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## Relational Justice: Egalitarian and Sufficientarian

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**ABSTRACT** *Relational egalitarianism is a theory of justice according to which people must relate as equals. In this article, we develop relational sufficientarianism – a view of justice according to which people must relate as sufficientians. We distinguish between three versions of this ideal, one that is incompatible with relational egalitarianism and two that are not. Building on this, we argue that relational theorists have good reason to support a pluralist view that is both egalitarian and sufficientarian.*

### 1. Introduction

According to a prominent theory of justice – relational egalitarianism – justice requires that people relate as equals. This view is plausible, relational egalitarians argue, partly because it provides a plausible explanation of why (relational) injustices such as discrimination and racism are wrong, that is, they are wrong because relations involving racism and discrimination are unequal in the sense that the racist, or the dominator, treats (and regards) the racistee, or the dominatee, as an inferior. If we want a relational theory of justice, we do not have to be relational egalitarians, however. We could also be relational sufficientarians. According to this view, justice requires that people relate as sufficientians, where a sufficientian is one whose standing is sufficiently high.<sup>1</sup> If we are relational sufficientarians, we are also able to object to injustices such as discrimination and racism. Thus, that relational egalitarianism finds discrimination and racism to be unjust is not a reason for supporting this view of justice as opposed to relational sufficientarianism. But whereas relational egalitarianism has attracted a large degree of attention and has been developed as a theory of justice, that is not the case for relational sufficientarianism. This is not because relational sufficientarianism is any less plausible than relational egalitarianism. Rather, we conjecture, it is because defenders of relational accounts of justice in their effort to explain and justify the relational component of their view – that is, how it is relational as opposed to distributive – have failed to substantiate whether it is indeed egalitarian or, alternatively, sufficientarian. As a result, many so-called relational egalitarians might be relational sufficientarians or pluralists.

One of the two main purposes of this article is thus to explore and develop relational sufficientarianism as a theory of justice. We will argue – drawing on discussions of sufficientarianism as a distributive theory of justice – that there are different versions of relational sufficientarianism. Indeed, we distinguish between pattern-monist relational sufficientarianism, relational shift-sufficientarianism, and the spheric relational view. The first view is the strongest in the sense that it is incompatible with relational egalitarianism whereas the latter two are compatible with a pluralist view of relational justice that is both egalitarian and sufficientarian.

The second main purpose of this article is to argue that the most plausible account of relational justice is both egalitarian and sufficientarian. This is to say that there are some relations in which people, as a matter of justice, must relate as equals, but other relations in which justice demands only that people relate as sufficient. This pluralist relational view, we argue, is attractive partly because it provides answers to two problems facing relational egalitarians, namely (i) the problem of explaining how their ideal travels from close, personal relations, such as a friendship or marriage, to more anonymous relationships, such as relationships between co-citizens; and (ii) the pervasiveness problem, that is, the problem that relational egalitarians have to come up with a convincing explanation of which inegalitarian relationships are unjust, and which are not, given the plausible assumption that some inegalitarian relationships are not unjust, for example, the relationship between a university teacher and her student.

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section, we – by drawing on debates on sufficientarianism as a distributive theory of justice – distinguish three different versions of relational sufficientarianism which have not so far been acknowledged in the literature. We then show, in Section 3, how it is integral to both relational egalitarianism and relational sufficientarianism to acknowledge basic moral equality, that is, the view that every person has equal moral worth and equal moral standing. This means that by pointing to injustices such as domination, racism, and sexism, we cannot settle the question of whether we should be relational egalitarians or relational sufficientarians. In Section 4, we argue that we should be both. We defend a pluralist relational view of justice on which the requirements for how we must relate to each other vary with both the type of relationship and the context. Finally, in Section 5, we conclude and point to where relational theorists should go from here.

## 2. Relational Sufficientarianism

Relational egalitarianism is a theory of justice according to which justice requires that people relate as equals.<sup>2</sup> Usually, relational egalitarians motivate their view by pointing to inegalitarian relationships which we find intuitively objectionable. For instance, Kolodny says, ‘the servant is subordinate to the lord of the manor, the slave subordinate to the master ... the plebian is lower than the patrician, the untouchable lower than the Brahmin ... the paradigms [these examples of inegalitarian relationships] provoke in us a sense of unease’.<sup>3</sup> In objecting to such relationships, relational egalitarianism seems like a plausible theory of justice. But, as we will explain in the next section, since we do not have to be relational egalitarians to object to such cases – indeed, we could also object to such inegalitarian relationships if we were relational sufficientarians – more needs to be said for this to provide an argument for relational egalitarianism (as opposed to other relational views).

As a distributive theory, sufficientarianism is the view that what matters for justice (or morality) is that everyone has enough of the relevant distributive good or currency, not necessarily an equal share. This implies that there exists a certain threshold point marking the relevant interpretation of enough so that benefits to individuals above that point are morally incomparable to benefits given below it. Sufficientarians, then, are motivated by eliminating insufficiency, not by leveling inequalities. In Crisp’s sufficientarianism, for example, it is the emotional response of compassion towards the

perception of suffering that grounds the morality of the sufficiency principle.<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, Raz notes that it is ‘the hunger of the hungry, the need of the needy, the suffering of the ill, and so on’<sup>5</sup> that motivates his sufficientarianism. Many who are sympathetic to the sufficientarian distributive ideal find this immediate concern for people’s absolute suffering to be the strongest reason in favor of sufficientarianism.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it is characteristic of sufficientarianism as a distributive principle that it is discontinuous, as it involves a significant break in our moral reasons to benefit people beyond the threshold level, and non-comparative because it is not concerned with relative inequality.

Relational egalitarians are sometimes distributive sufficientarians, in a way that invites the thought that the two views are likely theoretical friends. Anderson, explicitly, believes that capability sufficiency is the distributive ideal that best secures a society in which people relate to each other as equals.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, but from the other side of the friendship, Frankfurt argues that something like a relational ideal of equal respect is a necessary add-on to his distributive sufficientarianism.<sup>8</sup> And, more recently, Huseby sees a possible marriage between distributive sufficiency and some form of relational equality when he notes that ‘it seems plausible to assume that telic sufficiency is compatible with deontic egalitarianism, if the latter is taken to be the view that people should be treated with equal respect and concern’.<sup>9</sup>

As mentioned, few have been concerned with the distinction between different ideals within the relational family of views, but once we zoom in on this distinction, we must carefully consider how relational sufficientarianism differs from its egalitarian cousin. And, if the sufficientarian–egalitarian distinction on relational justice runs parallel to the distinction in distributive theory,<sup>10</sup> it must be the case that relational sufficientarianism involves some relational version of a threshold, thereby implying some form of moral discontinuity and non-comparability put in the form of relational justice. Looking over the sufficientarian literature, however, leaves us with several alternative routes open for how to flesh out this generic idea. Before laying out these alternatives, we want to offer a general account of relational sufficientarianism and briefly elaborate on how we think this differs from relational egalitarianism.

*Relational Sufficientarianism:* A society is just only if people relate to each other as sufficient, where relating as sufficient requires regarding and treating each other as having sufficiently high standing.

This generic account needs to be further spelled out. First, note that the view as generically formulated only displays a necessary condition for justice. This implies that relational sufficientarianism can but does not necessarily exhaust what is required by justice. As such, the view could be accompanied by other (distributive or relational) principles, to construct a complex pluralist view. This is no different from many relational egalitarian views<sup>11</sup> and does not pose a theoretical problem. More importantly, as the view is stated, it is unclear what, more particularly, it means to regard and treat others as having sufficiently high standing. We need to elaborate further on this to understand how relational sufficientarianism is an alternative to relational egalitarianism.

Relational sufficientarians need not be committed to one specific account of relating as sufficient. Just like relational egalitarians may disagree on what relating as equals pertains to, relational sufficientarians may disagree on what, more particularly, it requires to regard and treat others as having sufficiently high standing. But like distributive sufficientarians, relational sufficientarians need to be able to give some explanation of what the threshold

amounts to. Some of the most pressing objections to sufficientarianism as a distributive ideal concern the vagueness and arbitrariness of the critical threshold, and, unless further specified, the idea of relating as sufficient is vulnerable to the same kind of objections. Thus, we need to be able to say more about what it means to relate as sufficient, even if what we say need not be accepted by all relational sufficientarians.

Our own account takes inspiration from Stephen Darwall's notion of recognition respect,<sup>12</sup> and how this relates to the dignity of personhood.<sup>13</sup> On Darwall's view, recognition respect is to give something weight or standing in one's deliberation on how to act, and 'to have recognition respect for someone as a person is to give appropriate weight to the fact that he or she is a person by being willing to constrain one's behavior in ways required by that fact'.<sup>14</sup> When the target of recognition respect is other persons, Darwall believes that its object is personhood dignity or authority – unlike merit, which is the object of appraisal respect.<sup>15</sup>

From this, we draw the following elements of a Darwallian account of relating as sufficient. First, relating as sufficient requires recognition of others as having personhood dignity. This is an absolutist component. It involves that relational sufficiency is violated whenever someone is treated as less than a dignified human person. The fact that two equally hostile racist groups treat members of the other group as beasts without personhood dignity is already a violation of relational sufficiency because of this component. Second, relating as sufficient also requires respecting others as moral equals in the sense of recognizing that other persons' lives matter just as much as one's own, and to take that appropriately into account in one's moral deliberation. This is a comparative component, but it is bound specifically to the basic standing of moral agents. This requires that no one thinks of others as of lower moral worth than themselves. Hence, the fact that the two racist groups not only think of their opponents as beasts but also think of them as a lower form of being than themselves is a violation of relational sufficiency (as it would also be of relational equality, but for a different reason). Third, relating as sufficient does not necessarily require recognition of or treatment of others as social equals. That is, whenever treating others as having lower or higher standing than oneself (and others) involves no disrespect to either their standing as moral equals or their standing as absolute dignified persons, relational inequalities are, from the perspective of relational sufficientarianism, unproblematic. Thus, the fact that it is impossible to establish equal social relations between the very successful and the less successful, between the highly and less highly educated, or between groups of very diverse cultural backgrounds is, taken in isolation, no problem of justice from the perspective of relational sufficientarianism.

To see how relational sufficientarianism compares to relational egalitarianism, consider the following example. Imagine a society S in which everyone relates to each other as equals and of sufficiently high standing. Now, suppose that society S is bound to change in one of the following two ways. One way it could develop is into a scenario in which everyone relates to others as undignified beasts, not recognizing their dignity as persons, but that everyone similarly perceives of themselves as mere undignified beasts. That is, everyone relates equally as undignified beasts. Call this relational suffering. In relational suffering, moral and political deliberation on how to behave will be highly (but equally) disrespectful and egoistic, no one enjoys recognition respect for their standing as person, not even from themselves. The alternative way S could develop is into relational inequality. In relational inequality, everyone thinks of others as dignified persons with equal moral status, and they take that status appropriately into account in their moral and

political deliberation. However, this scenario involves significant relational inequalities. The cultural elite thinks of others as uncultivated, the highly educated assemble in intellectual communities in which less educated people are not allowed to participate, and the beautiful look down with pity on the less attractive. Given that society S is bound to develop, which of these two societies should we prefer?

While there is certainly something regrettable about both alternatives, we have good reasons to favor relational inequality over relational suffering, and relational sufficientarianism explains why. In relational suffering, no one is left below the relational threshold of being treated as a sufficient – on our account, as enjoying the recognition respect of one's equal dignity as a person. But for relational egalitarians, we conjecture, this is more difficult. As we see it, relational egalitarians have two options here. First, they could bite the bullet by insisting that the development to relational inequality is, at least in some sense, worse than relational suffering, because in relational suffering the development does not compromise the ideal of relating as equals. This, we think, would make relational egalitarianism intuitively implausible, and incompatible with what most relational egalitarians believe.<sup>16</sup> Second, they could side with relational sufficientarianism on the point that relational suffering is the worst outcome and should be avoided, but it is difficult to see how this option is available<sup>17</sup> without inviting into their view at least some absolutist relational component – for example, that no one is treated as less than a dignified person. If relational egalitarians opt for this, and still believe that the relational inequality scenario is worse than the original society S, they might defend a form of relational pluralism, including sufficientarian and egalitarian elements.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the fact that the relational inequality scenario seems intuitively worse than the original society S is analogous to cases motivating the most important criticism against sufficientarianism on distributive issues, so a pluralist account might be the most defensible option. But relational pluralism already presupposes disentangling relational sufficiency from relational equality and bringing these components together in some form of hybrid account. Hence, we take it, many relational egalitarians already (although implicitly) accept some form of pluralist account which incorporates a relational sufficientarian component.

It is important to take note of what this argument implies. It is not a fundamental critique of relational egalitarianism. We are not, that is, claiming that relational egalitarians should necessarily give up on their core beliefs about justice and adopt instead a sufficientarian or pluralist view. Some relational theorists already give us the tools to cope with scenarios such as the relational suffering or relational inequality cases. Our point is rather a much less polemic one, that if egalitarianism is to have an equivalent meaning in the relational space as it has in the distributive space, then it must be the case that relational egalitarian views (strictly defined) cannot explain our intuition in the relational suffering or relational inequality cases. If, on the other hand, egalitarianism has a distinctive meaning for relational views which can explain our reaction, such that, for example, seeing each other and oneself as undignified beasts is already a violation of some deontic constraints that are fundamental for how we should treat each other in a society,<sup>19</sup> it is hard to see how this should bear any particular connection to egalitarianism (rather than, say, sufficientarianism).<sup>20</sup>

Once we have accounted for relational sufficientarianism in this general sense, and seen how it relates to relational egalitarianism, it should be useful to consider how it can be further fleshed out in more specific terms. The literature on distributive sufficientarianism gives us some ideas for consideration. First, we can interpret a relational account of

sufficientarianism in its strongest version as pattern-monist relational sufficientarianism. It is standard to interpret distributive sufficientarianism as committed to two separate claims: the positive and the negative thesis, respectively.<sup>21</sup> The positive thesis (P) claims that it is of central moral importance that everyone is above some critical threshold. The negative thesis (N) claims that once everyone is above that threshold, inequalities are irrelevant from the point of view of justice (or morality). It is reasonable within this understanding to interpret the positive and negative theses as two separately necessary but together sufficient conditions for sufficientarianism, and it follows that there is an upper limit to our duties of justice. This interpretation is accordingly sometimes called upper-limit sufficientarianism.<sup>22</sup>

If we interpret relational sufficientarianism as the relational counterpart to upper-limit sufficientarianism, we can with confidence turn to the relational versions of the sufficientarian theses:

RP: It is of critical moral importance that everyone regards and treats each other as sufficient.<sup>23</sup>

RN: Once everyone regards and treats each other as sufficient, relational inequalities are not unjust.

As we have defined relational sufficientarianism here, accepting the positive and the negative relational theses commits you to relational sufficientarianism, which again, *qua* the negative thesis, implies that you deny relational egalitarianism. Thus, pattern-monist relational sufficientarianism is distinctive, and indeed incompatible with, relational egalitarianism.<sup>24</sup>

Distributive egalitarians often object to sufficientarianism on the basis of the abrupt moral break introduced by the upper-limit threshold. If distributive sufficientarianism is correct, this implies that we should accept even extreme inequalities above the threshold. This has been known as the indifference objection.<sup>25</sup> The indifference objection poses a serious problem for pattern-monist views, perhaps for relational as well as distributive accounts, but let us stress that its intuitive force seems much weakened as an objection to sufficientarianism as a relational view. Against distributive sufficiency, the objection often invokes examples such as, if the threshold is 10, then it seems implausibly counter-intuitive that inequalities between some at 10, and some at 1,000, are not unjust. But such cases translate uneasily into the relational case. If there is no oppression, discrimination, etc., then it certainly seems intuitive enough that relational differences are of less importance – in any case, increasing the numerical distance between the two parties makes little sense in relational terms.

We have not taken a stand on whether pattern-monist sufficientarianism is defensible, but even if it is not, this does not outplay the role of sufficientarianism for relational justice. There are alternative, pluralist relational sufficientarian ideals. As a second, pluralist interpretation, we can turn to Shields's increasingly influential shift-sufficientarianism.<sup>26</sup> According to Shields, distributive sufficientarians should maintain Casal's positive thesis but in place of the negative thesis adopt the shift thesis, that above the threshold, there is a 'significant shift' in the weight of our moral reasons to benefit people further.<sup>27</sup> This implies, for example, that once we have lifted a person out of poverty, such that there is no poverty-addressing reason to benefit this person further, other moral reasons (e.g. responsibility-sensitive egalitarianism) may come to light. Shift-sufficientarianism

is pattern-pluralist in the sense that it allows the ideal of sufficiency to take place in a set of principles which collectively account for distributive duties.

If relational justice is to be interpreted as shift-sufficientarianism, we should accept the positive relational thesis, but exchange the negative relational thesis with an alternative relational shift-thesis. We conjecture that this thesis would be as follows:

RS: Once everyone relates to each other as sufficient, there is a significant shift in the weight of our moral reasons for further requirements on relational justice.

Note that RS is not incompatible with RN, because RN already presupposes a shift. It is just a very radical shift (from critically morally important to morally unimportant), whereas RS is much weaker. Thus, if we accept that the discontinuity of relational sufficientarianism need not involve an absolute abrupt break but a more moderate shift, relational sufficientarianism can be pluralist in the sense that once the ideal of relational sufficiency is satisfied, the ideal of relational equality can take on moral relevance. To give a clear example, if relational sufficiency requires treating no one as less than a dignified person – for example, explaining why slavery is relationally unjust – and relational equality implies treating everyone as of equal status in all relevant social respects, relational shift-sufficientarianism seems in a plausible manner to capture the strong moral priority of the sufficientarian concern without neglect of the potential relevance of the egalitarian idea. Consequently, the relational pluralism involved in this interpretation avoids the indifference objection motivating many skeptics' critiques of sufficientarianism.

So far, we have distinguished between a traditional monist and shift-sufficientarian, pluralist account of relational sufficientarianism, and it is the distinction broadly between monism and pluralism which will entertain us the most. However, we should stress that the sufficientarian literature is much more complex than we can give credit here,<sup>28</sup> and that we have been far from exhaustive in accounting for it. Before moving on, it is worthwhile to consider a third and final possible interpretation of relational sufficientarianism, which employs a distinctive form of pluralism. Whereas relational shift-sufficientarianism is pluralist in the sense of adding on relational egalitarian requirements once relational sufficientarian requirements are met, what we might call spheric relational justice – loosely inspired by Walzer's separate spheres of justice<sup>29</sup> – invokes pluralism on the contrary by insisting that different relational ideals apply to different relational contexts. This is the relational counterpart to what have been called horizontal multiple-threshold views in distributive theory.<sup>30</sup>

Spheric relational justice holds that relational equality is not a relevant ideal of justice in and of itself, but that what it requires to relate to each other as sufficient – that is, what it means to have recognition respect for someone as a dignified person – varies across different social contexts to the extent that relating to others as sufficient will in some particular contexts require relating as no less than equals. For example, spheric relational theorists might hold that treating others as inferior to oneself in the context of democratic deliberation and electoral procedures will be an instance of relating as insufficient, whereas seeing others as less of an expert in a scientific field is not. Certainly, proponents of the spheric view need to say more about when and why different relational ideals apply to different contexts, but for now it suffices to note that spheric relational justice is a form of relational pluralism which nicely captures many of the cases that relational egalitarians are motivated by.



### 3. The Moral Equality Argument

There is an asymmetry allegedly in favor of relational egalitarianism compared to relational sufficientarianism, because there is a generic sense in which relational sufficientarianism is or seems to overlap one aspect of relational egalitarianism. It is integral to relational egalitarianism to acknowledge that everyone has equal moral worth and equal moral standing. Call this basic moral equality. Basic moral equality seems to immediately imply that there are ways in which we should never be treated unequally. Slavery is morally impermissible in part because of this. The same is true of racism and sexism. Although it is tempting to relate this idea to egalitarianism, this should not be taken as a reason comparatively in support of relational egalitarianism, since basic moral equality is the backbone of any plausible (relational or distributive) theory of justice. Thus, although it is widely accepted and highly plausible (or, we might add for the matter at hand, plainly true) that it is always unjust if someone is treated as lesser than a moral equal, this is no reason to prefer relational egalitarianism over relational sufficientarianism. It will be comparatively integral to relational sufficientarianism to treat everyone as having equal moral worth, as we explained when we laid out the Darwallian conception of relational sufficientarianism.

The moral equality argument is central in most relational egalitarian theories. Elizabeth Anderson's democratic equality is a prominent example. In her influential critique of luck egalitarianism, Anderson takes as her starting point Dworkin's assumption from ethical individualism, that every person is of equal moral importance. This assumption is integral to Dworkin's outset in that the state should treat everyone with equal respect and concern,<sup>31</sup> and Anderson explicitly notes that all egalitarians ought to accept it.<sup>32</sup> What is problematic, Anderson conceives, is that the stark distributive focus of Dworkin (and others' theories) – and particularly the insistence of luck egalitarianism on tracking individual exercise of responsibility – often leads to conflict with moral equality in this sense. In her best-known critique, the harshness objection, Anderson says that 'the reasons luck egalitarians offer for refusing to come to the aid of the victims of bad option luck express a failure to treat these unfortunates with equal respect and concern'.<sup>33</sup> What Anderson is pointing to, then, is that the obsession with distributional fairness – and the tracking of exercise of responsibility in particular – has unacceptable consequences in relation to the basic value of moral equality.

In a similar spirit, Scheffler contrasts his relational egalitarianism with distributive (luck) egalitarianism in reference to the value of basic moral equality. 'In contrast to the inward-looking focus of luck egalitarianism', Scheffler claims, 'it [relational egalitarianism] emphasizes the irrelevance of individual differences for fundamental social and political purposes. As a moral ideal, it asserts that all people are of equal moral worth and that there are some claims that people are entitled to make on one another simply by virtue of their status as persons'.<sup>34</sup> The same is true for other relational egalitarians.<sup>35</sup> However, since the assumption of moral equality is not exclusively tied to the ideal of equality – that is, egalitarianism in any telic sense – but is similarly accepted by sufficientarians and other inegalitarians, the critique by relational egalitarians is an attack specifically on the distributive foci of telic egalitarianism. This, of course, implies that these critiques can only be taken as arguments (indirectly) in favor of relational accounts of justice and not that these are, necessarily, committed to relational egalitarianism.<sup>36</sup>

From this, we can see that even though relational sufficientarianism already accepts some commitment to equality, this commitment is no stronger than the commitment

any reasonable theory of justice (libertarianism might be the exception) will accept. Thus, it is still an underexplored opportunity that much of what relational egalitarians believe is better explained and justified by the ideal of relating to each other as sufficientists than as equals.

#### 4. Should Relational Theorists Be Egalitarians or Sufficientists?

We have laid out three versions of relational sufficientarianism and their relation to relational egalitarianism, in particular when it comes to the question of moral equality. The question now arises: should those who support a relational theory of justice be egalitarians or sufficientists? In this section, we will argue that they should be both.<sup>37</sup> There are some relations which, as a matter of justice, must be equal, whereas there are other relations in which justice only requires that people relate as sufficientists. In that sense, relational justice should be both egalitarian and sufficientist.<sup>38</sup> We thus defend a particular version of pluralist relational justice which is inspired by both relational shift-sufficientarianism and the spheric relational view. This pluralist relational view of justice is attractive, we will argue, because it can convincingly handle two objections that have been put forward against relational egalitarianism: (i) because relational egalitarians often formulate their ideal starting from close, personal relationships such as a marriage, it is difficult to see how the relational requirements that are generated in that context apply to more anonymous relationships, such as relationships between citizens; and (ii) the pervasiveness problem, that is, the problem that relational egalitarians must come up with a convincing explanation of which inegalitarian relationships are just, and which are not, given the plausible assumption that some inegalitarian relationships should not be deemed unjust, for example, the relationship between a teacher and their student.

What does it take for a relationship to be egalitarian? According to Scheffler, relating as equals requires that the parties to the relationship satisfy:

*The Egalitarian Deliberative Constraint (EDC):* ‘If you and I have an egalitarian relationship, then I have a standing disposition to treat your strong interests as playing just as significant a role as mine in constraining our decisions and influencing what we will do. And you have a reciprocal disposition with regard to my interests. In addition, both of us normally act on these dispositions. This means that each of our equally important interests constrains our joint decisions to the same extent’.<sup>39</sup>

He takes his starting point in a marriage. If the husband’s interests always trump his wife’s interests when they decide on their collective affairs – such that the husband fails the EDC – it is clearly not a relationship between equals.<sup>40</sup> It seems like a plausible requirement of relational justice that parties in close, personal relationships must relate as equals – and thus, that they must satisfy the EDC in their dealings with each other. Scheffler further argues that this is not only a requirement that applies to close, personal relationships. Indeed, as he argues, ‘a version of the deliberative constraint that plays a central role in egalitarian personal relationships is also central to the idea of a society of equals. In such a society, each member accepts that every other member’s equally important interests should play an equally significant role in influencing decisions made on

behalf of the society as a whole'.<sup>41</sup> Thus, co-citizens must also satisfy the EDC in their dealings with each other.<sup>42</sup>

But there is a long way from saying that the EDC is a requirement that applies in close, personal relationships to saying that a citizen must satisfy the EDC in his dealings with his co-citizens, with whom he does not have close, personal relationships. Indeed, 'if we start from friendship [and marriage, we may add], we have a relatively easy time explaining the need for equal power. But we have a hard time establishing that the relevant norms apply to political society'.<sup>43</sup> Viehoff points to this to argue that in starting from the norms relevant to close, personal relationships, relational egalitarians have a hard time explaining why these same norms apply to relationships between co-citizens who do not have close, personal relationships given that the relationships seem relevantly different.

A way for relational egalitarians to avoid this problem would be to argue, contrary to Scheffler, that satisfying the EDC is not a requirement in relationships between co-citizens. The EDC would thus be a way of distinguishing what it takes to relate as equals and relate as sufficient. Whereas relating as equals requires satisfying the EDC, relating as sufficient does not require satisfying the EDC. And whereas persons in close, personal relationships, due to the nature of these relationships, must relate as equals, relational justice does not require that persons who are co-citizens relate as equals. Instead, justice requires that they relate as sufficient. In this way, it is not a requirement of relational justice that co-citizens must satisfy the EDC in their dealings with each other. Thus, for this pluralist relational view, it is not a problem that close, personal relationships and relationships between co-citizens are relevantly different such that the norms and requirements related to close, personal relationships cannot automatically be extended to relationships between co-citizens. Indeed, it is precisely because there is this difference in the nature of these relationships that the EDC is a requirement of justice in the first type of relationship, and not in the second.

So, if relating as sufficient does not require satisfying the EDC, what does it require? We can start by pointing, negatively, to cases where people relate as insufficient. Clearly, if A treats B in a racist manner, A and B do not relate as sufficient – after all, A regards and treats B as a moral inferior and thereby denies basic moral equality. The same is true if A dominates, exploits, oppresses, etc., B. Relating as sufficient thus requires at least that the parties to the relationship respect the moral equality of persons.<sup>44</sup> We explained this idea of relating as (in)sufficient earlier by appealing to Darwall's notion of recognition respect. Here, we will not repeat that argument (and why it shows that relational sufficientarianism is different from relational egalitarianism). But there are further ways of developing relational sufficientarianism (and thus, ultimately, the pluralist relational view which we find appealing). In line with relational shift-sufficientarianism and the spheric relational view, we can point to (at least) two dimensions in relation to which we may make our relational theory of justice partly sufficientarian: (i) when it comes to the type of relationship, for example, whether it is a marriage, a student – teacher relationship, or a relationship between co-citizens; (ii) when it comes to the type of standing, for example, whether it is moral, social, or aesthetic standing.

We have already said something in relation to (i). Whereas the parties to a marriage must relate as equals, the pluralist relational view of justice only requires of co-citizens that they relate as sufficient. This difference in requirements is due to the difference in the nature of these relationships. So now we should like to say something about (ii). As Lippert-Rasmussen points out, when we say of X and Y that they relate as

equals, this is always shorthand for X and Y relating as equals in terms of Z, where Z is a given dimension.<sup>45</sup> And as he further argues, relational egalitarians have pointed to five different dimensions on which we may relate as (un)equals: moral, epistemic, social, aesthetic, and empirical standing.<sup>46</sup>

Interestingly, Anderson – arguably the most prominent relational egalitarian – argues that when it comes to aesthetic standing, it is not a requirement of justice that people relate as equals, only that they relate as sufficient. As Lippert-Rasmussen points out, ‘the ideal that we relate to one another as sufficient, aesthetically speaking, is implicit in Anderson’s idea that justice does not require that we adopt aesthetic norms such that we are all equally beautiful, only norms which are such that we are all deemed “an acceptable presence in civil society”’.<sup>47</sup> It seems plausible that a relational theory of justice does not require everyone to relate as equals in an aesthetic sense. Although it might in some ways be good if everyone were to relate as aesthetic equals, this is different from saying that it is a requirement of justice that everyone relates as such. Not everything that is good is a matter of justice. Even if two persons are not considered equally attractive, they may still relate as sufficient in the aesthetic sense as long as the less attractive person is considered attractive enough.<sup>48</sup> Thus, this plausible relational theory of justice requires, not that people relate as aesthetic equals, but that people relate as aesthetic sufficient. Indeed, as spelled out in terms of the spheric relational view, the sphere of aesthetic standing is a context within which relational justice is achieved, not when everyone is considered equally attractive, but once everyone is considered attractive enough.<sup>49</sup>

Social standing has to do with authority. People who relate as social equals are equally socially authoritative, for example, they are admired, deferred to, obeyed, etc., to an equal degree. For instance, in a society which is obsessed with titles, the Dr has more social authority than the Mr for which reason they fail to relate as social equals.<sup>50</sup> But we must distinguish between social standing in local and global senses.<sup>51</sup> When people are social unequals in a local sense, there is a given sphere in which they are not equally socially authoritative. For instance, the university teacher and her student are not equally socially authoritative within the sphere of the classroom. The same is true of the employer and the employee in the workplace. But even though they are social unequals in the local sense, they might still relate as social equals in the global sense if, throughout society as a whole, they are equally socially authoritative.

Interestingly, this distinction between social standing in the local and global senses, and the distinction between relating as social equals and sufficient, may provide an opportunity to respond to the pervasiveness problem. Scheffler describes the pervasiveness problem as follows:

[relational] equality is in some ways a puzzling value and a difficult one to interpret. After all, differences of rank, power, and status are endemic to human social life. Almost all human organizations and institutions recognize hierarchies of authority, for example, and most social roles confer distinctions of status which in turn structure human relationships, such as the relationships of doctors to patients, teachers to students, parents to children, attorneys to clients, employers to employees, and so on. If there is any value at all in such relationships, then at least one of the following things must be true. Either some relationships can be valuable despite having a fundamentally inegalitarian character or else it is not necessary, in order for a relationship to qualify as having an

egalitarian character, that it should be altogether unmarked by distinctions of rank or status ... Both points are almost certainly true. This means that, in order to understand the value of equality, one needs to investigate the specific respects in which egalitarian relationships must be free from regimentation by considerations of rank or status.<sup>52</sup>

Scheffler does not provide any principled solution to the pervasiveness problem.<sup>53</sup> But pluralist relational justice can provide an answer. Take the case of the relationship between the employer and her employee. Clearly, they do not relate as social equals in the workplace because the employer has authority over the employee. But pluralist relational theorists could respond that this is not (necessarily) an injustice since all that relational justice requires in terms of social standing in the local sense is that they relate as social sufficient. <sup>54</sup> And an equal degree of authority is not necessary to relate as social sufficient (whereas it is necessary to relate as social equals).<sup>55</sup> However, this does not mean that everything goes in the workplace from the point of view of pluralist relational justice. There are clearly still limits to the authority such that, if they were crossed, the employer and the employee would relate as social insufficient. <sup>56</sup> For instance, if the employer were to utilize her authority to act in a sexist manner towards the employee in the workplace, they would relate as social insufficient (in addition to relating as unequals in the moral standing sense). The same would be true if the employer forced the employee to take a drug test every day because she wanted to show off her authority.

Thus, as a general matter, pluralist relational theorists could say that in the local sense, all that relational justice requires is that people relate as social sufficient. This solution to the pervasiveness problem can explain why it is not (necessarily) unjust that the university teacher and her student do not relate as social equals in the classroom; that the employer and her employee do not relate as social equals in the workplace; and that the doctor and the patient do not relate as social equals during the consultation. As long as they relate as social sufficient locally, relational justice is satisfied. Note also that this is in line with what was argued earlier, that in a marriage, given the type of relationship, the partners must relate as equals. This is compatible with it not being unjust that there are local senses – for instance, when it comes to the household's cooking – where one partner is more socially authoritative than the other.<sup>57</sup> This can then be, but does not have to be, combined with the claim that people, depending on the type of relationship, must relate as social equals in the global sense. In any case, it seems that pluralist relational justice may provide a plausible solution to the pervasiveness problem.

Let us take stock. We have not provided sufficient argumentation against relational egalitarianism or in favor of either relational sufficientarianism or pluralism. The advancement of our analysis is rather that if the meaning of egalitarianism is equivalent in the relational and distributive space of justice theory, then it is possible to consider sufficientarianism and pluralism as natural contenders to egalitarianism within the relational space. We have elaborated what such theoretical components could look like, and we have shown how it bolsters relational theory to cope with challenges to relational egalitarianism, such as the pervasiveness problem. This, of course, is no quick fix and alternative relational theories will face their own set of problems. In particular, relational sufficientarianism will have to deal with how to identify the relational thresholds, and pluralism needs to determine and justify the domains for relational equality and sufficiency, respectively. We have only briefly touched upon these latter concerns, and much more

work is needed to fill these gaps. Going further into these matters is beyond our purpose here, but this is hopefully a useful starting point for further reflection on relational justice.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Whereas the *relational* component of relational egalitarianism is quite clear, the *egalitarian* component is often left underspecified and in need of further justification. In this article, we have developed and explored relational sufficientarianism as a relational ideal of justice. We started by laying out an account of relational sufficientarianism based on recognition respect before distinguishing three different versions of relational sufficientarianism which have not so far been acknowledged in the literature: pattern-monist relational sufficientarianism, relational shift-sufficientarianism, and the spheric relational view. Whereas the latter two are compatible with a pluralist relational view which is both egalitarian and sufficientarian, the former view is incompatible with relational egalitarianism. We then defended a pluralist relational view which is inspired by both relational shift-sufficientarianism and the spheric relational view. This view is attractive, we argued, partly because it can solve two problems that relational egalitarians face: (i) the problem of explaining how their ideal travels from close, personal relations to more anonymous relationships, such as relationships between co-citizens; and (ii) the pervasiveness problem, that is, the problem that relational egalitarians have to come up with a convincing explanation of which inegalitarian relationships are unjust, and which are not, given the plausible assumption that some inegalitarian relationships should not be deemed unjust, for example, the relationship between a university teacher and her student.

The pluralist relational view provides a solution to (i) because it does not require that the same requirements attach to close, personal relationships and more anonymous relationships. Indeed, whereas parties in close, personal relationships must relate as equals, pluralist relational justice requires of people in more anonymous relationships only that they relate as sufficientians. Thus, this view captures plausibly that there is a relevant difference between these types of relationships. The pluralist relational view provides a solution to (ii) since it can explain why there are some contexts, such as those involving aesthetic standing and local social standing, in which justice does not require equal relations, but only that people relate as sufficientians.

We would like to end this article with some reflection on where relational theorists should go from here. Since this is the first thorough exploration of relational sufficientarianism, let alone a pluralist theory of relational justice, it naturally still leaves many questions unanswered. We would like to point to three. First, more needs to be said on what it takes to relate as sufficientians in particular types of relationships and contexts. For instance, when it comes to democratic decision-making, do people relate as sufficientians when everyone has the right to vote, or is more needed, perhaps that everyone also has some degree of informal opportunity to influence the political process?<sup>58</sup> Also, in what sense, if any, is the requirements of relational sufficientarianism and relational egalitarianism different when it comes to democratic decision-making? Perhaps what it takes to relate as sufficientians in this domain is extensionally equivalent to what it takes to relate as equals.

Second, we have pointed to two problems to which relational egalitarianism is vulnerable but to which relational sufficientarianism is not. However, this hardly suffices to settle whether we should be relational pluralists (or sufficientarians) or relational egalitarians.

To settle that question, both views must be further developed, and it will also be worth exploring to a fuller extent whether the criticisms of egalitarian and sufficientarian theories of distributive justice, some of which were mentioned earlier, apply to their relational counterparts.

Third and finally, we have stipulated and explored two possible ways to flesh out the pluralist relational ideal – relational shift-sufficientarianism and the relational spheric view – but more work is needed to settle which of these is most promising, and whether there are other alternative candidates. But hopefully our article will at least encourage relational theorists to discuss which relational theory is most plausible rather than assuming that relational egalitarianism is the only game in town.

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## NOTES

- 1 Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism*, 9.
- 2 Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?”; Anderson, *Imperative*; Bidanure, “Making Sense”; Fourie, “What Is Social Equality?”; Fourie *et al.*, *Social Equality*; Hojlund, “Mitigating Servility”; Kolodny, “Rule”; Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism*; Miller, “Equality and Justice”; Nath, “Equal Standing”; Nath, “Relational Egalitarianism”; O’Neill, “Egalitarians”; Ross, “Profiling”; Satz, *Some Things*; Schmidt, “Relational Equality”; Scheffler, “Choice”; Scheffler, “Practice”; Schemmel, “Relational Egalitarians”; Schemmel, “Distributive and Relational Equality”; Schemmel, *Justice*; Tomlin, “Point”; Viehoff, “Democratic Equality”; Viehoff, “Power”; Voigt, “Relational Equality”; Wolff, “Fairness”; Young, *Justice*.
- 3 Kolodny, “Rule,” 292.
- 4 Crisp, “Equality.”
- 5 Raz, *Morality*.
- 6 Herlitz, “Indispensability”; Huseby, “Sufficientarianism.”
- 7 Anderson, “What Is the Point of Equality?”
- 8 Frankfurt, “Equality.”
- 9 Huseby, “Sufficiency.”
- 10 This, admittedly, is merely an assumption, but one which critics of sufficientarianism also draw; see Lippert-Rasmussen, “Relational Sufficientarianism.”
- 11 See, e.g., Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism*; Moles and Parr, “Distributions.”
- 12 Darwall, “Two Kinds.”

- 13 Darwall, "Second-Person Standpoint."
- 14 Darwall, "Two Kinds," 45.
- 15 Darwall, "Second-Person Standpoint," 49.
- 16 E.g. Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?"; Schemmel, *Justice*.
- 17 And even if we were to assume that it was available, it would be available for a different reason, namely one having to do with inequality (e.g. Bengtson, "Republicanism"). For the relational sufficientarian, it has to do with insufficiency.
- 18 We will (further) defend a pluralist relational view later in the article.
- 19 This is probably how we should interpret Schemmel's view; see Schemmel, *Justice* (see also Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism*).
- 20 Sufficientarians often make this point in relation to deontic equality. See Frankfurt, "Equality"; Huseby, "Sufficiency."
- 21 Casal, "Sufficiency."
- 22 Nielsen, "Sufficiency"; Shields, *Just Enough*.
- 23 We have chosen the positive expression in line with Casal's positive thesis, but for a negative expression of the same thesis, see Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism*, 9.
- 24 In the limited discussion of relational sufficientarianism so far, there is an assumption that relating to each other as sufficientists is less demanding on the part of the relationship than relational egalitarianism; see, e.g., Lippert-Rasmussen, "Relational Sufficientarianism." But this is not necessarily the case. If the relationship between relational and distributive sufficientarianism is similar to the relationship between relational and distributive egalitarianism, it must be the case that relating to each other as sufficientists requires some substantial – threshold level, we might add – content of 'relating to', whereas relational equality needs few substantial relational goods. Two people could, in principle, relate to each other as equals in ways that are inadequate from the point of view of relational sufficientarianism, and, we might add, also intuitively inadequate from the point of view of justice.
- 25 Nielsen, "Sufficiency"; Shields, *Just Enough*.
- 26 Shields, "Prospects."
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 For an elaborate review of the internal tensions in the sufficientarian family, see Pedersen and Nielsen, "Applicability Argument."
- 29 Walzer, *Spheres*.
- 30 Axelsen and Nielsen, "Sufficiency"; Nielsen, "Sufficiency."
- 31 Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue*, 5.
- 32 Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?," 295.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Scheffler, "What Is Egalitarianism?," 22.
- 35 See O'Neill, "Sufficiency"; Schemmel, "Relational Egalitarians"; Wolff, "Fairness."
- 36 That is, the disagreement between relational egalitarianism and relational sufficientarianism is not about whether we should accept basic moral equality; it is a disagreement about what basic moral equality requires when it comes to how we should relate to each other.
- 37 For a similar idea when it comes to moral unequals, see Bengtson and Lippert-Rasmussen, "Relational Egalitarianism and Moral Unequals."
- 38 Here, we are only concerned with relational justice, but note that our position – that relational theorists should be pluralists – is compatible with hybrid views of justice drawing on both distributive and relational values; see, e.g., Schemmel, "Relational Egalitarians"; Moles and Parr, "Distributions."
- 39 Scheffler, "Practice," 25; cf. Cohen, *Finding Oneself*, 196; Viehoff, "Democratic Equality," 353.
- 40 We do not mean to suggest that the EDC is necessarily a requirement of relational egalitarianism as such. But it strikes us as a plausible, necessary requirement of what it takes to relate as equals, and it is useful in illustrating a difference between relational egalitarianism and relational sufficientarianism. For a similar analysis of the relationship between EDC, relational egalitarianism, and relational sufficientarianism, see Lippert-Rasmussen, "Friends."
- 41 Scheffler, "Practice," 35.
- 42 Might we not say that the EDC is satisfied between citizens if the state grants equal weight to people's interests (such that citizens, to relate as equals, do not have to satisfy the EDC in their dealings with each other)? First, in the marriage case, we do not want to say that they relate as equals, even if the husband's interests always decide their collective decisions, because the state grants equal weight to their interests. The EDC applies to them as



well: to relate as equals, their interests must be equally important when they make decisions within the relationship. Given this, it is not clear why, if co-citizens must relate as equals, the EDC does not apply to them in their dealings with each other as well. But perhaps this is, at the end of the day, a terminological dispute: whereas we want to say that the EDC does not apply in relations between co-citizens since it suffices that they relate as sufficient, others might want to say that they must relate as equals; it is simply that the EDC can be satisfied in a different way in co-citizen relations. We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

43 Viehoff, "Power," 10.

44 Cf. Frankfurt, "Equality."

45 Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism*, 69.

46 *Ibid.*, 63–9.

47 *Ibid.*, 9, n. 21.

48 What it is to be considered attractive enough presumably varies with context. According to Anderson, "What Is the Point of Equality?" 35, one is considered attractive enough as long as one is able to function as an equal citizen.

49 In this sense, our pluralist relational view may be congenial to the relational egalitarian views defended by Fourie, "Praise," and Porro, "Esteem," in relation to inequalities of esteem. They argue, roughly, that inequalities of esteem are only objectionable for relational egalitarianism if they are sufficiently pervasive (as they are, *inter alia*, if they spill over into other domains – if they are not 'bounded' – and if they 'eclipse' other domains of esteem). But given this, one might question whether our point about relating as aesthetic sufficient is not already captured by relational egalitarianism. We have the following response. To the extent that it is captured, we believe that this is because these accounts are in fact a variant of relational sufficientarianism or relational pluralism. In the next paragraph, we introduce the distinction between local standing (one's standing in a given sphere) and global standing (one's standing throughout society as a whole). We argue that when it comes to aesthetic standing, relating as sufficient is all that our pluralist relational view requires when it comes to both local and global standing. Perhaps Fourie and Porro would argue that when it comes to global standing, people must relate as equals in the aesthetic sense (at least insofar as aesthetic standing is an important esteem domain) – in which case their accounts would actually be different from ours – but at least they would seem to accept that, at least in some circumstances, relating as sufficient may suffice when it comes to local standing, in which case their accounts would be pluralist relational accounts according to us. In any case, their accounts would not be egalitarian in the way that an account which took it to be a requirement that people relate as aesthetic equals in both the local and global sense would be (for an account that is more demanding when it comes to esteem, see, e.g., Baker, "Conceptions"). We thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to discuss this.

50 Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism*, 65.

51 Cf. Miller, "Equality and Justice," 234; Moreau, *Faces*, 40; Walzer, *Spheres*.

52 Scheffler, "Choice," 17–8. Note, interestingly, that this points to Scheffler being some form of pluralist relational egalitarian, as opposed to a strict relational egalitarian.

53 Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism*, 51.

54 In this sense, this pluralist relational view is congenial to Schemmel's account of relational egalitarianism (*Justice*, esp. chaps. 3 and 4). He argues that some inequalities of power within the workplace (and more generally) are not objectionable; only inequalities of power that involve domination are objectionable according to his account (e.g. Schemmel, *Justice*, 58, says, 'liberals [his being a liberal account of relational egalitarianism] have very strong reason to recognize that some inequalities of power serve valuable purposes for social cooperation'). Although Schemmel calls his account a relational egalitarian view, in our terminology his account would probably qualify as a pluralist relational view. If relational egalitarians are right that equal relations require equal power (see, e.g., Kolodny, "Rule," and Viehoff, "Power"), then Schemmel's account does not call for equal relations, but only that the relationships' power inequalities do not involve domination which, in our terminology, would be a requirement that they (not) relate as (in)sufficient (although more than non-domination is needed to relate as sufficient), and not equals. So to the extent that existent relational egalitarian views can provide a solution to the pervasiveness problem – which Schemmel's view might be able to – we believe that this is because they are already views which incorporate a sufficiency requirement (and if they would dispute that, we suspect that the dispute is merely a verbal dispute). But there might still be differences between Schemmel's view and our view. To give one example, Schemmel's view is an expressivist view: it 'makes a case for the special relevance for justice of the attitudes expressed by institutions in the treatment of those subject to their power, as that expression constitutes its meaning' (Schemmel, *Justice*, 13). Our pluralist relational view is not, or in any case does not have to be, expressivist in this sense. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pushing us on this.

55 See, e.g., Kolodny, "Rule"; Viehoff, "Democratic Equality."

56 Cf. Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism*, 9.

57 Cf. Scheffler, "Practice."

58 Cf. Kolodny, "Rule."

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