action (this is discussed further in chapter 6). But at some point, changes to informal social norms and practices has to involve individuals changing their own behavior in some ways and exhorting others to do the same.

In practice, relational egalitarians could help construct a justifiable informal social structure in an incremental fashion, by progressively adopting norms and practices that are not prohibited by the EDC, seeing how they operate together, and revising them when they lead to objectionable cumulative effects.¹⁸⁵ In this fashion, they could move toward a justifiable informal social structure without knowing all its details in advance. Even under ideal circumstances, though, living together as equals requires continuous specification and renegotiation of the terms of informal interaction, as they learn more about the contingent long-term consequences and interaction effects of their social practices.

2.4.2. Criteria for Justifiable Informal Social Structures

Although this describes what deliberation about the informal social structure might look like in practice, it does not tell us what reasonable people who engage in that deliberation would

¹⁸⁵ I have in mind here something like Mill's "experiments in living" or Dewey's reflective practical intelligence, as described in Richardson (2002), 119–29. As Elizabeth Anderson puts it in describing Dewey's approach to moral philosophy: "We test our value judgments by putting them into practice and seeing whether the results are satisfactory—whether they solve the problems they were designed to solve, whether we find their consequences acceptable, whether they enable successful responses to novel problems, whether living in accordance with alternative value judgments yields more satisfactory results" (2018).

choose. What can be said generally about justifiable informal social structures? We will not find any informal social structure that is uniquely appropriate for a relational-egalitarian society. There are good reasons to think the ideal of relational equality does not prescribe one unique, complete set of informal social norms. First, arguably there are many ways of organizing our informal social world in ways that respect and secure standing as equals. If societies with different geographies, population distributions, needs, levels of economic development, and histories are equally well compatible with an ideal of relational equality (and I see no reason to think, say, only a densely urban society can achieve standing as equals), and those differences call for different social practices, then different relational-egalitarian informal social norms are possible. Second, what work those norms do will depend on what is not organized by formal institutions like the state, and the deliberative view of relations of equality does not require one particular set of governmental institutions. Third, the needs and interests of members of society may vary from culture to culture. What is called for will depend on existing practices. If the culture is one in which people frequently socialize in public or attend events open to the public, what informal social norms best realize relational equality may be quite different from a culture in which there are fewer such spaces and practices. Fourth, the meaning or expressive character of different acts obviously can vary. In some societies, the use of titles and formal address is inextricably connected to social hierarchies, such that there are good reasons to prefer casual forms of speech, but that need not be true everywhere. Finally, the material wealth of the society can influence what informal social norms are appropriate. Whether and to what extent the members of that society enjoy private spaces, what collective projects they can afford, and what standard of living is required for dignity in public can all affect what norms are appropriate.

This makes the task of describing what informal social norms are compatible with relational equality harder in one respect and easier in another. We cannot describe a set that every society should adopt, from which we can straightforwardly derive individual duties to help establish that particular set of informal social norms. On the other hand, we might be able to identify broad classes of norms that would be satisfactory, without having to prove they are uniquely well suited to a society of equals.

An informal social world that meets the demands of relational egalitarianism will be one that can be endorsed by parties using the EDC. That can be expressed in terms of two requirements. First, the informal social structure should give equal weight to everyone's equally important interests, such that they could endorse it. In his initial description of the EDC, Scheffler emphasizes that it

is best understood diachronically rather than synchronically. The point is not that each decision taken individually must give equal weight to to the comparably important interests of each party. . . . [Rather,] each person's interests should play an equally significant role in determining the decisions they make over the course of the relationship. (2015b, 26)

Applied to the present context, this idea is members of society should assess whether the informal social structure as a whole gives equal weight to all parties' interests, not whether each particular informal social norm or practice does so. Second, informal social practices should leave individuals able to deliberate as equals with each other—by allowing each person to get a proper hearing, preventing associative and status inequalities from impeding the EDC, and so on.

If it is the case that justifiable informal social norms and practices depend on context, history, and coherence with other norms, what should we hope to get out of a general inquiry

about justifiable informal social structures? Even granting all these conditions, there are still some things we can say at an abstract level. Some norms and practices would never be compatible with a society of equals. We can establish at least a default presumption against norms and practices that reliably contribute to emergent social inequalities, even if final judgment requires more contextual information about available alternatives. We may be able to talk about appropriate ranges of permissible variations in some norms and practices, even where we cannot identify a specific, uniquely appropriate form.

Some informal norms and practices are objectionable in themselves, and can be rejected by parties governed by the EDC without consulting the rest of the informal social structure. Social norms that required acts of deference and the use of honorific titles on the basis of a racial caste system, for instance, would be rejected from that standpoint. Expressly inegalitarian social norms—those that communicate a judgment about the inferiority of some group—deny the initial premise of the EDC and cannot be made compatible with it. To take an obvious example, a social norm that marked it as appropriate for members of one racial group to step off the sidewalk in deference to approaching members of another race would express a hierarchical judgment inconsistent with the relational-egalitarian ideal. The society of equals, then, will define the range of acceptable social norms and practices so as to exclude such inegalitarian norms. (My account does not add much beyond what existing accounts of relational egalitarianism already demand, on this front.)

Other informal norms and practices are not objectionable in themselves but may be worrisome in virtue of downstream emergent consequences. For example, a set of social norms about polite interaction in public could contribute to homogamous friendship networks—in which individuals with similar backgrounds, educations, or occupations cluster together and

some enjoy greater status, power, and influence as a result. Commitment to the EDC does not automatically require rejecting these social norms. Members of society may respond to such downstream consequences by responding in some other fashion besides abandoning the social norm. That said, if there are alternative ways of structuring informal social practices, then the fact that one option reliably generates emergent social inequalities gives deliberators a reason to prefer alternatives.

2.5. Connecting the Informal Social Structure to Fair Relational Equality

The second section of this chapter has argued that the informal social structure—a set of informal norms and practices that organize informal social life and facilitate social cooperation—composes an important part of the basic structure of society. If the deliberative view of relations of equality holds that members of society ought to make decisions relevant to their relationship together, governed by the EDC, then decisions about the basic structure certainly fall within it. An argument for so conceiving the informal social structure provides a way of understanding how members of society might deliberate about the norms and practices of informal social life. Individuals do not owe it to each other to submit personal questions about whom to marry, where to live, or what projects to pursue to the constraints of the EDC, but they do have an obligation to help support a justifiable informal social structure. Conceiving of some set of informal social norms and practices in this way opens up alternative responses to the compatibility worry, beyond merely asking individuals to make different personal choices.

If the informal social structure is properly understood as part of the basic structure of society, then individuals have a duty to help realize a fair informal social structure (in virtue of the broader duty to support just institutions). The natural duty to support just institutions, and

where they do not exist to work toward their establishment, is commonly understood to ground a duty to obey the laws of a generally just legal structure, to not otherwise undermine the stability of a just order, and to support efforts to construct and implement a just political constitution.

Liberal relational egalitarians can productively extend discussion of individuals' natural duty to support just institutions to describe a responsibility to help create and maintain a just informal social structure.¹⁸⁶

It may not be obvious yet how discussion of the informal social structure helps advance a fair relational equality strategy. The next chapter will examine at least one plausible way the moral labor of creating a justifiable informal social structure could be divided among institutions and individuals. Having outlined such a possible division of labor in more depth, we will then be in position to explain why liberal relational egalitarians, despite these efforts, will still only realize fair (not full) relational equality. Because the elaboration of a possible division of labor will take the length of another chapter, it seems prudent to first give some further indication of the argumentative strategy at work here.

¹⁸⁶ This approach can be contrasted with the approach taken by Carina Fourie (2006). Fourie argues that, in order to counter the prospect of social inequality, Rawlsian liberals should adopt principles of justice applying to personal choice that include both an expansively redefined duty of mutual respect and a duty of justice (248). In particular, Fourie argues that Rawlsians should add to their understanding of individual duties a requirement that individuals must adopt an ethos that involves extending basic courtesies (256), tolerating differences (266), not treating "others according to arbitrary hierarchies of worth" (263), and "demanding a basic standard of treatment for all" (264). By contrast, I am not arguing for a revision of a Rawlsian conception of individual duties, but rather examining the degree to which liberal views (Rawls's being the preeminent contemporary example) can satisfy the demands of relational egalitarianism. Fourie appears to be offering principles that would purportedly wholly realize the relational egalitarian ideal; I argue instead that we are likely to only realize fair relational equality. Besides this difference in aims, I disagree with Fourie (2006) on two fronts. First, it seems to me that the Rawlsian view already accommodates much if not all of what Fourie is arguing needs to be added as individual duties. Rawls's description of the duties of civility and mutual respect already arguably contain much of that; the very project of deliberating in terms of public reason evinces respect for difference. Further, his concern to show that the just society would be stable involves an argument that individuals' choice of their conception of the good is "framed within definite limits" set by principles of justice (1999a, 493). It is an important component of justice as fairness that its structure reliably leads citizens to adopt conceptions of the good that help reinforce justice. That would seem to include some component of mutual respect, without imposing an ethos as a duty, as Fourie (2006) argues. Second, Fourie's set of duties seems to deny the possibility of emergent social inequalities, since she tethers violations of social equality to objectionable social choices (2006, 132n82). If objectionable relations can be established by decisions that are innocuous in themselves, though, those individual duties would be insufficient to secure relational equality.

It may be that a focus on the informal social structure is attractive to liberals because of the nature of informal social practices and norms.¹⁸⁷ Generally, informal practices do not involve the kind of coercive force that comes with state solutions to social problems. There may be multiple nonintrusive ways for individuals to support a satisfactory framework, since treating the informal social structure as part of the basic structure does not necessarily involve dictating particular social choices to individuals. The tools of enforcing informal social norms—principally shaming, social pressure, and persuasion—may well also be more amenable to liberals reticent to use state power to enforce relational equality in informal social life.¹⁸⁸

I have proposed that under some circumstances, committed relational egalitarians can accept and embrace an imperfect realization of the ideal of relational equality, as part of a package of principles of justice. Not just any failure to achieve full relational equality should qualify, however, so to determine what should count we should determine what kinds of efforts to achieve relational equality could be demanded, given the other commitments of justice. Liberal relational egalitarians will want to ask what could be demanded of individuals without abandoning commitments to fundamental individual liberties. Seeing informal social interaction not in terms of isolated individual actions but in terms of its normative structure helps to illuminate how liberals might assign duties to individuals to help mitigate emergent social inequalities that are the product of informal social interaction—conceived as duties to help support a just institution. What the liberal should say about this division of labor has yet to be articulated, but the aspiration is that by doing so, we can begin to understand what a form of fair

¹⁸⁷ Arneson (2003) and McTernan (2014) have both argued that informal social norms can play a useful role in a liberal society that displaces coercive or unduly intrusive alternative methods of encouraging prosocial behavior.

¹⁸⁸ Of course, this is not to say that liberals are comfortable with any deployment of shaming or other informal social sanctions. John Stuart Mill restricts the “moral coercion of public opinion” as well as legal penalties in outlining the Harm Principle (1859, 223), and Niko Kolodny likewise points out that liberalism restricts the intervention of non-state actors into certain choices (2018, 169).

relational equality would look like—what a liberal relational egalitarian should say is required of institutions and individuals before we can accept an imperfect realization of relational equality as just. When institutions and individuals are doing all they can be reasonably asked to do to help create and maintain a set of just institutions (a set that includes a justifiable informal social structure), if some emergent social inequalities remain that may be counted as achieving fair relational equality.

The general aspiration to achieve relational equality does not change when we accept the possibility of fair relational equality—relational egalitarians would first try to achieve full relational equality. The regulative goal, then, is a world in which we have no trouble deliberating as equals, in which our institutions and practices can be fully endorsed without regret. A society of full relational equality would eliminate and protect against the emergence of objectionable differentials. In the context of the worries discussed in chapter 4, that would likely mean a set of informal social practices that prevented enduring stratification or large gaps in positional esteem. Relational egalitarians also want an informal social structure that does not reliably disadvantage individuals or perpetuate hierarchies of power, status, or influence. Whether or not they could fully achieve that goal, they would aim to make opportunities for informal social interchange more evenly distributed, to minimize the kind of social or material advantages an individual can accrue on the basis of informal social networks, and to protect a kind of basic equality of status in interactions with other members of society. These are desired features, but it is not obvious to what extent an available set of norms and practices can realize all of them simultaneously, given the possibility of emergent social inequalities.

CHAPTER 6

FAIR RELATIONAL EQUALITY AND THE DIVISION OF MORAL LABOR

The previous chapter introduced the idea of fair relational equality—the idea that liberals might justifiably accept the persistence of some recalcitrant social inequalities, even under ideal circumstances, without thereby giving up a genuine commitment to relational egalitarianism. I have argued that achieving fair relational equality would require doing everything possible to realize relational equality up to the point at which other demands of justice would be compromised (the reasons-for-failure requirement). Not merely any failure should be counted as an imperfect form of relational equality—in some circumstances, we ought instead say that relating as equals in any form is simply impossible for us (the reasonable approximation requirement). As yet, this does not answer what fair relational equality would look like, or how it would be achieved. In this chapter, I provide a more substantive characterization of fair relational equality in practice.

The previous chapter also argued that liberal relational egalitarians could conceive of informal social life as being governed by an informal social structure—a set of social norms and practices that facilitate cooperation and set the terms of interaction. Even if the particular informal social choices of individuals are not appropriate subjects of collective deliberation, the informal social structure itself is appropriately decided by all. The two halves of chapter 5 work in conjunction: fair relational equality is a liberal relational-egalitarian answer to the compatibility worry, and the idea of the informal social structure helps direct and coordinate the efforts of institutions and individuals.

What remains is to show what fair relational equality could look like, how liberal relational egalitarians could go about accomplishing it, and why we should think this can meet the demands of justice. Faced with the prospect of emergent social inequalities, how could a liberal society of relational egalitarians respond? There is not a unique answer to these questions, but by examining what steps are available to respond to emergent social inequalities, we can better assess how much could be accomplished.

Relational egalitarians are not precluded from appealing to the idea of a liberal division of moral labor, just because their conception of equality concerns the character of interpersonal relationships. On the contrary, they have good reasons to aspire to a division of moral labor that would allow individuals to make informal social choices for purely personal reasons. If nothing else, recognition that individuals have a strong interest in planning and managing their own lives gives the relational egalitarian reason to aspire to a division of moral labor. When responding to emergent social inequalities, what can be demanded of institutions will differ from what can be demanded of individuals. It is sensible to begin by asking what work institutions such as the state can do to secure a justifiable informal social structure. After exhausting permissible institutional actions, if serious emergent social inequalities remain, they can examine what could be demanded of individuals without transgressing liberal commitments.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Some have argued recently that a focus on state- and individual-level action is apt to miss cultural meanings as an important target for reform. Sally Haslanger, for instance, has argued that eliminating oppression requires more than “normative analysis [focused] on either individuals or the state” (2017, 153); it also requires attending to and reshaping the dominant culture, which she understands as “a network of social meanings, tools, scripts, schemas, heuristics, principles, and the like, which we draw on in action, and which gives shape to our practices” (155). Hopefully it should already be clear from the last chapter why the sketch of institutional and individual duties I describe here need not overlook normative analysis of culture in this sense. If members of a society of equals have a duty to create and maintain a fair informal social structure, then part of that responsibility will involve attending to culture in precisely the sense that Haslanger intends. Duties to create and maintain fair social norms and practices will involve an assessment of the social meanings of those norms and practices. When it comes to assigning responsibility for creating and maintaining a fair informal social structure, we need to cash out those responsibilities in terms of what we can do individually and collectively (e.g., through voluntary associations or the arm of the state). Culture and social practices can be treated as part of the basic structure of society, to the degree that they mediate social interaction and cooperation, and the basic structure can be shaped and affected by institutions but

This chapter is divided into three sections. First, I explain in greater depth how institutions such as the state and large nongovernmental organizations can respond to emergent social inequalities and support a justifiable informal social structure. Second, I examine what kind of work individuals can take up, short of simply subordinating their informal social choices to political considerations. I argue that relational egalitarianism can understand the relevant individual responsibilities in terms of individuals' broader duties to support a just basic structure. This way of describing individual duties to support a just basic structure is a familiar liberal move, but relational egalitarians have not yet leveraged it to address concerns about informal social interaction. Finally, in the final section, I take stock of what has been accomplished, and in so doing I turn to the question of whether the result constitutes fair relational equality. That involves explaining why it would be a mistake to call this full relational equality, and on the other hand why accepting fair relational equality is not a capitulation to injustice.

1. Institutional Responsibilities

In chapter 4 I outlined a basic relational-egalitarian institutional framework: democratic political institutions, economic regulations that eliminate avoidable deprivation and domination, and laws that prohibit discrimination in public and civil society. A society with these institutions would be free of many of the power, status, and influence inequalities that characterize our own society,¹⁹⁰ but they would not prevent all emergent social inequalities. Once the possibility of these emergent inequalities is pointed out, however, relational egalitarians could consider asking

needs support from individuals. This project doesn't address how social meanings are changed, but I assume that much of that work will be done by changing social practices and norms.

¹⁹⁰ Laws that protect universal suffrage and forums for public deliberation express a judgment of equality and give individuals reasons to treat each other as equals in deliberation. Redistribution can minimize the status hierarchies that develop out of wealth differentials, the provision of public services and regulation of the labor market can prevent severe differentials altogether (what has sometimes been called "pre-distribution"), and basic economic security can protect individuals against some forms of domination. Robust antidiscrimination laws prevent some hierarchies of power and status that could emerge out of de facto segregation in private spaces.

institutions to do more to mitigate them.

It is worthwhile to say which institutions I have in mind. In many cases, the primary institutional agent for creating and maintaining a society of equals will be the state, in virtue of its power and its potential to speak for the polity as a whole.¹⁹¹ (In stateless societies that have no institutional correlate, the division of labor will obviously differ.) Other institutions may be able to aid in the construction and maintenance of a justifiable informal social structure—the structure of churches, civic organizations, clubs, community groups, and businesses can assist on a smaller scale. Whatever the case, in this section I want to focus on the social institutions that have a special responsibility to help secure justice, and for that reason I will focus primarily on action that could be undertaken by the state.

One way to begin thinking about the role of institutions is to draw out an analogy with the role they can play in protecting background justice across economic transactions. Rawls's discussion of background justice (1999a [1971], 73–78, 240–2, 268) focuses on the idea that institutional measures can correct for the inegalitarian effects of some economic transactions.¹⁹²

This idea of background justice can be productively applied to questions about the role of

¹⁹¹ That said, I use the phrase “formal institutions such as the state” in some places to indicate that relational egalitarians needn't be necessarily committed to a statist vision. I don't need to commit to any particular definition of the state in this project, but it seems plausible to me that anarchist societies of some form, which may or may not have an institutional correlate that can perform some functions for the public, could also be committed to relational egalitarian ideals. What is important is that some of the moral labor involved in creating a just society can be transferred to institutions or collective agents that can legitimately act on behalf of individuals. I'm indebted to Jessica Flanigan for raising questions about the centrality of the state to the relational egalitarian ideal, though her worries are not fully addressed here. I assume throughout that the state power discussed here can be exercised in a legitimate fashion. State action that helps realize a just order, when undertaken and authorized by a democratic polity, will not constitute an objectionable inequality of power—at least so long as that power is constrained by democratic control.

¹⁹² Individual transactions can be fair in themselves—fully voluntary exchanges without any impropriety—and yet contribute to significant material inequality. Inequality of wealth can generate disparities of power, if individuals are able to translate wealth into political influence. Background justice can be protected by preventing these cumulative effects. Tax and transfer systems limit wealth inequality and so prevent disparities in political power from emerging. When set up properly, this design would allow us to evaluate the justice of the system without assessing the final distribution of goods, one advantage of which is that “it is no longer necessary to keep track of the endless variety of circumstances and the changing relative positions of particular persons” (Rawls 1999a [1971], 76). Importantly, it would also allow individuals to make many choices for wholly personal reasons—without, say, having to judge whether an individual economic transaction is likely to contribute to long-range negative consequences.

institutions in the effort to achieve a justifiable informal social structure. If institutions could shape the social environment in ways that allow individuals to make individual choices for personal reasons, such that “the outcome [of informal social choices, in this context] is just whatever it happens to be” (Rawls 1999a [1971], 74), that would successfully address the compatibility worry. Institutions might aim to prevent emergent social inequalities from arising at all or to change social practices so that individuals’ choices don’t have such consequential effects. Of course, there is no direct tax and transfer of informal social relationships or relational goods. Institutional action might work in other ways: it could shape the environment in which individuals make choices, it could encourage or exhort individuals to make different choices, or it could provide compensatory responses that mitigate the effects of individual choices. Although the achievement of background justice in informal social interaction may be a suitable regulative aim for institutions, it is unlikely that simply restructuring the state can fully accomplish it. It would expect too much of public policy to assume that it could, on its own, preempt any and all emergent social inequalities, regardless of what action individuals took. Even if they cannot wholly succeed, this might be useful as an initial starting point, since it minimizes the requirements imposed on individuals. Institutional designs can do better or worse at nearing that goal.

In what follows, I want to enumerate a few ways in which liberal institutions could try to affect informal social norms and practices without coercively dictating personal choices.¹⁹³ The kinds of institutional mechanisms that can counteract emergent social inequalities fall into three rough categories. First, institutions can aim to prevent emergent social inequalities from arising

¹⁹³ I am not claiming that relational egalitarians have argued that institutions cannot or may not play these roles. Rather, these possibilities have received less emphasis, mostly because relational egalitarians have been focused on forms of gross relational inequality for which the institutional responses are simpler—formal equality under the law, the redistribution of wealth, antidiscrimination law, and so forth.

by shaping the informal social environment. Second, they can prevent or mitigate such inequalities by speaking out on behalf of relational-egalitarian attitudes and choices. Finally, they can respond to ineliminable emergent social inequalities in ways that aim to blunt their effects. This is not an argument that all societies committed to relational equality must take up these specific measures, since fair relational equality is multiply realizable and sensitive to circumstantial details. Instead, what I offer here are examples of sets of institutional projects that institutions in societies like our own could take up.

1.1. Environmental Development

The first category of institutional action involves efforts to shape the informal social environment in which individuals make decisions. That informal social environment consists of all the public and private space in which individuals will interact as private citizens. Not only would it include private homes, residential neighborhoods, meeting houses, and churches—it would also include public spaces where individuals would interact as neighbors, commercial facilities used by the public, offices and schools. That is expansive, of course, but these spaces are considered part of the informal social environment to the degree that individuals carry out important parts of their informal social lives in them. The aim of environmental-development interventions would be to anticipate and prevent emergent social inequalities from arising in the first place, by changing the spaces in which people interact.

There are several ways institutions could shape the informal social environment. First, institutions can change the physical spaces of a society—the shape and size of public and private spaces, how easy it is to access such spaces, and where they are located. Certain kinds of public (or freely accessible) spaces can encourage casual interaction or public-minded discourse. The

state can shape neighborhoods by promoting or permitting mixed primary uses (Jacobs 1961) that would bring different populations into proximity. Second, institutions can shape the social environment in a less literal way by adopting some projects and practices that encourage different forms of social interaction—hosting social events or conducting official business in ways that bring disparate groups together. This shapes the social environment in the sense that it creates opportunities for certain forms of social interaction. In a similar vein, they can adopt institutional rules and norms that set an example for individual and group adoption, creating an environment more friendly to certain attitudes and practices. For example, they can encourage horizontal organizational cultures by making them standard in public employment. Such steps can exert pressure on other employers and voluntary associations to adopt similar structures and so indirectly affect informal social opportunities. Finally, and most contentiously, environmental development could involve choosing policies that shape the “choice architecture” of informal choices (Thaler and Sunstein 2008, 83), making some choices cheaper and easier for individuals. They could make it easier to set up homeowners’ associations, social clubs, and private schools that do not have exclusionary or self-segregative policies (where it would be unduly restrictive to ban such policies outright). They could set default opt-in membership rules for public programs that promote cross-sectional interaction (e.g., public transit passes, mailing lists for public events). These efforts change the informal social environment by making the behavior that contributes to emergent social inequalities less attractive. In all these ways, institutions might act to prevent some social inequalities from emerging or dramatically change social patterns.

One might worry that some environmental development efforts are manipulative, disrespectful of rational agents, and therefore incompatible with a vision of a society of free and equals. This would not apply to all attempts to foster a healthy environment—there need be

nothing manipulative about locating a park in the center of town in the hopes that people from various social groups will cross paths there—but in some cases it may seem that environmental development goes “behind the backs” of individuals, subverts their choices, or undermines their ability to make informal social choices on their own.¹⁹⁴ I agree that there are limits to the permissibility of institutional efforts to shape environments to promote social integration, and relational egalitarians would indeed have reason to reject policy that treated some members of society as objects to be manipulated. Whether a policy is objectionable on those grounds would depend on a number of factors, such as how it was formulated and adopted, whether the design of the environment is intended to activate some automatic or unconscious bias, and whether alternative designs can avoid activating such biases. Such policies could be adopted with full transparency, after extensive deliberation and public agreement. Institutional action may not be disrespectful if it merely carries out the self-binding decisions of the public. Additionally, in some cases the design of the environment may affect individual choices no matter what the state chooses to do.

Consider a few practical examples. Chapter 4 discussed the possibility that residential segregation might be produced unintentionally, as people chose homes for a variety of personal reasons—as people with different resources sought different neighborhood amenities, or as members of minority groups sought neighborhoods with fellow members. The state could attempt to use a variety of policy choices to try to prevent such stratification from occurring in the first place. At one extreme, the state could simply prohibit the construction of economically

¹⁹⁴ To the degree that efforts to shape social environments resemble “libertarian paternalism,” those efforts may be subject to similar worries about when they constitute manipulation (e.g., Mitchell 2005, Wilkinson 2013). Libertarian paternalist interventions aim to make certain individual choices more likely, without using coercive force, by exploiting knowledge of people’s reasoning processes (see Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). Not all efforts to shape social environments must resemble policy “nudges,” especially since not all environmental development hinges on exploiting features of automatic or unconscious reasoning processes.

stratified neighborhoods, or tether the provision of public goods and services to that neighborhood to meeting some goals for heterogeneity in design and population. Without coercive prohibition, the state could construct and give preferential treatment in various services to public housing that meets these needs. Requiring that a variety of different types of housing be included in every neighborhood may make it more suitable for a wider range of people and encourage heterogeneous neighborhoods.¹⁹⁵ Those aims might be achieved without directly prohibiting some types of neighborhoods, by changing the tax burdens or providing incentives for individuals to live in diverse communities. The state could make it easier or more attractive for diverse groups to live in a residential area by providing services like public transit to commercial districts, or incentives for voluntary associations, churches, and community groups to move into the area. Ensuring that neighborhoods have amenities of more even quality (e.g., equal resources per capita for schools) would prevent some motives for residential segregation in the first place.

Similar environmental development projects might mitigate other forms of social stratification. The state can design public spaces (e.g., streets, parks, city squares, public forums, government buildings and administrative offices, and transit systems) in ways that decrease the likelihood of social stratification more generally. It can regulate the spaces of civil society likewise, without impinging on individuals' fundamental liberties. While these kinds of environmental-development measures on their own would not ensure the preservation of background justice in the informal social structure, they could make social stratification less

¹⁹⁵ Thinking exclusively about economic stratification in neighborhoods in the US today, Richard V. Reeves proposes encouraging the construction of “missing middle” housing (e.g., duplexes, triplexes, townhouses, and other forms of construction between single-family homes and high-rise developments) in suburban neighborhoods (2017, 140). Similar arguments could be made for low-income housing as well, of course. The problems and the institutional aims would be different in an ideal-theoretic context, but some such policy of diversifying housing stock may be useful all the same.

likely.¹⁹⁶

Environmental development is not obviously useful against all emergent social inequalities. Take for instance the example of appraisal/recognition conflation, which concerned ways in which appraisal on some particular matter could come to stand in for a general societal judgment, such that being found deficient causes shame or lack of self-respect. In chapter 4, I considered the possibility that social contributions in the labor market might come to stand in for some general societal judgment. In such a case, could shaping the informal social environment prevent emergent status hierarchies? Changing the contours of physical spaces does not seem particularly apt. Perhaps by funding projects that give people of different capabilities and skillsets opportunities to be esteemed, the state could be said to actively shape the environment in which individuals evaluate each other. Likewise, there may be ways to make social contributions that are not valued on the market more visible. A caregiver's wage, for instance, might make the devaluation of that labor less likely. This shades into the next category of institutional action, informative and expressive speech. Generally, however, it is much easier to see how environmental-development efforts could help prevent emergent social inequalities that arise through associative choices.

1.2. Informative and Expressive Institutional Speech

The second category of institutional action involves the use of institutional speech—the public declarations of officials, the content of public education, what the state chooses to honor

¹⁹⁶ Even where such interventions do not change the composition of informal social networks, they could dampen hermeneutic injustices by bringing people from diverse groups into contact (Fricker 2007) or they could promote Iris Marion Young's ideal of city life as social differentiation without exclusion (Young 1990, 237–41). That could decrease inequalities in influence and foster greater tolerance for difference, which would have positive knock-on effects on citizens' ability to deliberate as equals with each other.

or recognize.¹⁹⁷ Institutional speech might be used for at least four purposes. First, it can offer a public defense of the relational-egalitarian ideal, adding to the stock of arguments available in public discourse. Second, it can also convey public endorsement of relational-egalitarian attitudes—singling out supererogatory action for praise. For instance, the state could defend the value of social integration or publicly affirm categories and means of esteeming that are compatible with a society of equals.¹⁹⁸ That could mean dedicating resources to promoting multiple sources of esteem, to encouraging behavior that prioritizes or amplifies recognition respect for all members of society, or that stigmatizes forms of superciliousness or condescension. This does more than just add one voice more to the set of individual voices expressing their evaluations of others: in its capacity to speak for the public as a whole, the state’s affirmation of certain standards of value has a significant weight and has the potential to shift public opinion. In some cases, institutional speech could play a significant role in preventing or mitigating objectionable differentials in status. Third, along similar lines, institutional speech can attempt to persuade individuals to adopt different social norms or behavior. Such action is instrumentally valuable insofar as it makes it easier for individuals (by relieving them of some of the burden of advocating for some kinds of behavior, and by affirming their own choices). It is intrinsically valuable as a way of making a collective statement of

¹⁹⁷ These items are drawn from Brettschneider (2012, 95).

¹⁹⁸ One might worry that, in taking steps to promote certain informal social choices, this kind of action abandons liberal neutrality. Liberal neutrality, on some views, demands that the state not favor some private conceptions of the good over others. If individuals do not have duties to make informal social choices in particular ways (that could be coercively enforced), one might argue that the state has no business favoring some conceptions of the good over others (e.g., those that prize diverse communities over homogeneous communities or flatter levels of esteem over those that hold out great honor for a few). The only relevant assumption about liberalism made in chapter 4 is that it requires that certain fundamental liberties be protected. The kinds of institutional actions discussed here would not impinge on those liberties, so for that reason the neutrality worry isn’t pressing here. Beyond this, we could say that the kind of neutrality the liberal state is supposed to maintain is a neutrality among different conceptions of the good life that are not pertinent to the achievement of justice. If relational equality is relevant to justice and institutional action can help realize it without directly restricting fundamental liberties, then the state has just cause to engage in such promotion.

egalitarian commitments. Fourth, institutional speech can raise the salience of predictable pathways to emergent social inequalities, pointing out how informal social choices can lead to objectionable differentials. It could explain the mechanisms of emergent social inequalities, pointing out how innocuous preferences and social attitudes can create stratification and hierarchy.

Corey Brettschneider's work (2012) on the permissibility of state-sponsored speech promoting the values of liberal democracy can usefully explain what institutional speech looks like. Brettschneider is concerned specifically with how the liberal society can respond to hate speech without resorting to the curtailment of freedom of speech, but there are parallel projects that a liberal relational egalitarian society could take up. He distinguishes between the expressive power and the coercive power of the state, arguing that a liberal democratic state does not compromise its own values by criticizing certain views (e.g., views expressed in racist/sexist hate speech) and promulgating a defense of the egalitarian basis of liberal democracy itself, so long as that expression is not coupled with coercive restriction of the speech of positions it opposes. On his view, this so-called “democratic persuasion” needs to be carefully delimited—the kind of speech a liberal-democratic government is permitted to engage in is a justification of liberal democratic values.¹⁹⁹ The parallel distinction would be between (a) the use of coercive force to prohibit inegalitarian attitudes in informal social circles and (b) government speech on behalf of relational-egalitarian attitudes in informal social circles.

Institutional speech might be useful as part of a response to residential segregation. The state could speak out on the issue of social stratification, to point out the connections between, for example, the search for certain kinds of neighborhoods, residential segregation, and emergent

¹⁹⁹ For example, an articulation of the reasons for protecting free speech rights grounded in the equality of citizens. In Brettschneider's view, the reasons the state has for protecting rights of privacy, freedom of association, and freedom of speech at least partly stem from an “ideal that all citizens have equal status under the law” (2012, 31).

social inequalities. The state could attempt to persuade individuals to rethink how they make residential and associational choices, or it could defend the relational-egalitarian value of more heterogeneous spaces and networks. That could involve attempts to simply articulate the value of diverse networks, attempts to persuade individuals to consider such values when making decisions, or attempts to raise the salience of residential choice as a vector of emergent social inequality. It could praise and exhort the efforts of individuals and voluntary associations to create more integrated informal social networks.

Institutional speech as a response to appraisal/respect conflation could take similar forms. The state could aim to inform the public of connections between market-based evaluative standards and inequalities of esteem and status. It could publicly praise individuals for a variety of reasons, to connect different standards of appraisal with civic respect (e.g., highlighting the work of volunteers and caregivers).²⁰⁰ It could argue for a shift in the way people appraise each other. As with environmental development, institutional speech could reduce the likelihood or severity of some emergent social inequalities.

1.3. Effect Mitigation

A final category of institutional action is effect mitigation—institutions can dampen the significance of some informal social choices by removing negative downstream consequences attached to those choices. Even if institutions cannot prevent worrisome social patterns from arising (by shaping the environment or persuading individuals to change their behavior), they

²⁰⁰ Whereas there may be intrinsic value in having the state articulate a defense of the relational-egalitarian ideal, the value of using institutional speech for these other purposes is instrumental. There are circumstances where institutional speech used to promote alternative standards of appraisal would have counterproductive effects—it could signal that what is esteemed in institutional speech is not highly regarded elsewhere. If so, it would function much like Elizabeth Anderson's imagined letters from the State Equality Board (1999a, 305), confirming and deepening existing stigma. So even if this tool is justified in principle, whether it should be used depends on the likelihood of success.

might be able to diminish the significance of such patterns. Where social stratification cannot be avoided, measures can be taken to diminish the importance of informal social connections for key resources. Likewise, where emergent status hierarchies cannot be prevented, steps can be taken to disconnect informal evaluations from access to other goods and resources. Just as background justice in economic transactions does not aim at keeping people from making transactions but rather works to prevent those transactions from producing inequalities of power, effect-mitigation strategies aim to change the downstream significance of social choices without preventing individuals from choosing on their own terms. These steps might be appropriate if the emergent social inequality is inevitable or too costly to eradicate.

There are several ways in which institutions might work to blunt the significance of social stratification or emergent status hierarchies. First, they could provide alternative means of obtaining goods that are normally secured only through informal relations. The public provision of resources that are normally supplied through informal networks would make it less important to secure an advantageous position in those networks, and so reduce the harm created by social stratification. That might take the form of providing small loans, babysitting, professional mentorship, or other goods that are often incidental benefits of some informal relations. Second, institutions could develop compensatory structures that reduce the importance of some social practices. If social stratification is unavoidable, some groups are likely to have outsize influence in the informal stages of political deliberation, and institutions will have reason to develop more opportunities for informal deliberation in public (e.g., by encouraging public forums in shared spaces). They could design political structures in ways that respond to the likelihood of such social patterns. Third, institutions might also seek to minimize the importance of some informal social connections or esteem by removing reliance on them in institutional structures themselves.

They could, for example, shift away from relying on personal recommendations in hiring or potentially biased reputational measurements in evaluating employee performance.

Returning again to the example of residential segregation, we can consider a few effect-mitigation strategies that institutions might adopt. The state could do a number of things to dampen the importance of residential choice and disconnect residence from the likely composition of one's informal social networks, which would serve to mitigate residential segregation and make it less consequential for the lives of citizens. It could build public space or promote mixed-use commercial zoning in neighborhoods, to encourage nonresidents to move through such spaces and increase the likelihood of interaction. It could foster more casual or informal interaction among citizens who aren't neighbors by hosting more public events or providing so-called "third spaces" in accessible areas. Among other things, that could combat inequalities of influence in the informal stages of political deliberation. To counteract the disadvantages in influence that minority groups might suffer as a result of residential segregation, institutions could disseminate information on minority-group interests and beliefs (or simply amplify the voices of minority groups with public or subsidized media). To counteract the disparities in power that might arise if the relatively advantaged clustered in neighborhoods, the state could adopt a strong preference for centralized responses to local quality-of-life issues (effectively mitigating resource inequalities among neighborhoods).

Likewise, there are steps institutions could take to reduce the importance of emergent status hierarchies. Instead of trying to prevent that status hierarchy from taking hold, the state could try to help some individuals obtain the relevant forms of appraisal by providing accommodations. For instance, those who are excluded or stigmatized on the basis of some impairment would benefit from changes to the built environment. The state could provide greater

resources or more opportunities for people to make contributions they wouldn't otherwise be able to make.

1.4. Overview

This provides a relatively abstract characterization of how institutions in a liberal society could take further steps to affect informal social interaction, without coercively interfering with individuals' choices. They can shape the environment in which individuals choose, publicly affirm egalitarian values and ways of interacting, and provide compensatory measures that diminish the significance of emergent social patterns. By these means (and possibly others), institutions could reduce the likelihood and severity of emergent social inequalities, and in so doing they could reduce the amount of work left over for individuals. Although it would be hard to say conclusively at this level of abstraction, it does not seem as though these efforts by themselves would be sufficient to secure background justice in informal social interaction—to wholly eliminate emergent social inequalities or render them harmless. Institutions can encourage or facilitate certain kinds of behavior, or provide compensating mechanisms to blunt the effects of emergent social inequalities, but a fair informal social structure ultimately depends on how individuals act in their private lives.

I have been enumerating a variety of ways institutions could work to prevent or mitigate emergent social inequalities, to point out that there is a considerable amount that they could do without coercively interfering with individuals' informal social choices. That said, institutions are constrained in their pursuit of this background justice. Considerations of effectiveness, cost, and sustainability constrain institutional efforts. Assuming that the society has finite resources, the state will not be able to pursue all projects that possibly could conduce to greater relational

equality. Institutional interventions are unjustified when the costs of imposition outweigh the likely effects on relational equality. The measurement of those costs could be put in terms of the EDC: unjustifiably costly interventions will not count equally interests that are equally significant. For example, interventions that eliminated slight differentials in social status at the expense of basic nutrition for many could not be justified; nor could interventions that temporarily secured relational equality by sacrificing future generations' well-being (e.g., bankrupting the society to provide lavish sinecures for current citizens).²⁰¹ Finally, liberal commitments could constrain the set of institutional actions, even where none of the interventions would be objectionable in isolation. The expectation that the liberal society will leave individuals substantial discretion to plan and manage their lives rules out constant interference with personal choices. While it is not objectionable in itself to act in ways that narrow the range of choices available to an individual, a constant stream of small impositions, taken together, may be objectionably restrictive, if the cumulative effect makes it difficult to pursue different reasonable conceptions of the good.

2. Individual Responsibilities

Changing a society's informal social structure will also require action from individuals, but it may not be immediately obvious what would be required. Most generally, individuals have a responsibility to participate in deliberation about the informal social structure and to recognize collective authority to shape its norms and practices. Why would individuals have a duty to

²⁰¹ There are some serious questions about what relational egalitarians should say about responsibilities to future generations that I am sidestepping here (e.g., it does not seem that we can engage in the "practice" of equality with future generations in the same manner as we can with each other, nor does it seem possible to have a relationship with them in the same way, so an account needs to be given of how and why the interests of possible people need to be taken into consideration in making important societal decisions). For the purposes of this argument, I am assuming that relational egalitarians will want to show that a sustainable society of equals can be achieved. This issue is also raised in Lippert-Rasmussen (2018), 123.

participate in collective deliberation about the informal social structure, rather than just an obligation to recognize the legitimacy of whatever decisions are made collectively? First, if the deliberative view of relations of equality describes equality as a practice, actually relating as equals involves actually engaging in that practice. Although there are instances where a hypothetical deliberation test is satisfactory, where the relational-egalitarian ideal underdetermines what people should choose (as is the case when there are multiple informal social structures that could be satisfactory), individuals must actually decide together for the requirements of the ideal to be met. Second, to adequately meet the conditions of the EDC—in which the equally significant interests of all are given equally significant weight—the decision needs to be informed about the interests of all, which requires some form of input or participation from all. Beyond this, actual participation can also be instrumentally valuable. Just participating in deliberation about particular emergent social inequalities may have some positive effects: discussion of the downstream consequences of social practices may influence how people behave and encourage a kind of accountability about informal social behavior.

The duty to participate in collective deliberation is an ongoing commitment. Changes in relatively innocuous features of society can change patterns of socialization, distributions of social capital, and opportunities for broad social mixing (e.g., zoning laws that move foot traffic out of neighborhoods, the emergence of online shopping at the expense of historic downtown commercial districts). Consequently, the informal social norms and practices of society will need to be adjusted from time to time to mitigate these effects, even in just societies. In practical terms, that does not require that individuals be continually, unceasingly engaged in political deliberation of informal social norms. Rather, they should be willing to treat the informal social structure as up for collective determination, in political debate and in more everyday

circumstances. Individuals need not justify all of their informal social choices on political grounds, but it is incumbent on them to show that their behavior is compatible with the existing informal social structure or one the society should create.

Previous chapters have already described some individual responsibilities for helping achieve relational equality. In chapter 4, I argued that individuals would need to abjure expressly inequalitarian attitudes and to adopt certain attitudes that allow for egalitarian deliberation. Further considerations can be drawn from the discussion of the informal social structure in chapter 5. Given the importance of some shared norms and practices to social cooperation, individuals have some responsibility to help establish and maintain norms that meet the demands of the EDC. An egalitarian society needs conventions that help express respect toward all. Those conventions may be fairly arbitrary at the outset, but individuals have reasons to comply because of the important moral work such conventions can perform. Beyond this, questions about key social practices and expectations ought to be treated as collective decisions, just as questions about the political and economic structure are treated. Explicit deliberation and collective decision making is likely to take place only in response to identified social problems. Where there are emergent social inequalities, though, individuals generally have an obligation to participate in deliberation, to learn and weigh others' interests, and to comply with the norms that are selected.

What I want to focus on here is what responsibilities might be passed to individuals to help respond to emergent social inequalities, as a society tries to create and maintain a justifiable informal social structure. Institutional efforts can at best indirectly shape the norms of social interaction. If an ideal of fair relational equality requires that institutions and individuals do everything they can to mitigate such inequalities up to the point at which they would have to

sacrifice other demands of justice, and institutional action is insufficient to prevent emergent social inequalities, then it is plausible that individuals will have some further duties to help realize relational equality.²⁰²

I categorize these responsibilities into three parts. First, individuals have an obligation to support the efforts of governments and similar institutions. This is already a duty the liberal ascribes to individuals, now applied to the institutional efforts described above. Second, they have an obligation to modify their informal social behavior, to the extent that doing so is necessary to help establish or revise some social norms. This follows from a commitment to govern relationships by the EDC and recognition of the importance of the informal social structure to those relationships. Such an obligation is most plausibly compatible with liberal commitments when the obligation concerns behavior in public, less important choices, or how individuals respond to the informal social behavior of others. Third, where they cannot change informal social norms without directly threatening liberal commitments to fundamental individual liberties, individuals still have a limited obligation to treat informal social practices as an appropriate subject of public discussion.

2.1. Support for Institutional Efforts

Institutional action helps ease what would otherwise be an intolerable burden on individuals, and individuals have some responsibility to help that division of labor succeed. Where those institutional efforts involve the creation of new legal obligations, individuals will obviously have duties to comply with them. Many of the institutional mechanisms in the last section, however, do not involve imposing coercive legal requirements. In what way ought

²⁰² That depends, obviously, on the nature of the emergent social inequality and what institutions can accomplish. My account might productively be compared with Andrew Mason's (2012) argument that citizens' associative obligations extend to some personal choices (e.g., how they share domestic burdens, whether they integrate).

individuals support institutional efforts when those efforts involve, for example, shaping the environment to make social integration more likely, or using institutional speech to affirm egalitarian categories of esteem?

If supporting institutional efforts required that individuals act in ways that maximally helped realize the goals those institutions were indirectly pursuing, then in many cases we might as well say they are under a duty to let political considerations dictate many personal decisions. For example, if institutional action aims to facilitate greater interaction, an individual could support that effort by making the personal choices that are being encouraged, but this would just be to say that they have a duty to make those informal social choices. This would render a division of moral labor pointless, so we ought to look for alternative ways of understanding support for institutional efforts. Individuals have a defeasible obligation to not act in ways that undermine institutional efforts. That said, there are many reasons to make social choices that contribute to emergent social inequalities that are legitimate in their own right—religious minorities may want to self-segregate to preserve their communities, or hermits may wish to avoid spaces of social interaction.

Beyond the unusual circumstances where institutional action will involve imposing new legal requirements on individuals, how can individuals fulfill this duty to support just institutional action? There are some relatively lightweight forms of support that do not impinge on social life autonomy. Even if individuals do not have an obligation to, say, make integrative social choices, they have an obligation not to disparage just institutional efforts to encourage and facilitate interaction and integration. They can support institutional efforts to minimize or mitigate associative stratification in a few ways. First, they can refrain from seeking or using loopholes to regulations (e.g., exploiting carve-outs for communities of conscientious self-

segregation in bad faith). Second, they can treat the public spaces and programs that are set up (with the aim of encouraging wider interaction) as options in their own decision-making, preferring them at least when it makes little difference to their own projects. They can encourage others to consider those options as well. Third, they can help propagate institutional speech that defends more integrative patterns or points out sources of emergent social inequalities. Similar acts could support institutional action to minimize or mitigate esteem-related inequalities. More generally, we can say that, absent good reasons to act otherwise (like deep personal convictions or the peculiarities of their reasonable comprehensive doctrine), individuals have reason to act in ways that do not undermine or impede institutional efforts.

When describing the natural duty to support just institutions, Rawls argues that individuals have this duty "to support and comply with just institutions that exist and apply to [them] . . . [and] to further just arrangements not yet established, *at least when this can be done without too much cost*" to them (1999a [1971], 99, emphasis added). The considerations of cost are understood absolutely rather than comparatively. We might think that liberals generally would want to qualify the duty to support institutional efforts in this fashion. It would be fairly easy for individuals to use the public spaces that the state constructs with the aim of fostering cross-sectional interaction. It would be significantly more burdensome in many cases to sell their home and move to a new neighborhood, just to help support an institutional project.²⁰³ All the same, individuals have at least some minimal responsibility to make small behavioral changes that help institutional efforts succeed.

²⁰³ Liberal relational egalitarians in nonideal circumstances have a stronger argument for asking individuals to make larger changes like this, to the degree that individuals are benefitting from past injustices. Chapter 7 discusses this under the heading of duties of rectification.

2.2. *Demands on Informal Social Behavior*

At a certain point, changing some parts of the informal social structure requires that individuals reassess and revise their own social behavior. Social norms and practices have a reliable shape because individuals recognize and adhere to them—they comply with expectations, they sanction others for noncompliance, or they engage in the practice. What kinds of demands could be made on individuals to change their informal social behavior, in a liberal society? The deliberative conception of relational equality provides a criterion. The EDC's requirement that equally significant interests be given equal weight means that individuals' interests in autonomy over their social lives should not be sacrificed for a small remediation of emergent inequalities, but arguably it would permit revision of social norms and practices that produce significant differentials in power, status, and influence. When members of society consider revising some informal social norms and practices, they are considering (a) the extent to which they should decide together to change some personal behavior and (b) whether to sanction, praise, demand compliance, or demand accountability for some behavior in others. When contemplating some change, they will ask whether the resultant informal social structure would give due weight to interests in participating as an equal in society and in maintaining autonomy and privacy in social life.

Some informal social behavior is public, in the sense that it involves general, role-related behavior in public spaces or with the public at large. Individuals ought to be willing to treat many informal norms and practices of *public* interaction as a proper matter for collective determination. In describing this as general, role-related behavior, I mean to point to behavior that is not particularly expressive of their personality or individual commitments—behavior directed by general norms of respectability and decency in public, for instance. The norms of

public interaction are different from norms governing the inner life of voluntary associations. They involve how individuals interact as citizens, in a sense—as neighbors or members of a shared society. Public interaction norms could involve matters of politeness, what constitutes respectful interaction among strangers, the use of and comportment in shared public space, and standards of interaction in civil society. It may range over what matters are proper topics in public, when civil inattention is appropriate, or how new relationships are initiated. Treating those matters as proper subjects of deliberation and collective determination means there is at least a defeasible obligation to accept those norms in one’s own behavior, and to set expectations for others’ behavior in those terms (i.e., to hold others to those norms). Even where individuals have good reasons to flout such norms, they still have good reason to accept the legitimacy of collective determination of those norms and to acknowledge the need to make such matters an ongoing subject of deliberation in an egalitarian society.

By contrast, informal social behavior within personal relationships and private associations is presumptively not a matter for collective determination. Such behavior can be opened to society-wide egalitarian deliberation, and individuals asked to comply with the outcome of such deliberation, in a few circumstances. Individuals can be asked to modify private behavior that generates significant negative externalities. For example, the expression of some kinds of partiality toward partners, family, neighbors, and other associates can contribute to emergent social inequalities, and individuals can be asked to curtail that partiality (at least when such acts are not indispensable to the nature of the relationship itself). Transfers of resources to partners or friends may not be essential to the relationship (particularly when society as a whole already secures at least a sufficient minimum for all, such that transfers would not be necessary to help partners and friends meet basic needs). Individuals might also be asked to refrain helping

their friends and acquaintances obtain scarce resources outside the normal avenues of distribution. If competitions for positions of authority and privilege are necessary, individuals might be asked to withhold support that might give unfair advantage to those in their informal social networks.

The equal society can ask individuals for more extensive changes to informal social behavior, associative choices, and forms of expression in response to severe emergent social inequalities. When institutional efforts would struggle to contain profound associative stratification, individuals might be reasonably asked to scale back their involvement in exclusive organizations or to exhort and criticize others who make careless, exclusionary choices. When convergent standards of esteem threaten the self-respect of some groups or mechanisms of cumulative advantage create significant status hierarchies, individuals might be asked to refrain from inconsiderate expression of praise and blame on the relevant criteria. Generally speaking, the liberal relational egalitarian can ask for less in this domain before such requirements would impinge on individual discretion in private life, so the inequalities in question would have to be significant to merit this kind of demand.

To give these still rather abstract ideas some concrete detail, consider two examples of emergent social inequalities from chapter 4. First consider the emergent social inequalities produced by patterns of residence. In response to this problem, members of society might change norms and practices of public interaction. They may decide to develop new social practices that facilitate interaction with a broader cross-section of society (e.g., changing the felicity conditions for chatting with strangers, creating new traditions and practices that bring a wide range of strangers into contact). They could adopt norms that aim to mitigate the harm of residential segregation indirectly, by limiting norms of partiality within neighborhoods. Alternatively, they

could praise forms of community engagement that get individuals outside their own neighborhoods. Finally, they could make more direct demands on individuals' residential choices—sanctioning the expression of exclusionary attitudes and preferences, or demanding that people explain and justify their residential choices.

Facing patterns of appraisal respect indexed to the job market that undermine the self-respect of some groups, liberal relational egalitarians could make a different set of shifts to their informal social behavior. They might most obviously have good reason to revise some public interaction norms—for example, to discourage or criticize expressions of appraisal for marketable skills, at least in certain settings. They might also adopt norms that mitigate the harm of appraisal/respect conflation by detaching forms of address and the etiquette of interaction from recognition of the relevant feature (e.g., through norms of plain-spokenness and informality, or disapprobation of markers of deference). Social norms might limit the form in which esteem is expressed (e.g., disapprobation of compartmentalizing esteem by gender for achievements that have no reasonable connection to gender) or the reasons for esteeming (e.g., Fourie argues that a society concerned with minimizing inequalities of esteem might have reason to discourage or criticize poorly grounded esteem [2015, 99]).²⁰⁴

Liberals can readily accept demands on individual comportment in public spaces, norms of interaction with strangers or in formal institutions as citizens. They will be more reluctant to accept a relational-egalitarian demand governing the formation of relationships (i.e., how and when individuals choose friends) or the inner life of personal relationships themselves (e.g., what

²⁰⁴ See Miller (1997), Wolff (1998), and Fourie (2015) for more work on what kinds of inequalities in esteem or status are compatible with a society of equals.

favors one is willing to do for romantic partners or religious co-adherents).²⁰⁵ The liberal commitment to preserving broad discretion for individuals to plan and manage their own lives constrains what can be demanded. Obligations must leave room for individuals to exercise fundamental liberties in pursuit of their own reasonable conceptions of the good. Even if an informal social norm is enforced only by informal sanctioning (i.e., not enforced by the coercive force of the state), some impositions can be unduly intrusive, unjustifiable in a society committed to fundamental individual liberties.

Liberal commitments constrain what can be demanded of individuals in another way: whatever is asked of them must fit into a scheme of public rules. Part of a justification of a scheme of duties is an explanation of its fairness—that is, an account that shows that individuals are not being asked to do more than others without good reason. The liberal interprets that to mean that impositions need to be framed as determinate, accessible public standards, such that individuals are able to observe that others generally comply with these requirements.²⁰⁶ A vague imperative to do one’s fair share toward establishing fair informal social norms will not satisfy that publicity test.²⁰⁷ The social practices that give rise to emergent social inequalities often involve subtle matters and take place in private spaces, so it may be hard to see how well fair norms of informal interaction are obeyed. What this suggests is that individual obligations will need to be concrete, specific, and observable. Individuals might agree to refrain from attempting

²⁰⁵ One strand of feminist criticism of Rawlsian liberalism centers on this reluctance—see Okin (1989) on the importance of intra-family relations for justice. See also Brake (2004), Higgins, (2004), and Schwartzmann (2007) for more contemporary articulations of feminist criticisms of liberalism.

²⁰⁶ On this, see the discussion in Parr (2017).

²⁰⁷ This would parallel Andrew Williams’s worries about Joseph Carens’s claim that individuals have an obligation to “contribute as much as they are capable of contributing” (Carens 1986, 33) or G. A. Cohen’s “right to pursue self-interest to some reasonable extent” (Williams 1998, 239).

to help friends and family win competitive job openings or offices, but a vague requirement not to give undue credibility to close associates would not meet publicity requirements.²⁰⁸

2.3. Constrained Public Accountability

Finally, when other obligations would be ruled out by liberal commitments, individuals might nevertheless still have an obligation to treat some aspects of informal social life as appropriate matters of collective discussion. Some social choices and ways of interacting are not rightly decided together, either because they involve intimate decisions that ought to be left to individuals or there is value in letting groups develop their own practices. That does not mean that the norms and practices related to such decisions cannot be matters of collective concern. Where it would be inappropriate to demand collective decision-making, individuals might still have an obligation to treat such norms and practices as appropriate matters of public discussion, in which people can exchange reasons for their social choices.

To help explain this, I want to draw on two liberal feminist accounts that give us tools for thinking of how personal choices could be “politicized” without introducing intrusive, illiberal requirements. First, in recent work Amia Srinivasan has considered how categories of sexual attractiveness, desire, and beauty might be so treated. Although she thinks it would not be appropriate to make those categories a matter of collective determination, it may still be fair to make it a subject of collective discussion. As she puts it:

²⁰⁸ Richard Arneson has claims that the liberal publicity requirement cannot be satisfied when the demands involve social norms, because on his view the requirements of social norms will remain unclear or ambiguous (2003, 159). This is likely true of uncoordinated norms, which emerge gradually, can contain vague requirements, are vaguely or partially understood by some groups, and compliance with which may not always be obvious. It need not be true of social norms that are decided upon in a more deliberate fashion. Although I have observed that deliberation about the informal social structure could happen in a variety of forums, consideration of a publicity requirement might suggest that individuals only be demanded to follow norms (and sanctioned for not heeding norms) that have been affirmed publicly and clearly stated, where compliance can be assessed.

The question, then, is how to dwell in the ambivalent place where we acknowledge that no one is obligated to desire anyone else, that no one has a right to be desired, but also that who is desired and who isn't is a political question, a question usually answered by more general patterns of domination and exclusion. (2018)

This does not culminate in collective action (e.g., a determination of norms of attractiveness and enforcement of those norms via social sanctioning). It does call for individuals to recognize the greater social importance of some personal choices and to be willing to talk about their social significance with others. The subject of discussion is "politicized" in the sense that it is brought into public discussion, and there is public recognition of the importance of addressing the issue, but on Srinivasan's view that doesn't show that standards of beauty or sexual choices can be collectively decided in the same fashion as other political matters.

This approach generalizes to discussion of other social choices, where individuals ought not be obligated to choose in particular ways. How could these matters be treated as "political questions" if they did not admit of political, collective answers? Perhaps this requires nothing more than an ongoing commitment to reflect on and talk about the relevant phenomenon together. Individuals might have a responsibility to explain (at least in broad strokes if not in intimate detail) why they act as they do, where reasons can be given. Beyond discussion of categories of attractiveness, we might think that individuals have similar obligations to be willing to engage in dialogue about how they choose friends and associates, how they spend their time, and the projects they pursue.

Anita Allen's description of accountability for personal life (2003) may also be useful in unpacking an idea of constrained accountability. She provides a modular definition of accountability in which obligations to provide information, explanation, and justification might

come apart from the suitability of sanctions (21–2). While Allen remains ambivalent about when and how it is appropriate to hold individuals accountable for personal choices, her definition raises the possibility of a disaggregated approach to accountability for informal social choices. Liberal relational egalitarians could aspire to cultivate a kind of explanation- and justification-emphatic form of accountability for some informal social practices and choices. People could be held accountable in this sense without having obligations to behave in a particular way, if they ought to be willing to treat those practices and choices as a fair subject of public discussion.

To have a responsibility to engage in such discussion is not to have a responsibility to change one's behavior in the absence of some reason that could be stated in public terms. Rather, the thought runs that to the degree that the norms and practices of informal social life affect standing as equals generally, members of society have a responsibility to consider those effects together. I do not think this is an empty or ineffective requirement. An obligation to engage in deliberation about the informal social structure, and where appropriate to discuss the effects of informal social choices, introduces a pressure to look for reasons and justifications of one's choices. Behavior that might be otherwise entirely unreflective may shift when considered in this light. The effect this would have on emergent social inequalities may be rather minor, outside of pushing individuals to make more deliberate and reflective choices on some matters.

There is a large caveat, though, which is why I describe this as *constrained* public accountability. Individuals should not have to publicly explain the details of some intimate choices, or even to have those choices made a matter of public or semi-public record. The obligation to treat informal social practices as an appropriate subject of public discussion is limited by concerns for appropriate privacy. Being held to account for some choices, not having the privacy to shield some personal choices and behavior from public scrutiny, is inhibiting in

itself.²⁰⁹ While individuals might choose to alter the boundary of what is appropriately considered public and private in recognition of the effect some private choices have on emergent social inequalities, people have a significant interest in being able to shield some aspects of their lives from public discussion. Accordingly there is a stronger case for requiring only that individuals participate in ongoing discussion of these informal social norms and practices in abstract terms (that is, without having to report and account for their own choices in detail). They might have an obligation to participate in collective discussion about informal social practices, even when they are not appropriately obligated to divulge how they themselves have chosen in their personal life.

2.4. Overview

This discussion has enumerated some steps individuals might take to respond to emergent social inequalities, but what would be sufficient to realize fair relational equality, and which steps (if any) would be necessary? Of course, any combination of these measures that eradicated all objectionable forms of residential segregation would be sufficient. Failing that, the liberal relational egalitarian should continue to the point at which either further measures would require illiberal impositions, or the point at which members of society could reflectively endorse the informal social structure in spite of the failure to eliminate emergent social inequality. They might be justified in forgoing some costly but not illiberal measures that made only small improvements to patterns of social stratification, if the resultant inequalities were already close to the point at which they would already stop. The point is that there is not a singular state of affairs that can be described as fair relational equality. What kinds of residual inequalities are

²⁰⁹ A number of scholars have argued that privacy is essential for intimacy (see, e.g., Inness [1992]). Even setting aside discussion of intimacy per se, the freedom to plan and manage one's life as one sees fit requires some ability to refuse scrutiny or accountability.

acceptable depend on circumstantial details and the resources available to the parties, so determining whether an imperfect realization of relational equality is justifiable in any given society requires further evaluation.

3. Assessment

In this final section, I will complete this account of fair relational equality. There are three large tasks that remain. First, we need some characterization of what relationships could look like, after the responsive measures discussed in this chapter have been taken to eliminate or mitigate emergent social inequalities. This characterization will help to explain why we should anticipate that differentials of power, status, and influence would persist in spite of these efforts. Second, we need to know why we should not simply count this as the full achievement of relational equality. Finally, we need to know why this imperfect realization of relational equality is not a surrender of the relational-egalitarian ideal, why it is not an unjust compromise.

3.1. Inequalities Likely to Persist

The aim of this chapter has been to show how institutions and individuals can respond to emergent social inequalities without abandoning liberal commitments, on the idea that what results might be called an imperfectly realized but justifiable form of relational equality. Taking as given some liberal commitment to individual liberties²¹⁰ and the likelihood of emergent social inequalities, can the ideal of relational equality be pursued in good faith and realized in some form? The answer depends on the degree to which the resulting society approximates the

²¹⁰ More radical proposals to fully realize relational equality by constraining freedom of association and speech would need to show why this liberal commitment is unjustifiable. I am dubious of the prospects of such proposals—even if we could justify restructuring society into kibbutzim, phalansteries, or Platonic communism, rational agents like us would have a strong interest in autonomy over some intimate, affective, and expressive choices—but further examination of that would have to be taken up in another project.

relational-egalitarian ideal. If the inequalities described in chapter 4 are common when people have freedom to choose their associates, speak their mind, and pursue their own conceptions of the good, then we can make some generalizations about lingering inequalities in the liberal society.

I have argued that (a) formal institutions (including the state and nongovernmental voluntary associations) can do more to shape informal social life in ways that promote relational equality, and that (b) the duty to support just institutions, which Rawlsian liberals already assign to individuals, can be interpreted as requiring that individuals take some action to help respond to emergent social inequalities and secure a fair informal social structure. Institutions can shape the social environment, create new opportunities for interaction, supply certain goods that are regularly distributed through informal social networks, speak out on behalf of relational-egalitarian values, and raise the salience of sites of bias and emergent inequality. Individuals can support those institutional efforts, reconsider public interaction norms, curtail some in-relationship practices that greatly exacerbate inequalities, and contribute to ongoing public conversations about the effects of informal social norms and practices.

While this identifies a substantial amount of work that could be done in response to emergent social inequalities, those ameliorative steps have their limits. Individuals would have to retain broad discretion to order their lives as they see fit and pursue personal conceptions of the good. Collective regulation of whom people choose to form personal relationships with, how they generally act in those relationships, or what they esteem would quickly run afoul of liberal commitments. Micromanagement of voluntary associations would crimp democratic politics and individual projects. Different standards of esteems, ideals, and aspirations will develop automatically as individuals pursue different paths. Individual efforts may reduce behavior that

unthinkingly contributes to social inequalities—some relatively inconsequential behavior that generates emergent status hierarchies can be changed, for instance. Emergent social inequalities that are produced by patterns of more important choices (e.g., what life projects to pursue, with whom to develop close relationships) cannot be addressed by simply asking individuals to be more mindful of the consequences of their behavior. Some differentials in power, status, or influence may persist so long as individuals' social choices are uncoordinated and made for personal reasons.

Despite the efforts described in this chapter, then, there is likely to be residual inequality of power that affects collective decisionmaking. Some will continue to have more powerful social networks and better exit options (should the attempt to engage in the practice of equality fail). The associative choices that are left up to the discretion of individuals would still have implications for the distribution of power, since informal social resources can confer a kind of power (e.g., the ability to ask for certain kinds of assistance and partiality) that cannot be easily redistributed. Individual discretion in forming friendships and romantic relationships could still produce clustered advantages of intelligence, beauty, and talent. Institutional efforts to anticipate and mitigate emergent social inequalities will not entirely eliminate the uneven distribution of informal social resources, and institutional responses would struggle to redistribute intangible, intimate forms of social capital. These inequalities of power could be small or subtle and still have a meaningful influence on collective deliberation.

There is likely to be residual inequality of influence and status, as well. Some will continue to have more influential, powerful, or otherwise well-positioned social networks. The responses to occupational stratification, for instance, will not entirely eliminate the sorting effects of occupational specialization (i.e., the opportunities people have to meet and interact

with others in their line of work). Absent a radical institutional shift in how work is distributed, professionals in positions of authority will have a receptive platform among others who are likely better placed to amplify their voices and address their interests. The institutional and individual measures described above do not entirely eliminate these kinds of advantages. Contrariwise, the distribution of social connections is likely to render the interests of members of minority groups less familiar, accessible, and understandable to the broader public. Like the residual inequality of power, these remaining inequalities in influence may be small or subtle, but they could affect collective deliberation all the same. Similar considerations will apply to status inequality. Residual inequalities of status can persist due to disparities in opportunity, appraisal, and network composition. Although institutions can dampen the material consequences of emergent status inequalities, fundamental liberties of speech and association would continue to permit such inequalities to develop.

Given that these relationships are apt to still be characterized by some inequalities, there is good reason to ask how we should evaluate them. Why should this result be described as the accomplishment of fair relational equality? There is room for others to object to the claim that this result should count as fair relational equality from two directions. Some might argue that these kinds of recalcitrant inequalities do not really prevent us from achieving full relational equality. In contrast, others might argue that we ought not call the result even an imperfectly successful realization of relational equality. I explain why I find neither criticism persuasive, and why on that basis I think it fair to call this the realization of fair relational equality.

3.2. Against Treating This as Full Relational Equality

There are at least three ways to argue that what would be accomplished at this stage is the full realization of relational equality. What I call the complacent view claims that what is realized at this stage is simply all that relational egalitarians ever envisioned, and these small residual inequalities are irrelevant to the ideal. Second, what I call a voluntarist view claims that whether relational equality is achieved depends more on whether the parties make use of residual inequalities of power, status, and influence in their collective deliberation. If they refuse to take advantage of residual inequalities, the voluntarist says they relate as equals in the fullest sense. Finally, a quasi-contractualist view would argue that we should revise definitions of relational equality in light of the problem of emergent social inequalities. On this view, relational equality is defined in terms of what can be reasonably demanded, such that people relate as equals when they do everything they ought to do for the sake of this relationship.

The complacent view holds that the society of equals would be fully realized by the measures described (the typical suite of institutions and the additional duties described here). Subtle social inequalities have not played any role in descriptions of the relational egalitarian ideal; the focus has been on major sociopolitical obstacles involving domination, stigma, discrimination, or other forms of oppression. By contrast, these recalcitrant inequalities are generally small and subtle. Many natural inequalities are compatible with full relational equality—people are not prohibited from relating as equals because one is taller or smarter, though that certainly contributes to differences in what those people have the power to do. (At the very least, natural differences in abilities and talents don't by themselves show that relational equality is impossible.) So, the line of thought runs, why not treat these remaining social inequalities similarly, as no impediment to full relational equality?

The complacent view should be rejected because the residual social inequalities that have been described could impede the parties' ability to meet the demand of the EDC. I agree that relational egalitarians typically have not been concerned with subtle social inequalities. However, discussion of the deliberative conception of relational equality, particularly discussion of the nature of the deliberative practice, gives us a vantage point from which we can think about smaller and more long-range requirements. If these inequalities can influence or materially impact the decisions that parties make together, or they otherwise prevent the parties from being able to give equally significant interests equally important weight in their deliberations, then they are prevented from fully realizing the relational egalitarian ideal. Inequalities in power, influence, and the intelligibility of their interests can indeed affect their ability to deliberate as equals. So the complacent view is too quick.

In a similar spirit, though, someone might adopt what I call a voluntarist position: they could claim that whether two individuals stand as equals depends as much on what forms of power they *choose* to wield over each other as it does on the structure of society and the distribution of power, so full relational equality is possible so long as people choose to refrain from taking advantage of emergent social inequalities. Daniel Viehoff, in a recent article on the connections between democratic authority and egalitarianism, suggests a voluntarist position. He claims that “egalitarian [democratic] procedures have authority because, by obeying them, we can *avoid acting* on certain considerations that must be excluded from our intrinsically valuable egalitarian relationships” (2014, 340). On his view, egalitarian relationships involve a commitment to set aside and not act on inequalities of power. He uses an egalitarian heterosexual marriage as an example:

[although] laws against marital violence serve, among many other important ends, to prevent men from exploiting their greater physical strength in shaping their relationship. . . . just as, if not more, important than such external restrictions are norms that the parties have internalized. . . . Thus, partners committed to relating to one another as equals will exclude from deliberation facts of unequal physical power, or unequal economic prospects, in dealing with one another. (359)

Viehoff's conception of equality is cast in relational terms, and beyond that he describes relations of equality as deliberative in nature. At least the characterization of equality quoted here is compatible with Scheffler's description of the egalitarian deliberative constraint. If Viehoff is right that relations of equality are compatible with significant differentials in power (and one might extend this reasoning to differentials in status and standing), then it may be possible for members of society to stand as equals even if emergent social inequalities are not rectified, so long as those inequalities are not exploited in deliberation. If so, someone taking Viehoff's position could argue that we can ultimately dismiss the compatibility worry—relational equality does not require a society to eliminate emergent social inequalities, if individuals within it to refrain from taking advantage of informal social advantages, when making decisions within the context of their relationship with others. Differentials in power, status, and influence are not worrisome in themselves; the EDC will be more concerned with whether they are used objectionably. The fact that some informal social practice reliably produces emergent social inequalities is not reason to object to it.

As a view about why excluding certain considerations from deliberation can promote more egalitarian decision-making, Viehoff's view has much to recommend it. Citizens who find themselves in relationships with such inequalities do have good reason to exclude consideration

of them from deliberation. That said, there is reason to resist building such recommendations into the definition of relations of equality itself. Applied broadly to differentials of power in relationships, Viehoff's view would be too sanguine. The republican conception of domination helps explain why: when one party has the ability to exercise significant power over the other, even when they do not take advantage of that differential, their relationship will change as a result. The weaker party will be at the mercy of the stronger, relying on their good will, even if that power differential is not exploited. Given the frequency with which relational egalitarians have identified domination as a salient relational inequality,²¹¹ I think most of them would agree that standing as equals is not made compatible with severe differentials in power on the sole condition that those differentials are not exploited. Viehoff describes laws against marital violence as important in the domestic case, and similar considerations could be applied to a political context.

There may be a more sophisticated position implicit in Viehoff's article, to which a voluntarist could appeal. Perhaps the thought is that it is simply impossible to actually eliminate all such inequalities, so relational equality must be defined in ways that make its realization possible. Relational egalitarianism has been offered as a reorientation of egalitarian theory toward matters of real, practical concern, so indeed it ought to offer prescriptions that can be followed. Elizabeth Anderson's seminal article on relational egalitarianism, after all, was called "What is the Point of Equality?" and we would miss an important aspect of the view if we settled on a view of relations of equality that bore no resemblance to what people could do. The voluntarist position does provide a conception of relational equality that is achievable. Regardless of how society is structured, people could commit to acting in ways that don't take advantage of differentials in power.

²¹¹ See, for example, Anderson (1999a) or Schemmel (2011a).

I see four reasons to reject the voluntarist response to the compatibility worry. First, the voluntarist position seems overinclusive—it would allow people to relate as equals regardless of any deep structural injustices. A slaveowner and slave could ignore the differentials in their social and legal power and try to make all decisions on the basis of the EDC. Even if there is a sense in which they are committing to relate as equals, it seems reasonable to deny that they can achieve full relational equality, given the power to which the slaveowner could at any time appeal. Second, the voluntarist reconception could conflict with how relational equality has been understood by egalitarian political movements. Those movements fought for real structural changes, not merely changes in individual dispositions. Finally, even if the voluntarist position is correct that where differentials in power are impossible to eliminate, relations of equality require us to refrain from exploiting those differentials, that would not show that the parties in question fully relate as equals.

A third argument for treating what would be realized as full relational equality can be described as quasi-contractualist. It claims that what counts as relational equality should be defined in terms of what can be appropriately demanded of others. Some relational egalitarians, Elizabeth Anderson in particular, have described relational equality in terms of appropriate agential virtues or the demands that one can make on another:

According to luck egalitarians . . . justice itself consists in a desirable distributive pattern. . . . The justice of agents is derived from an independent standard of the justice of states of the world. [This luck-egalitarian view] takes the value of a state of affairs as foundational and gives all agents the common aim of realizing it. [In contrast,] relational egalitarians identify justice with a virtue of agents (including institutions). It is a

disposition to treat individuals in accordance with principles that express, embody, and sustain relations of equality. (Anderson 2010a, 2)

In the same essay, she claims that the content of relational equality can be defined by the second-personal demands people can make on each other:

Most relational egalitarians follow a second-person or interpersonal conception of justification. . . . [from which it follows that] the principles of justice are whatever principles free, equal, and reasonable people would adopt to regulate the claims they make on one another. (Anderson 2010a, 2–3)²¹²

Relational egalitarians with such views might be said to have a quasi-contractualist definition of relational equality. They take what relational equality itself requires to be limited by what individuals can demand of one another (and so to be connected to or just identified with some subset of second-personal claims). If it is unreasonable to demand more of individuals than what I have described above, they might well say that what is accomplished is relational equality full stop. The fact that there continue to be differentials in power, status, and influence is no reason to say that individuals do not stand as equals, and understanding why they cannot eliminate these differentials without making unreasonable demands could help reconcile them to the persistence of such differentials. I am sympathetic to the idea that understanding what we can reasonably demand from one another can help reconcile us to persistent differentials, but I do not think we are forced to conclude that the result must be the perfect realization of relational equality.

²¹² I am running together what Anderson treats as two distinct disagreements between luck egalitarians and relational egalitarians—a disagreement about the “status of principles of justice and their relations to the justice of persons and of states of affairs” and a disagreement about “the standpoint from which principles of justice are justified” (2). Anderson takes the latter to be the fundamental disagreement. Although in chapter 2 I argued for what I called the deliberative view of relations of equality, I do not agree with Anderson about either of these disagreements. The potential for well-meaning individuals to fail to relate as equals, as described by Scheffler (2015b, 30–1), and the possibility of emergent social inequalities, suggests that relational equality bears some relation to the successful realization of states of affairs, and neither luck egalitarianism nor relational egalitarianism strike me as conceptually tethered to second-personal or third-personal perspectives. See Lippert-Rasmussen (2018, 189) for another argument that relational egalitarianism need not be connected conceptually to second-personal reasons.

To the extent that the assessment question (concerning what proposals should qualify as meeting the demands of the EDC) can be addressed by contractualism, the deliberative view may seem to be a quasi-contractualist definition of relational equality. I would argue, though, that something has gone wrong with our definition of perfect standing as equals if it is compatible with there being persistent, predictable inequalities of power, status, and influence across group lines.²¹³ Such differentials can impede individuals from being able to successfully participate in the deliberative practice. So we might differentiate a good response to the assessment question, which provides a criterion for evaluating how people propose to balance their interests in deliberation, with an assessment of whether they fully realize relational equality. Some kind of achievement-oriented definition of relational equality is needed—some characterization of relational equality in terms of states of affairs, regarding how people interact and their roles in society. There are good reasons to say that the society that achieves what I have described in this chapter has achieved fair relational equality only.

3.3. Against Treating This as Surrender of Ideal

Critics could approach this from the other side, though, and argue that we ought not call the result even an imperfect realization of relational equality. They could argue (a) that accepting a social world with residual inequalities in power, status, and influence is unjust, (b) that those who accept such an outcome have abandoned relational egalitarianism, or (c) that the resulting relations are not an imperfect form of relational equality at all.

²¹³ There are exceptions to this generalization. That those who are better informed or more persuasive have more influence is not evidence of relational inequality. A social world in which some have greater influence due to owning homes in an advantageous neighborhood, knowing the right people, or being esteemed for unrelated reasons, by contrast, does manifest some relational inequality.

First, critics might accuse the fair relational equality approach of merely accepting injustice, given the inequalities in power, influence, and status it endorses. The reason why fair relational equality is not unjust, though, is that evaluations of justice should focus on the set of social arrangements as a whole, on the basic structure of society. If the just society rightly gives priority to the protection of fundamental individual liberties, and this constrains the kind of relational equality that can be achieved, then fair relational equality may be part of a just system. This parallels the way in which liberals argue they would give priority to those liberties over the full realization of equality of opportunity.

Second, critics might characterize fair relational equality as the abandonment of relational egalitarianism. Is this not the tacit acceptance of a different ideal of relating, even in ideal circumstances? The rough analogy to (imperfectly realized) fair equality of opportunity is instructive here. If the Rawlsian liberal is not abandoning a commitment to equality of opportunity when recognizing that fair equality of opportunity will not be fully realized so long as the family exists, then neither should the relational egalitarian be characterized as abandoning the pursuit of relational equality in these circumstances. There is no new ideal of social relations proposed here; full relational equality is still the regulative ideal. The definition of relational egalitarianism offered in chapter 1 anticipates this objection, as well. Whereas Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen and others have held that, on the relational egalitarian view, “an outcome is just only if everyone relates to one another as equals” (2018, 7), I have argued that we should characterize relational egalitarianism as claiming that justice demands only a sincere and action-guiding commitment to realizing relational equality. Relational equality is an aspiration we pursue, and we have not abandoned a commitment to relational egalitarianism if other demands of justice put that goal out of reach.

Third, critics might contest whether it is right to characterize the resulting relations as an imperfect form of relational equality. In chapter 5, I offered two rough criteria for fair relational equality. The first is that fair relational equality requires that the members of society do everything they can to dampen or eliminate residual inequalities up to the point at which they would have to sacrifice other fundamental commitments of justice. Critics could argue that there is more that could be asked of institutions or individuals.

Could formal institutions do anything more to help realize relational equality without unduly interfering with individuals' choices? Someone might argue that the compatibility worry merely makes the case for greater economic redistribution than I have been assuming. With a more egalitarian distribution, the line of thought runs, we would not need to worry about the material advantages of living in better neighborhoods, or the advantages that accrue to those who have more prosperous informal social networks. While I agree that some emergent social inequalities can be mitigated or even eliminated with more egalitarian redistribution, there are significant social inequalities that could emerge in societies with near-equal distributions of wealth. Informal social networks could still cluster along lines of identity or interests, and emergent status hierarchies could still arise because of bias, unequal social opportunities, and forms of cumulative advantage. So even if some emergent social inequalities simply make the relational-egalitarian case for greater economic redistribution, distributive equality would not assuage all worries about emergent social inequality.

Alternatively, a critic might argue that problems like occupational stratification and educational homogamy simply call for more radical, centralized reorganization of social institutions—in those cases, reform of the workplace and educational systems. A full assessment of what is demanded in each case would require more specific details about the society in

question, the nature of the emergent inequalities in that society, and what alternative responses are available. All the same, it seems that in many cases a radical reorganization of professional or educational systems, just to offset informal social stratification, would compromise the goods internal to those systems for comparatively smaller improvements in social relations.

Could individuals be asked to do more to help realize relational equality? Perhaps some of the exemplary emergent social inequalities in chapter 4 could be entirely avoided if individuals took on more responsibility to change their own informal social behavior, with relatively small, unintrusive changes. I am skeptical that all possible emergent inequalities can be eliminated that way. Where institutions and individuals have taken all these further responsive steps, then, the reasons-for-failure requirement would be met.

The second criterion for fair relational equality is that the outcome must reasonably approximate full relations of equality. This is obviously a vague standard, but it seems plausible that where extreme inequalities in power, status, or influence persist, we ought instead to say that no form of relational equality is possible. Critics might hold that the responses described in this chapter would (often) allow serious inequalities to persist. There is an empirical question here about the extent to which such inequalities would persist, and about the extent to which those inequalities will reliably disadvantage some group. If the remaining differentials in influence have a significant effect on the outcome of important collective decisions, they prevent people from living flourishing lives, or they effectively obstruct good-faith efforts to engage in deliberation, we would have good reason to say that the members of that society do not (even imperfectly) relate as equals.

I do think that at least for modern liberal societies, facing the kinds of emergent social inequalities described in chapter 4, something worth calling fair relational equality is possible.

(That is assuming the basic relational-egalitarian socio-political framework was in place, individuals fulfilled their duty to support just institutions, and the state and nongovernmental organizations took what measures they could to promote relational equality without directly interfering in individuals' choices.) Social stratification might produce enduring differentials in power and influence that affect deliberation but do not prevent people from reaching fair outcomes. One predictable consequence of leaving individuals significant latitude to order their lives as they see fit is that the resulting informal social networks will have an uneven distribution of power and status, but the members of that society could still make important decisions together in a way that respects everyone and takes their interests seriously.

Another reason to think this is a form of relational equality is that such a social world seems justifiable to parties operating under the EDC. Members of that society can truthfully say to each other that they have let each other's equally significant interests play equally significant roles in influencing decisions. Residual differentials in esteem or power are truly regretted. In being able to offer a rationale for this failure to fully realize the ideal of relational equality, they can reconcile themselves to some small social inequalities. It is by reference to those kinds of considerations that we can be justified in calling the results fair relational equality.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLICATIONS FOR NONIDEAL CIRCUMSTANCES

This dissertation is generally a work in ideal theory. The project as a whole is concerned with the proper aspirations of liberal relational egalitarianism, given certain features of informal social interaction and their effects on the quality of social relations. The argument maintains an ideal focus in several of the ways that Laura Valentini (2012) has identified as characteristic of ideal theory: it sets aside issues of individual and institutional noncompliance, as well as pre-existing or historical injustices, and it focuses on an ideal endpoint rather than on transitional steps.²¹⁴ I have argued that such a focus is useful for considering the compatibility of our commitments: although liberalism and relational egalitarianism do not conflict when we are addressing severe inequalities in our world, the compatibility worry comes into sharper view when we look beyond their immediate practical implications and ask what it would take to fully satisfy them. Although this requires accepting at least a limited role for ideal theory in political philosophy, it is compatible with a wide range of views, including some that generally prioritize a nonideal approach.

²¹⁴ There are at least two ways someone might dispute the characterization of this project as an instance of ideal theory. First, Hamlin and Stemplowska distinguish “ideal theory” (on their view, idealized forms of institutional design) and the “theory of ideals,” which aims to “identify, elucidate, and clarify the nature of an ideal or ideals” (2012, 53). They might consequently classify a project that examines the compatibility of ideals of relational egalitarianism and liberalism as part of this “theory of ideals.” While I agree with them that there is valuable work to be done in specifying ideals and testing their compatibility, I am not convinced that we can separate out questions about the “nature of the value” of certain ideals from questions about how they are realized in the world. Second, one might argue that this project is about “how to make choices between different domains of partial justice theory,” which Ingrid Robeyns identifies as an area of nonideal theory (2008, 349). Even if this is a project in reconciling or trading off dimensions of justice, though, it still makes a number of idealizing assumptions that require further assessment. Given the varying definitions of the ideal/nonideal distinction, there are likely many ways to characterize this project. What concerns me here are the idealizations that I have made in previous chapters in order to examine the long-range goals of relational egalitarianism, and how such idealizations might obscure the practical implications of fair relational equality.

Chapters 5 and 6 aim to show that there are defensible forms of liberal relational egalitarianism, by describing what could be done in ideal circumstances to ameliorate emergent social inequalities. Liberal relational egalitarians can treat a complex of informal norms and practices as something they ought to choose together, without requiring that individuals subordinate all personal choices to political considerations. Even if they cannot realize full or perfect relational equality, they can minimize emergent social inequalities and reconcile themselves to the result, since any remaining inequalities would be necessary byproducts of a commitment to liberalism.

Of course, that alone does not provide substantial action guidance for us, and it is not obvious how that project of shaping the informal social structure should be taken up in nonideal circumstances.²¹⁵ What should we do in light of these considerations about emergent social inequalities? To what extent will other priorities supersede or impede the project of shaping the informal social structure? How should nonideal considerations change how we approach that project? We face questions about the degree to which the conclusions of the previous chapters meaningfully inform our practical deliberation, given our nonideal circumstances.

In this comparatively shorter final chapter, I want to note a few ways in which the ideal-theoretic argument presented here is practically relevant, in spite of the differences introduced by nonideal considerations. I also defend the value of the fair relational equality argument, given its uncertain immediate practical implications. The aim is not to generate a list of proposals for our circumstances—although I provide a few concrete examples throughout, chapter 5 presented reasons for thinking fair norms and practices often need to be chosen in actual deliberation, on the basis of practical experiments, and sensitive to path-dependent cultural contingencies. Rather,

²¹⁵ By ‘us,’ I mean to include at least contemporary societies with developed economies. My examples will be drawn mostly from the contemporary United States.

this chapter examines how translation into nonideal contexts is apt to change the preceding argument. In what follows, I want to look at three major questions about nonideal circumstances, concerning legacies of injustice, institutional noncompliance, and individual noncompliance, each of which raises questions about the relevance of fair relational equality.²¹⁶

In section 1, I outline some of the difficulties involved in drawing practical guidance for our society from the previous chapters. In section 2, I argue that in societies with legacies of injustice, individuals will have distinct duties to rectify past wrongs, and they will have good reason to divide the labor of changing the informal social structure unevenly among themselves. In section 3, I argue that institutional noncompliance with the demands of relational equality will also change how individuals should go about pursuing a fairer informal social structure—by adding to their responsibilities, making some efforts futile or counterproductive, and changing what norms and practices would be appropriate. As examples, I discuss what individuals might do if the state fails to compress economic inequality or fosters unnecessary positional status competition. In section 4, I turn to the effects of individual noncompliance. When others will not meet the demands of relational equality, broad collective deliberation about the informal social structure is often impossible, and compliant individuals will have to adopt other strategies to change the informal social structure. When individuals refuse to make changes in their own informal social activity, they might still work to secure a better informal social structure for future generations. Finally, in section 5 I argue that the theory of fair relational equality is still of theoretical interest and practical utility, despite these difficulties.

²¹⁶ While this provides a slightly better picture of the requirements liberal relational equality imposes in our own world, it is far from being an exhaustive list of nonideal considerations. I do not address how resource scarcity may affect liberal relational egalitarian aims, nor how we might move from descriptions of ideal states to the selection of appropriate transitional steps toward that ideal. See Goodin (1995), Sen (2009), and Gaus (2016). Rather than engage in full with the burgeoning literature on nonideal theory, I am selecting tools as necessary to help address likely worries about fair relational equality.

1. Problems Translating Recommendations to Nonideal Circumstances

The compatibility worry is built on the observation that emergent social inequalities are possible even in relatively ideal conditions. In describing the compatibility worry, I made a number of idealizing assumptions—that there are no major historical injustices to rectify,²¹⁷ that institutions do everything they can to achieve relational equality, and that individuals are willing to comply with the demands of justice. Such idealizations help show that the conflict is due to constitutive features of the relational-egalitarian and liberal ideals, not contingent features of unjust societies. The description of what further steps institutions and individuals could do to respond to emergent social inequalities is likewise built on the same idealizing assumptions. I have described fair relational equality as an aspiration that is coherent and attainable under those ideal conditions.

However, we face a number of obstacles that do not feature at all in the ideal-theoretic account. First, legacies of injustice have a reverberating impact on the relative power, influence, and status of groups. For instance, in the United States, African-Americans continue to be disadvantaged—impoverished, marginalized, and stigmatized—by legacies of slavery, Black Codes, and Jim Crow, historical and ongoing redlining and racist lending practices, discrimination in policing and prosecution, informal segregation, and demeaning cultural representations, among other injustices.²¹⁸ Designing institutions and informal social practices without accounting for those continuing effects can reinforce or amplify such disadvantages.²¹⁹ Second, our institutions do not meet the demands of relational equality, and they will fail to do

²¹⁷ Tommie Shelby argues that there is “no reason to believe that Rawls thought a well-ordered society could never be created out of an unjust one” and so “Rawls’s principles can help us . . . rectify injustices after they have already occurred” (2013, 157). Even if this is right, ideal-theoretic accounts like Rawls’s do not include consideration of historic injustices, so there is an open question about how they ought to be rectified.

²¹⁸ See Alexander (2012), Coates (2014), and Rothstein (2017) for arguments to this effect.

²¹⁹ Charles Mills argues that this is a particularly acute problem for the contemporary US (2009, 180).

so for the foreseeable future. There are significant inequalities of wealth and power in every existing society (very little of which could be justified by the EDC), our institutions do not enforce the laws evenly or grant the same rights to all citizens, and in many cases institutions do not secure even minimally decent conditions for its citizens. Those failures foster relations of domination and create disparities of influence that make genuine participation in egalitarian deliberation impossible or extremely difficult. Third, widespread individual noncompliance with relational-egalitarian requirements is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. We should realistically expect some non-negligible part of the population to reject demands on their informal social choices as too onerous.

As a result, what responsibilities individuals have to help create and maintain relations of equality in worlds like ours may be significantly different than what has been described so far. Some argue that an analogue of the “theory of the second best” applies to normative political theory: when the full ideal cannot be realized, we cannot assume it is always justifiable to pursue the nearest approximation.²²⁰ In the face of failure we may need to adjust our aims rather than seek to maximize the approximation of each aspect to the ideal. In some nonideal cases, we should instead pursue achievable local optima—for example, even if a society with minimal government coercion is ideal, it may be preferable to have more coercion than insecurity and widespread noncompliance. Similar reasoning could apply in the context of relational equality: it may be preferable not to aim at achieving the informal social structure of a fully just society, if we are unlikely to reach it. In some circumstances, the first priority will be to avoid or minimize cruelty, humiliation, or other egregious injustices (Shklar 1989, Margalit 1996).

²²⁰ For discussion of the theory of the second best, see Goodin (1995), Margalit (1996, 283), and Heath (2009). Wiens (2016) discusses the extent to which the theory of the second best can be generalized from its original economic context.

None of this should come as a surprise; these are common considerations in recent literature on nonideal theory.²²¹ I emphasize these considerations here to ward off a potential misunderstanding of the significance of fair relational equality. The acceptance of the idea of fair relational equality should not lead us to simply accept the persistence of subtle social inequalities. That some particular emergent social inequalities are ultimately acceptable for members of an otherwise ideally just society does not mean that those of us in nonideal circumstances must accept similar inequalities. What are tolerable differentials in an ideal context may be intolerable in our own, if they catalyze further injustices or serve as a painful reminder of past injustices. So it is difficult to translate the work that individuals would have to do to help realize fair relational equality in an ideal state with what relational equality demands of them in nonideal circumstances.

2. Legacies of Injustice

How would the requirements of fair relational equality change in societies characterized by deep legacies of injustice?²²² Our societies have long histories of discrimination, exploitation, and refusal to recognize all members of society as equals, and even after unjust policies have been ended, they cast a long shadow. I want to highlight two significant reasons why we should expect past injustice to change what constitutes an imperfect but justifiable realization of relational equality. First, in any such society, institutions and individuals will also have duties to rectify or repair residual disadvantages. Second, such societies will have more reason to divide

²²¹ See, for example, Goodin (1995), Murphy (2000), Robeyns (2008), Simmons (2010), Valentini (2012), Stemplowska (2016), Shelby (2016), and Stemplowska (2017).

²²² In this section, I am artificially separating questions about legacies of injustice from questions about how to respond to states that continue to enforce unjust policies (which is addressed under the heading of institutional noncompliance).

the labor of creating a fairer informal social structure unevenly among groups, on the basis of how such injustice has advantaged or disadvantaged different groups.

2.1. Duties of Rectification and Repair

In any world characterized by legacies of injustice, both institutions and individuals have duties of rectification. At a minimum, this supplements the requirements for achieving fair relational equality, and in some instances rectification and repair displaces other goals. In some ways, the rectification of past injustices is similar to the steps that need to be taken to eliminate or mitigate emergent social inequalities. I have already argued that even under ideal conditions, institutions and individuals have to take steps to redress differentials of power, status, and influence. Duties of rectification or repair that respond to legacies of injustice are fundamentally different, though, in that they are responses to wrongdoing. Institutions and individuals have special responsibilities to acknowledge the wrongdoing, and there may be a greater need to re-establish or build relationships of trust.

To rectify past injustices, institutions must reverse the policies that facilitated them and, having done so, take steps to ameliorate their effects. Most obviously, the state can change the relevant laws and policies. Making economic restitution can help restore an appropriate distribution of benefits and burdens in some cases. The state can in some cases compensate for harms produced in the past, by providing special goods or opportunities to those disadvantaged. It can recognize the moral wrongdoing with formal apologies. It can punish living offenders and seek justice for victims. It can encourage a process of reconciliation with memorials or spaces for dialogue and accounting.

In many cases, those kinds of institutional measures will not on their own eliminate the profound impact of past injustice on the shape of society. Informal inequalities of power, status, and influence may long outlive formal inequalities, unless informal social practices aim at correcting these effects. A history of injustice may tar the disadvantaged group with a lingering stigma. It can shape social networks such that the disadvantaged group is likely to continue to be marginalized into the future, even if the norms and practices of the informal social structure are made facially fair or nondiscriminatory.

Under such circumstances, correcting those informal inequalities could require further action to eliminate the effects of past injustices on informal social networks, or to eliminate lingering status hierarchy, stigma, and bias. Elizabeth Anderson's discussion of the aim of racial integration in the contemporary United States in *The Imperative of Integration* (2010c) is an example of the first type of reparative project. She argues that Americans have a responsibility to racially integrate their neighborhoods and informal social networks. The second type of reparative project, which aims at eliminating lingering status hierarchy, stigma, or bias, may include integration but also aims at some broader cultural changes. The Black Power movement, the "black is beautiful" cultural movement, or more recent attempts to address anti-black implicit attitudes exemplify different kinds of reparative status projects. Such efforts might aim at creating a less discriminatory distribution of social capital, at purging demeaning and disrespectful stereotypes from the cultural lexicon, at de-biasing social evaluative standards, or at allowing individuals fair opportunities to earn esteem.

Those reparative aims might be served by tailoring informal social norms and practices to respond to the reality of legacies of injustice. That could affect norms of public interaction, appropriate partiality, specifications of role responsibilities, and the etiquette of informal

communication. This adds another layer of considerations when shaping the informal social structure. A society with these reparative aims might choose social norms and practices that actively seek greater integration and better distributions of status. In some instances, it will be more important to rectify harms created by past injustices than to reduce emergent differentials of power and status, and egalitarians will have to make trade offs among those aims.

2.2. Variation in Individuals' Duties

Consideration of past injustices also gives us reason to think individuals' responsibilities for securing a fair informal social structure may be distributed unevenly, with members of some groups required to do more than others. The previous chapters do not consider this possibility, since the focus there was simply on the division of moral labor between institutions and individuals. Where some groups enjoy greater power, status, or influence, though, they have correspondingly greater responsibilities to help address such injustices. Those differentials affect what people can accomplish and what reasonably can be asked of them. In some cases, it is permissible for those harmed by legacies of injustice to refuse to adopt social practices and norms before those legacies are rectified, in virtue of special vulnerability. Beneficiaries of injustice may have a greater responsibility to adopt new norms and practices, not due to guilt but because they are better situated to make changes.

The recent exchange between Elizabeth Anderson and Tommie Shelby on the subject of racial integration illustrates this idea of uneven distributions of duties. Anderson starts from the claim that persistent racial segregation in the United States is a cause of severe, ongoing group inequality. She notes the connections between racial segregation and African-Americans' lower wealth, employment rates, educational attainment, health, and access to financial and social

capital. On that basis she argues that racial integration is a “requirement of justice” (2010c, 112). That requires formal and informal integration, and informal integration requires black and white citizens to take opportunities to integrate their neighborhoods and social circles. Shelby argues that in such circumstances, it is not unjust for blacks to continue to self-segregate, in light of the costs and risks they would endure—to give up protective social networks in the faith that they will not be further disadvantaged or marginalized (2016, 67).²²³ Under these circumstances, it would be appropriate to assign differential responsibility for integrative projects. Even if we rule out a duty to make particular associative choices, we might still say that white Americans have a greater responsibility to account for and justify residential and other associative choices that contribute to racial segregation, or that they have a greater responsibility to support integrative institutional projects.

Philosophical work on responsibility for rectifying structural injustice is useful in this context. Iris Marion Young argues that responsibilities ought to be divided on the bases of connections (to those victimized by structural injustice), power, and privilege (such that beneficiaries have special responsibility) (2003, 40–43).²²⁴ Applied to the problem of responding to legacies of injustice, that suggests that those with greater power bear greater responsibility for initiating changes in informal social norms and practices. In some cases, asymmetrical responsibilities for opening up informal social circles or seeking out opportunities to broaden social networks would be justifiable. Members of advantaged groups could adopt special responsibilities to advocate for new norms and practices. “Norm entrepreneurs” can suffer social

²²³ For my part, I am not sure that Anderson’s position is actually incompatible with Shelby’s observation of differential responsibilities. When she claims that “comprehensive racial integration is a necessary condition of a racially just future” [2010b, 189], that still seems to leave open the possibility that the bulk of the work of integration could fall on white Americans.

²²⁴ In a somewhat similar vein, Leif Wenar has argued that responsibility for addressing severe poverty should be distributed on the basis of who would bear the least cost to fix it, with the proviso that defining some fixed social roles with particular responsibilities can help clarify moral requirements and ease the division of labor (2007, 257, 262).

sanction for breaking older, established norms, which is one reason why the more advantaged and powerful may have greater responsibility to begin that process. The deliberative view of relations of equality can make sense of a nonideal division of labor that asked those with greater power to do more—such a division would reflect recognition of the important interests of more vulnerable members of society.

In other cases, however, a victimized group might have special responsibility for mitigating the effects of past injustices. Reparative status projects, like the “black is beautiful” social movement or attempts to “reclaim” slurs, may be best carried out by a stigmatized group, because such action secures some measure of dignifying agency. Perhaps the differential responsibility can be explained in terms of their greater power to effect that change, even if they have less power in society generally. Even where a disadvantaged group is not best equipped to create change—where they are a minority group, for instance, it may be easier for the majority to change predominant social norms and practices—they may be uniquely positioned to act in a way that empowers them. The disadvantaged group may also have a special role in deliberation about informal social norms and practices. In such cases, there is often good reason to grant the group some authority to decide how to go about revising social practices.

To summarize, in societies that have to deal with historical injustices, what relational equality requires will differ in a few significant ways. First, the duties individuals and institutions have will at least be supplemented, and some may be displaced, by responsibilities to rectify such injustices and repair moral relationships among members of society. Second, we need to accommodate the possibility that different groups will have different responsibilities for creating a fairer informal social structure. This complicates the picture of what we should do to help realize relational equality, but so far as I can see, it does not undermine the argument of the

preceding chapters. We still have reason to think that fair relational equality is compatible with liberal commitments, and we still have reason to treat the informal social structure as an object of collective deliberation. In the face of considerable historical injustices, a society may get less close to fair relational equality than they would in ideal conditions. That does not change what should count as fair relational equality—the presence of historic injustices may alter what can be demanded of individuals in the short-term, but fair relational equality should not be adjusted to accept the continuing impact of injustice.

Despite the addition of these supplemental or trumping duties of rectification, the argument of the preceding chapters still provides valuable tools for real-world deliberation. The focus on an informal social structure provides a target for reform and still helps frame how members of society can think about existing social practices and norms as a whole. They will still want to attend to the possibility of emergent social stratification and status hierarchies, even if the remediation of historical injustices takes precedence in some cases. Because rectification of historical injustices can be pursued simultaneously with attempts to prevent or mitigate emergent social inequalities, this account does inform what individuals should do in nonideal cases.

The idea of fair relational equality itself also makes a difference to how we evaluate what we have accomplished. It helps to identify the possibility that we might do everything that is rightly demanded of us without perfectly realizing relational equality. In virtue of liberal constraints on demanding integrative associative choices, Tommie Shelby proposes an ideal of “egalitarian pluralism,” which requires only that the just society be formally desegregated and that its members be left free to interact without constraint (2016, 67). Even if it would be illiberal and unjustifiable to demand individuals to make integrative associative choices, there is still good reason to say the full relational-egalitarian ideal has not been fully satisfied in such a world.

3. Institutional Noncompliance

In this section, I consider the implications of institutional noncompliance for the theory of fair relational equality. What ought individuals do if their state does not fulfill the institutional requirements of chapter 6? Does that suggest that individuals must do more, or does it make a fair arrangement so improbable as to release individuals from some obligations? The question of what individuals should do in the face of state failure is one part of what Zofia Stemplowska calls “defeatist responsive nonideal theory”—the theory of what should be required of the compliant in the presence of the noncompliant (2017, 288). General work in this area has focused attention on whether or when individuals in such circumstances have duties to take up a greater share of the labor, to only perform their fair share, or to perform less than their fair share (Murphy 2000, Stemplowska 2016). The difficulty in this context is specify what individuals should do by way of helping realize fair relational equality when the state does not create the basic institutions of an egalitarian society.

When the state fails to secure democracy, redistribution of resources, or robust antidiscrimination protections, or when it fails to do its part to mitigate emergent social inequalities, that does change what individuals should do in response.²²⁵ First, institutional failure can generate wholly new duties for individuals—for example, duties to speak out or resist institutional action. Second, it may make otherwise justifiable individual action harmful (e.g., individual duties to dampen goods transmission within relationships may depend on a public replacement being provided). When it does so, it changes the calculus of what can be reasonably demanded of individuals, so they can be relieved of some duties they would have in an ideal

²²⁵ Onora O’Neill has noted that states fail as primary agents of justice—as agents that institutionalize principles of justice—for a number of reasons (2001, 182). When states abuse their power or deliberately fail to meet obligations, individuals have obligations to try to reform them. When states fail due to weakness, individuals instead have obligations to empower or supplement them.

setting. Third, institutional failure may shift priorities, as compensating for such failure may be more important than attending to smaller informal inequalities. Projects that aim to correct subtle social inequalities will take a backseat to the need to rectify institutional failure. Fourth, what norms of informal social interaction are appropriate can differ—in which case rather than simply supplementing individuals' duties, it may change their content. Individuals may need to develop norms and practices that respond first to institutional failure (e.g., by countering the effects of unjustifiable economic inequality). Fifth, as with legacies of injustice, institutional failure can raise the possibility of uneven distribution of individual duties. Individuals may be unable to really deliberate as equals before institutions are fixed, due to resultant inequalities of power. We need to beware supposing that we can leap to egalitarian deliberation regardless of what institutions do, as though we can easily suspend unjust advantages. Nonideal models of action for reforming society may diverge significantly from what is called for under ideal circumstances.

3.1. Economic Inequality

Perhaps the single biggest step the state could take to help secure relational equality would be to compress economic inequality. Even if distributive concerns are ultimately derivative on a relational-egalitarian picture, material redistribution can eliminate some hierarchies of power, status, and influence, and encourage individuals to relate as equals. Contrariwise, failure to realize that redistribution can create a raft of relational inequalities. Disparities in wealth can produce forms of domination, when the poorer are not just relatively poorer but dependent on the wealthier. Economic inequalities can also produce inegalitarian public spheres or status hierarchies. Compression of economic inequality likely depends on

institutional action, so when institutions refuse to perform this function, how do individuals' duties change?

Given the importance of compressing economic inequality, individuals' first responsibility in such circumstances may be political—to get the state to enact redistributive reforms. Of course, there are ways to try to build an egalitarian culture in a society with material inequality. Members of society could devise egalitarian modes of address and public interaction, reject categories of esteem tethered to wealth, or adopt informal sumptuary norms. Even so, there are limits on the degree to which changes in informal social norms can compensate for inequalities of wealth and power. Such informal compensations may just give the appearance of endorsing continued material inequality, and it may even undermine efforts to spur the state to compress material inequality.

Although responsibilities to redress economic inequality may trump the importance of social life autonomy in some cases—it may be morally more important to alleviate dire poverty or combat structures of domination than to preserve discretion over informal associative choices—the best way to address such institutional failure is likely through political action rather than modifying informal social practices. That said, when institutions cannot be pressured to act to compress material inequality, individuals might adopt some compensatory measures in informal social interaction as a second-best alternative. They could voluntarily transfer resources to organizations seeking greater equality, or they could refuse to use their own greater resources to advance their own interests in some cases (e.g., by buying privileged access to vital goods). By and large, though, the first priority will be to seek institutional reform. Where economic inequality is severe, it will also impede individuals from genuine participation in egalitarian

deliberation, so we should be suspicious of attempts to draw out alternative informal social structures under those circumstances.

3.2. Positional Status

Institutions might also fail to meet relational-egalitarian demands if they encourage unnecessary positional status competitions (e.g., when they choose to restrict positions of power or honor). Relational equality is compatible with a system in which officeholders possess special power or authority, but relational egalitarians should favor more horizontal organizational design where possible. If institutions unnecessarily limit power to select offices, jobs, or places of public esteem, they can encourage members of society to compete against each other and cultivate unhealthy positional status hierarchies. Institutional design can also encourage positional status competition in the way they distribute goods or esteem—putting undue emphasis on formal education where such training is not a bona fide qualification, for instance, or reserving public praise for the most productive, intelligent, or talented. At one end, then, this may appear as competitions for some form of prestige. It may also withhold public goods and services in ways that creates unnecessary precarity, and so encourage unnecessary competition or conflict. Educational systems that unnecessarily limit access to the best resources or rank students simply to encourage competition may undermine the effort to create a relational-egalitarian culture.

Where institutions actively or unintentionally encourage positional status competitions, individuals will have different responsibilities. In order to promote the creation of more justifiable informal social practices, they may have a responsibility to abstain from participation in competition, or to compensate for such pressures by speaking out against them. Where getting

the state (or other institutions) to comply is unlikely, they may need to develop oppositional cultures that resist publicly authoritative status norms. The idea of oppositional cultures or compensatory social practices does not feature in the ideal-theoretic description of individuals' duties, but in our own circumstances, developing such cultures and practices may be of greater importance. In nonideal circumstances, relational egalitarians have responsibilities to reject the inequalitarian values promoted by the state and, where the costs are not too great, to refuse to accept advantages created by zero-sum status competitions.

Resisting positional status competitions may involve refraining from conspicuous consumption or signaling. It may require individuals to refrain from using resources, talents, or other means of winning such competition. As with economic inequality, the presence of competitive structures that undermine solidarity and relational equality cannot be entirely fixed by individual action alone—there is a collective action problem that demands an institutional reply, and it is too burdensome to ask individuals to sacrifice their own (or their loved ones') well-being by entirely refusing to participate in practices that determine social places and access to resources.²²⁶

Looking at examples like these, we can see why societies that have to address institutional noncompliance will have practical challenges not described in chapters 5 and 6. The task of reforming and resisting institutions would need to be added to the set of individual obligations, and in some cases that work could conflict with (and perhaps displace) other responsibilities. Institutional noncompliance can render some recommendations futile or counterproductive. As a result, the prospect of institutional noncompliance should make us wary of prematurely declaring that fair relational equality has been achieved: that individuals are

²²⁶ In a similar spirit, Brighouse and Swift (2014) discuss the degree to which parents can provide their children with advantages in education, acculturation, and care.

doing everything they would have to do under ideal circumstances is not conclusive evidence that the result is acceptable.

The likelihood of institutional noncompliance does not render the theory of fair relational equality theoretically or practically irrelevant. Ideal-theoretic accounts of justice generally face the possibility of institutional noncompliance, and the fact that societies will likely fail to meet the ideal does not show that the ideal is incorrect. The theory of fair relational equality also points out the need for institutions to adopt measures that will mitigate emergent social inequalities. In that respect, the theory provides new evaluative criteria for institutions. The theory of fair relational equality is also still practically relevant. Though duties to support institutional reform may take priority over duties to mitigate emergent social inequalities, where resources are limited or where duties would come into conflict, in many cases both aims could be pursued in tandem. Individuals can work to change the informal social structure while pressing for institutional reforms. The theory helps identify some long-range aims for the liberal relational egalitarian and offers a vocabulary that can be used in protest.

4. Individual Noncompliance

Finally, we should consider the implications of individual noncompliance, in two forms. If other individuals do not fulfill their obligations to help secure fair relational equality, what kinds of slack-taking obligations do compliant individuals inherit? Alternatively, if an individual will not comply with the requirements of fair relational equality regarding informal social life, what concessive obligations might this indicate?

4.1. Responsive Nonideal Considerations

There are a variety of reasons to expect noncompliance with the demands of relational equality. Some individuals are likely to reject the egalitarian ideal altogether, and to act on elitist, condescending, or exclusionary attitudes. Beyond inegalitarian attitudes and explicit rejection of the ideal of relational equality, people may fail to comply due to emotional commitments to existing practices, reluctance to bear the costs of giving up unjust advantages, or interests in shielding their informal social behavior from any kind of accountability. As I argued in chapter 1, the lone racist or sexist does not upset the achievement of relational equality—the expression of an isolated, minority view is not sufficient to institute hierarchies of power, status, or influence. When a sufficiently large number of people refuse to allow their relations to be governed by the EDC, though, what everyone else should do will change. There are two categories of responsive action to consider: (1) individuals should take some further steps to secure the compliance of others, and (2) they should alter their own behavior in light of the likely continuing noncompliance of others. Both categories concern another part of “defeatist responsive nonideal theory” (added to considerations of institutional noncompliance).

First, since relational equality requires that relevant sociopolitical decisions be made together, there is a collective obligation that cannot be satisfied by individuals alone. Sufficient levels of noncompliance will rule out some forms of collective deliberation about the informal social structure. Insofar as individuals have obligations to support the creation and maintenance of just institutions, including a fair informal social structure, when others do not comply, individual compliance does not help support a more egalitarian norm. Widespread noncompliance may mean that a number of the recommendations for individuals need to be rethought, since individuals cannot unilaterally change social norms.

It may make some kinds of unilateral action necessary. Individuals can set examples even where they cannot change social norms on their own. Pockets of egalitarian communities and subcultures could promote ideals of egalitarian relationships, even where the society at large is noncompliant, and provide models for the future. Such behavior can operate as a signal to others of a willingness to cooperate in broader egalitarian deliberation, which may be a necessary prelude in some circumstances to broader collective action that shapes the informal social structure.²²⁷ Individuals can prioritize efforts to persuade the noncompliant or protect the vulnerable. Elizabeth Anderson has argued that liberal relational egalitarians should focus efforts on protest and persuasion in order to eliminate recalcitrant inegalitarian attitudes (2009), and such action may at least temporarily displace obligations to participate in collective deliberation about the informal social structure.

Noncompliance may also force individuals and institutions to take up more defensive and compensatory action—to prevent further injustices or to alleviate the most immediate harms caused by other’s noncompliance. In general work on the subject, Zofia Stemplowska has defended the position that individuals have a duty to “take up the slack when slack taking is necessary to assist those in dire need” (2016, 592). People might alternatively argue that individuals have no duty to do more than their fair share, even in the face of noncompliance (Murphy 2000), or even that they have less responsibility to do their fair share when it is certain that others will not contribute. Those in actual egalitarian social movements (e.g., suffragettes, civil rights activists) have historically taken on more than their fair share to advance a relational-

²²⁷ I borrow this language from Holly Lawford-Smith (2015), who argues that ethical consumption can be a means of signaling willingness to cooperate in collective action. There is a broad parallel here: Lawford-Smith argues that “there are some morally important ends we can pursue only by acting collectively. . . . [and when there are such ends] an individual has an obligation to take steps toward collectivizing” (320–1). In a similar vein, changing the informal social structure is a collective project, and individuals have a derivative responsibility to facilitate collective action.

egalitarian agenda. At the same time, there are good reasons to think that some such slack-taking is supererogatory, and that it would be unreasonable to demand that individuals sacrifice more than others for the sake of an egalitarian ideal.

Widespread individual noncompliance can radically change what individuals ought to do, but it does not show that the theory of fair relational equality is theoretically or practically irrelevant. The preceding chapters argue that members of society have a collective obligation to regard the structure of informal social interaction as an object of deliberation. It is worthwhile to note this obligation, even if it is widely ignored. The theory of fair relational equality also makes important conclusions about liberal political philosophy—that it is compatible with at least partially addressing the inequities that arise out of informal interaction. Likewise, the conclusions drawn in previous chapters are practically useful, even if the obligations are widely disregarded. First, in trying to persuade others to accept a relational-egalitarian commitment, or in trying to design models of egalitarian relationships, compliant individuals would draw on ideal-theoretic considerations. They would want to know what liberal relational equality actually does and does not demand under conditions of full compliance. Second, in showing that a form of fair relational equality is possible, the theory responds to concerns that it is futile or hopelessly utopian to try to pursue relational equality. That is to say, the vision of an achievable, imperfectly realized form of relational equality could galvanize efforts, in some circumstances.

4.2. Permissive Nonideal Considerations

Finally, we might consider what nonideal theory would recommend to individuals who will themselves fail to do what the relational-egalitarian ideal demands. If individuals will fail to meet the requirements laid out in chapters 5 and 6, are there less demanding or more feasible

steps they should take in the wake of such failure? Suppose that people will not abandon exclusivity in informal association, opportunity hoarding, or competing for positional status. What weaker duties might they nevertheless have?²²⁸

Changing informal social norms and practices will sometimes involve upsetting life plans and reversing entrenched expectations about what is appropriate. People who are otherwise committed to a relational-egalitarian ideal may nevertheless find it difficult to accept such changes. It is possible in such cases that there is a set of second-best acts they could undertake. Even where they will not adjust their informal social behavior, they can take steps to make it easier for subsequent generations to form more egalitarian social networks.²²⁹ That might involve, for instance, changing how they educate their children or what norms they inculcate in younger generations. To the extent that their attitudes and preferences are the products of existing institutions and policies—for example, if their unwillingness to integrate their informal social networks is due to the structure of economic opportunities—they can press for changes to institutions and policies that will shape attitudes and preferences in the future.²³⁰ Individuals who will not adjust their partiality within relationships may have further obligations to try to compensate for that failure—for example, by donating more to institutions and organizations that are pursuing relational equality. They might also seek to amplify the voices of those who are willing to adopt better norms and practices. Finally, they might look for ways to blunt or mitigate the inequalities caused by patterns of noncompliant behavior like their own. This would not

²²⁸ This is connected to the debate about actualism and possibilism in ethics—whether the evaluation of an agent’s options (and a determination of what they ought to do) should consider what the agent will actually do or what it is possible for them to do (Jackson and Pargetter, 1986). Permissive nonideal considerations ask what agents should do, given that they fail to meet some other obligation. I doubt that possibilists are prohibited from considering what would be second-best suboptimal choices, even if they would have reservations about saying the agents ought to do them, so this discussion probably does not require adopting a position in the actualist-possibilist debate. Anyone who discusses permissive nonideal considerations is at least provisionally assuming that we can relativize recommendations or demands to sets of options, though, which may incline toward an actualist position.

²²⁹ Simmons (2010).

²³⁰ See Joshua Cohen (2001) on the relationship between social arrangements and social ethos.

satisfy an individual's obligations to help realize fair relational equality, but it may still be a requirement of minimal decency.

Consideration of permissive nonideal requirements is no more a threat to the theory of fair relational equality than were responsive nonideal considerations. Even if no one would comply, that does not show that fair relational equality is impossible or ruled out by inevitable human dispositions. The individual who seeks some second-best acts to take in the face of their own likely noncompliance already accepts the correctness of the standard they are failing to meet, so the pursuit of permissive nonideal considerations is parasitic on the ideal-theoretic account already given. That said, reflection on what people are likely to fail to do could give us reason to revise some of the practical suggestions for achieving fair relational equality. If people are apt to continue hoarding opportunities and fighting for positional status, then we have more reasons to favor institutional structures that are less competitive. If people are apt to continue favoring informal connections and intimate relations, even when such partiality reliably leads to emergent inequalities, there are reasons to favor more public provision of important goods. Those who deliberate about informal social norms and practices can consider whether some proposed practices would be psychologically demanding, whether people would struggle to comply. They can, on that basis, favor alternative practices or institutional solutions that depend less on individual willpower, so long as what they pick still satisfies the demands of the EDC. We may need to make adjustments to what we exhort of others in light of considerations of noncompliance, but that does not at all show that the ideal of fair relational equality is irrelevant or not useful.

5. Relevance of Fair Relational Egalitarian Injunctions

This shorter chapter has outlined a few ways in which nonideal considerations will dramatically change the requirements placed on institutions and individuals. Throughout I have argued that an ideal-theoretic account of fair relational equality, and a focus on the informal social structure, is still useful for us in spite of these differences. In this section I summarize why we should think the theory of fair relational equality is of theoretical interest and practical importance.

First, the idea of fair relational equality helps clarify and explain our values. By looking at what can be accomplished in ideal settings, we are in a better position to reconcile ourselves to the idea of imperfect relational equality, even if that should not inure us to actually existing inequalitarian relations. Even if fair relational equality, as described in previous chapters, is not an ideal that we can feasibly achieve, articulating it helps to differentiate what cannot be corrected by liberal relational egalitarians from what are injustices that we should continue to combat. In that way it may help guard us against being too permissive, against conceding too easily. Even if it had no immediate practical implications, it would be useful to come to better understand the nature of relational egalitarianism and what positive realizations of the ideal might look like.

The theory of fair relational equality does have some immediate practical implications, however. The argument for fair relational equality involves changing the likely ultimate endpoint of relational-egalitarian work, and that might change what steps we think are demanded at present. The project of shaping the informal social structure offers an aim that can orient efforts at reform. Some of the ideal-theoretic division of moral labor will still be useful—for instance, the institutional responsibilities described in chapter 6 (environmental development, informative and expressive institutional speech, effect mitigation) might inform projects we could delegate to

the state now. Some individual obligations will still apply immediately, alongside rectificatory, responsive, and permissive obligations. Individuals can promote public deliberation about the informal social structure or aim to exemplify egalitarian relations in their own organizations and communities. Knowing what is demanded of individuals in ideal circumstances is at least a starting point for consideration of additional labor, even when slack-taking is too onerous to demand. Pointing out what cannot be required even in ideal circumstances is also useful for our understanding of what we have and have not accomplished.

Developing concrete, specific recommendations about what specific practices to develop and what norms to revise in our own circumstances requires more empirical work. That requires evaluation of the costs and likely effects of various policy possibilities, data on how people would likely respond to different injunctions, and ways to measure and compare disparities in informal power in different circumstances.²³¹ Specific recommendations also depend considerably on the specific cultural meanings of informal norms and practices, so a great deal of descriptive or ethnographic work is needed to make suitably sensitive recommendations. Just as importantly, the relational egalitarian standard will underdetermine what specific policies and practices should be adopted, so we should not expect the theory to provide a list of particular norms for every society. It should be surprising, then, that the philosophical arguments on their own do not specify all the practical details of fair informal social interaction.

In sum, the gap between the ideal-theoretic account of fair relational equality and what we are likely to achieve in virtue of legacies of injustice and institutional and individual noncompliance is not indicative of a failing in the theory. On the contrary, reflection on the ideal-theoretic account can be quite useful for non-ideal circumstances. First, it can help us

²³¹ Here I am in broad agreement with the arguments recently made by Jonathan Wolff (2018) and Emily McTernan (2014) for a form of political philosophy in dialogue with empirical research and policy analysis.

develop new political projects and aspirations. While liberal relational egalitarians remain committed to the requirement to achieve full or perfect relational equality, should it become achievable, they can and should directly pursue fair relational equality. Second, relatedly, it provides a framework for grappling with inequalities in informal social life. The criterion of the EDC and the vocabulary of the informal social structure help us move beyond vague or diffuse worries about subtle informal injustices. They focus attention on the decisions people should make together about their informal social structure. In nonideal circumstances, that underscores the importance of getting to a world in which everyone can genuinely engage in egalitarian deliberation.

CONCLUSION

In these closing pages, I want to quickly survey the advantages of the position I have defended, identify questions that have been left open, and suggest some lines for future work.

I think it is already clear that there are a handful of advantages to adopting the idea of fair relational equality, taken as extending to the informal social structure. First, and most broadly, it illuminates a way of bringing egalitarian theory to bear on the details of informal social interaction, without adopting an anti-institutionalist position that simply applies the same demands to institutions and individuals alike.

Second, this account allows us to recognize that differentials in power, status, and influence that can emerge even if all agents are acting virtuously, and these differentials can affect whether members of society stand as equals. It doesn't require us to define relational equality in terms of what we may permissibly demand of others. The society of equals is at least partly understood in terms of certain states of affairs or particular accomplishments, which we may fail to realize for a variety of reasons.

Third, even though it doesn't give us a specific set of prescriptions for all societies, the deliberative conception of relational equality does allow us to say when people do in fact stand as equals (as opposed to just identifying salient inequalities), and so helps provide an orienting goal for political work. Although we may all agree about the grossest of relational inequalities, some positive conception is useful for adjudicating disputes about smaller and subtler inequalities.

Fourth, this approach brings some unity to the many strands of work being done under the heading of relational equality. Rather than having to develop two independent ideals of relational equality, as Christian Schemmel suggests in distinguishing “liberal” and “radical” relational egalitarian views (2011b, 142), this approach just describes one ideal of relational equality, which we could take liberal or illiberal steps to try to realize.

Finally, I think there is a practical advantage to adopting fair relational equality. The complex interaction effects of our informal practices are likely to throw up many obstacles to the perfect realization of relational equality. Bearing fair relational equality in mind as a goal worth pursuing can prevent despair from arising on the part of those who recognize the impossibility of realizing the full ideal.

This project has left many theoretical questions open, several of which would be promising lines for future research. First, I have left open the place of relational egalitarianism within a broader egalitarian theory. Egalitarians debate whether relational equality is a distinctive view, a supplement to distributive views or to luck egalitarianism, or a component of a broader encompassing view. In chapter 1, I argued only that relational equality merited attention in its own right, however that debate is settled. Although this account does situate relational egalitarianism as part of a package of principles of justice, a fuller account could also address how it fits with other conceptions of equality. As noted in chapters 1 and 2, I am inclined to agree with Anderson (1999a) and Scheffler (2003) that relational egalitarianism is a freestanding alternative conception of equality, but I have not directly addressed Lippert-Rasmussen’s argument (2015, 2016, 2018) that some pluralist account could incorporate relational and luck egalitarian concerns. If he is right, then we would need to know more about how luck-egalitarian demands constrain our pursuit of

relational equality, which may affect the ultimate characterization of fair relational equality.

Second, I have bracketed questions about the size and scope of the egalitarian community. How that is settled makes a significant theoretical and practical difference. If cosmopolitan theories are correct, then we need to think further about how varying national and subnational cultures fit within a larger egalitarian community, the degree to which informal social norms and practices can vary within that community, and the extent to which implementation of relational egalitarian norms can be aptly delegated to local groups. Chapter 5 dealt briefly with the idea of subcultural variation in informal social practices, but a cosmopolitan view would have to accommodate significantly greater variation than I have considered here. If the obligation to relate as equals only binds those who share a democracy or some pre-existing scheme of social cooperation for mutual advantage, then a noncosmopolitan account may be appropriate. Proponents of a noncosmopolitan account face questions about whether some form of equality, presumably less demanding than relational equality, is still required outside the egalitarian community.

Third, there is more to say about relational equality beyond what is required by justice. I defend an account of “justice-based” or deontic relational egalitarianism (Schemmel 2011a), but my account of this requirement is importantly different than others. Unlike others (e.g., Lippert-Rasmussen 2018), I do not hold that a society is just only if people relate as equals, where that is understood to mean full relational equality is achieved. Instead, I have argued that justice requires a sincere commitment to realizing relational equality. Members of society ought to aim to organize their institutions and interpersonal relationships in ways that satisfy the EDC, but it is not unjust if they fail to

achieve full relational equality because they protect fundamental individual liberties. This account leaves open whether there are other, unexplored aspects of the relational-egalitarian ideal that are not requirements of justice. David Miller and Andrew Mason might be correct that some aspects of the relational-egalitarian ideal are not requirements of justice. Camaraderie—including friendship, sympathy, or solidarity forged by similar experiences and backgrounds—may be valuable for a society of equals even if its absence would not be unjust. This project has said little about what individuals could ask of each other to help realize aspects of an egalitarian ideal that are not demands of justice, or how such admirable but supererogatory features might be realized.

Fourth, as noted in chapter 2, there is further work to be done on the domain question—the question of what decisions members of an egalitarian society must decide together. I argued that, whatever the full account says, members of society should at least make decisions together about the basic structure of society. That basic structure includes political and economic institutions, as well as some complex of important informal social norms and practices. The informal social structure of a society, including norms of appropriate interaction and the basic understanding of social roles, plays an integral role in social cooperation, so it is appropriately treated as a matter of collective deliberation. The argument in chapter 2 was expedient for the purpose of moving on to the compatibility worry, but it leaves open what else might be included within that domain. I suspect that a fully satisfactory answer to this question would identify both a core set of decisions that must always be decided together and a periphery of decisions that are suitable for collective deliberation but not required.

Fifth, alongside the domain question, the assessment question—sorting out exactly what the EDC requires—needs further development. The notes in chapter 2 help identify extreme cases, where people would obviously fail to offer satisfactory interpretations of the EDC, but it is less clear at the margins when individuals would be mistaken to accept a proposal as in keeping with the ideal. Any practice-oriented conception of relational equality will need a more precise standard for evaluating when the practice is successfully realized.

Sixth, it has been left open here whether all informal social structures will give rise to compatibility worries, or if there might be some that are more robust against emergent social inequalities. I argued that societies which leave associative decisions, broad life plans, and standards of esteem up to individuals will predictably produce emergent social stratification and status hierarchies. It was sufficient for our purposes that this is a problem for societies like ours, but it is not clear how universal this problem would be.²³²

The argument presented here has wide-ranging practical implications. Most importantly, it suggests that committed relational egalitarians are enjoined to treat some complex of important informal social norms as a subject for collective deliberation. It provides new practical goals for state action. The state can mitigate social stratification and emergent status hierarchies by redesigning institutions, shaping social space, engaging in public speech, and taking steps to dampen the material consequences of having informal social connections. Beyond being asked to engage in actual deliberation, individuals are

²³² As Julian Jonker has pointed out to me, we might also ask whether emergent social inequalities are only a problem for the societies in which they contingently occur, or whether full relational equality also requires robust counterfactual security against such inequalities. If relational equality includes nondomination, it already incorporates some requirement of counterfactual robustness when it comes to power. Perhaps something similar needs to be said about status- and influence-related disadvantages.

called to take further steps to support institutional efforts, to change their comportment and choices in public spaces, to restrain the exercise of some forms of partiality, and to be willing to discuss matters that are not up for collective deliberation.

That said, there are many practical questions left open by this project. First, there is work to be done to describe the wide set of permissible policies that egalitarian societies could adopt. The deliberative conception of relational equality offers a framework that could be used across a wide variety of policy questions, if not to determine uniquely satisfactory proposals, then at least to identify an acceptable set. More could be said about how the deliberative conception would address questions about education, labor, housing, public health, the provision of basic goods, culture, foreign policy, the environment, future generations, and other issues.

Second, there are pressing practical questions about how to implement this conception of relational egalitarianism. More could be done to help identify what steps we should take immediately, in nonideal circumstances, to help prevent or mitigate likely emergent social inequalities. More work needs to be done to help prioritize issues and sequence those steps. Such work would require more engagement with empirical research and attention to the details of particular societies.

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