



# Am I Socially Related to Myself?

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## Abstract

According to relational egalitarianism, justice requires equal relations. The theory applies to those who stand in the relevant social relations. In this paper, I distinguish four different accounts of what it means to be socially related and argue that in all of them, self-relations—how a person relates to themselves—fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism. I also point to how this constrains what a person is allowed to do to themselves.

**Keywords** Relational egalitarianism · Self-relations · Duties to self · Social relations

## 1 Introduction

According to relational egalitarianism, a prominent theory of justice, justice requires equal social relations. Am I socially related to myself? This is an important question for relational egalitarians because their theory applies only to those who are relevantly socially related. If, and only if, self-relations—how a person relates to themselves, e.g., over time—are social relations in the relevant sense, relational egalitarian justice constrains what people are allowed to do to themselves.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper, I will ask two questions:

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<sup>1</sup> As I explain below, being socially related is both a necessary and sufficient condition for relational egalitarianism to apply because relational egalitarians care about *relational* inequalities, and for there to be an unequal (or, for that matter, equal) social relation, there must be a social relation to begin with; and once there is a social relation, that social relation may be unequal and thus unjust. I thank an anonymous reviewer for asking me to clarify this.

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(1) Do self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism?

and.

(2) If self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism, how does this affect how I ought to relate to myself?

In response to the first question, I will distinguish four different accounts of what it means to be socially related in relational egalitarianism. I will argue that in all these accounts, self-relations do fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism.<sup>2</sup> This means that even if, in a society, interpersonal relations are equal, relational egalitarian justice may not yet be realized. This result, that self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism, is significant for several reasons. First, it shows that the scope of relational egalitarianism is surprisingly large. It is not just a matter of interpersonal relations, as we might have expected, but also a matter of how persons relate to themselves. Second, it implies that relational egalitarians will have to say what it takes to have equal intrapersonal relations, cf. my second question above. As I explain in the next paragraph, I start that investigation towards the end of this paper, but much more needs to be said. Third, that a unit *narrower* than interpersonal relations, i.e., intrapersonal relations, is important for relational egalitarian justice may also offer indirect support for a unit *broader* than interpersonal relations, i.e., group relations, being important for relational egalitarian justice (cp. Dietz 2020: 372–377). Although relational egalitarians sometimes mention group standing (see, e.g., Anderson 2010: 16; Schemmel 2012: 124; Voigt 2018: 438–439), they have not said much about how groups should relate to each other. This investigation, and result, might be a steppingstone to investigating more thoroughly the role of groups in relational egalitarianism. Fourth, it contributes to the developing literature on duties to self. Most work so far in this literature has focused on the possibility of duties to self and not on the principles that help to shape those duties.<sup>3</sup> This paper contributes to the latter in showing that relational egalitarianism helps to shape and give content to duties to self.

In response to the second question, I do not offer a complete answer. But I will point to three ways in which the fact that self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism constrains what persons are allowed to do to themselves. One constraint is that people must not incur massive debt since “intrapersonal peonage” constitutes unequal self-relations. But as explained above, this is merely the beginning; much more needs to be said about how people must relate to themselves according to relational egalitarianism.

<sup>2</sup> In this sense, my investigation is different from Hojlund’s (2022). First, although she argues that relational egalitarianism sets limits to how people must relate to themselves, she makes this argument by appealing to how this affects our relations with others. Indeed, she says that her argument does not apply to Robinson Crusoe-like persons. But if self-relations are relevant social relations, self-relations may be unequal, and thus unjust, even if no other person is involved at all, as I will argue. Second, she does not consider whether self-relations are relevant social relations in the first place, and thus whether they even fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism.

<sup>3</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for this formulation.

## 2 Relational Egalitarianism and Being Socially Related

Relational egalitarianism is a theory of justice according to which justice requires that people relate as equals. Focusing on relations, as opposed to distributions, as the fundamental concern of justice, relational egalitarians initially put forward their account mostly as a criticism of distributive theories of justice (e.g., Anderson 1999; Scheffler, 2003; Wolff, 1998). Increasingly, however, relational egalitarians have turned to the positive project of developing their theory of justice (e.g., Anderson 2010; Bidadanure, 2016; Fourie 2012; Fourie et al., 2015; Kolodny, 2014; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018; Miller, 1998; Nath, 2015; 2020; O’Neill, 2008; Satz, 2010; Scheffler, 2015; Schemmel, 2021; Schmidt, 2021; Voigt, 2018; Wilson, 2019). Part of this project is to settle what it means to be relevantly socially related since the requirements of relational egalitarianism only apply to those who stand in the relevant social relations (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 123–129; cp. Nath, 2011). The reason why relational egalitarianism extends, and only extends, to those who are socially related is that relational egalitarians care about social, or relational, inequalities. Particularly, they care that different -isms, such as racism, sexism, etc., do not determine how social relations are structured, including in how people are perceived, treated, and so on. That no one stands as an inferior in relation to others because of their race, sex, etc., and, more broadly, that their claim not to relate as unequal to others—their standing—is respected, as it is not when, for instance, a person is exploited or is treated paternalistically (Anderson, 1999: 301, 312).<sup>4</sup> For there to be an unequal (or, for that matter, equal) social relation, there must be a social relation to begin with (Kolodny, 2014: 293); but once there is a social relation, that relation may be unequal and therefore unjust.<sup>5</sup> However, this, in itself, does not tell us how we should understand social relations on relational egalitarianism (there are different ways of defining social relations if one wants to integrate these worries about different -isms structuring social relations, as we will see shortly).<sup>6</sup> Thus, we must start with the question of what it means to be socially related on relational egalitarianism.

One view of what it means to be socially related is what we may refer to as the moralized view. In this view, we define being socially related in line with the concerns of relational egalitarians. To exemplify, relational egalitarians object to domination. Hence, if X is able to dominate Y, they are socially related on this view. An advantage of this view is that relational egalitarians will then be able qua relational egalitarians to object to such instances of domination (since they will only be able to so object if the relation falls within the scope of relational egalitarianism and it does fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism if we assume the moralized view). A general version of the moralized view would then specify all the concerns of relational egalitarians—including also discrimination, exploitation, paternalism and racism (Ander-

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a person may be exploited or paternalized precisely because of their race or sex.

<sup>5</sup> This sums up why being socially related is a necessary and sufficient condition for relational egalitarianism to apply.

<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, relational egalitarians have not said much about what it means to be socially related as they have assumed an already bounded community (but see Lippert-Rasmussen (2018: 123–129) and Nath (2011) for two exceptions).

son, 1999: 301, 312; Anderson 2010: 59; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018: 86)—such that X and Y are relevantly socially related if, and only if, X is able to treat Y in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians as objectionable and/or<sup>7</sup> if Y is able to treat X in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians as objectionable.<sup>8</sup>

A non-moralized view is different. On this view, we do not look to the concerns of relational egalitarians. Instead, we (try to) come up with a lexical definition of what it is to be socially related. Lippert-Rasmussen has proposed such a view: “X and Y are socially related [if and] only if (i) X is socially related to Y and Y is socially related to X; and (ii) X can causally affect Y and Y can causally affect X”; (iii) X and Y can adjust their conduct in light of each other’s conduct and communicate (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 126, 128; see also Anderson 1999: 313).

There is another distinction which cuts across the distinction between the moralized and the non-moralized view, namely the difference between a one-way view and a two-way view. According to the one-way view, it is necessary and sufficient for X and Y to be socially related that one of them satisfies that which we identified as the necessary and sufficient conditions in relation to the first distinction (moralized/non-moralized view). Take the non-moralized view. Inasmuch as X is socially related to Y; can causally affect Y; and can communicate with Y, that is sufficient for X and Y to be relevantly socially related in the one-way view. For them to be socially related according to the two-way view, on the other hand, it must also be the case that Y is socially related to X; can causally affect X; and can communicate with X. Similarly, in the moralized two-way view, it must be the case both that X can treat Y in one of the ways identified as objectionable by relational egalitarians and that Y can treat X in one of the ways identified as objectionable by relational egalitarians.

Since these two distinctions—the one between the moralized and the non-moralized view, the other between the one-way view and the two-way view—cut across each other, it gives us four different views on what it means to be socially related in relational egalitarianism (Table 1):<sup>9</sup>

**Table 1** Four views on social relations

	One-way View	Two-way View
Moralized View	<i>Moralized One-way View</i>	<i>Moralized Two-way View</i>
Non-moralized View	<i>Non-moralized One-way View</i>	<i>Non-moralized Two-way View</i>

<sup>7</sup> In a minute, we will see why that formulation is relevant.

<sup>8</sup> Here it seems that being socially related plays no role in explaining why only people who are socially related are subjected to the demands of relational egalitarianism. But is this not something that relational egalitarians think it does (i.e., play that explanatory role)? If so, is this not a problem? Perhaps it would be a problem, but social relations do play a role in the sense that, on the moralized view, that which relational egalitarians worry about—the different forms of treatment mentioned in this paragraph—cannot arise outside social relations (so the view still captures that absent social relations, the worries of relational egalitarians do not arise). But in this sense, it is true that being socially related plays a different role on the moralized view than on the non-moralized view (which I introduce in the next paragraph), and for this reason, some relational egalitarians might prefer the non-moralized view. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

<sup>9</sup> I also present these distinctions and the table in (Bengtson and Lippert-Rasmussen, n.d.).

It is important which one of these understandings of being socially related relational egalitarians endorse since they have different implications, e.g., when it comes to non-overlapping intergenerational relations. However, it is not my purpose in this paper to settle which view of being socially related relational egalitarians should ultimately choose.<sup>10</sup> What I will do instead is to analyze what the four views imply for whether self-relations—a person’s relations to themselves—fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism.

## 2.1 The Moralized One-way View and Self-relations

Let us start with the Moralized One-way View, i.e., the view that X and Y are socially related if, and only if, X is able to treat Y in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians as objectionable *or* if Y is able to treat X in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians as objectionable. We will develop the understanding of self-relations as we move along but let me note here that a self-relation is to be understood such that, *in principle*, no other metaphysical entity need be involved, i.e., it is a matter of how the person relates to themselves irrespective of how this affects the person’s relations to other, metaphysically distinct persons. Does that person stand in a social relation to themselves given the Moralized One-way View such that the relation falls within the scope of relational egalitarianism?

Consider Parfit’s nineteenth-century Russian nobleman. As a young person, he is highly idealistic and signs a document such that the estates he is due to inherit will automatically be given away. This arrangement can only be revoked by his wife’s consent, so the nobleman asks his wife not to give her consent even if he, at a later time, begs her to do so. When he has grown older, his ideals have faded, and he asks his wife to revoke the arrangement. Parfit argues that the wife is not released from her duty in this case since the person who asks her to now revoke the arrangement is different from the person who made the arrangement in the first place (Parfit, 1984: 326–329; see also Dietz 2020: 367). In this way, Parfit’s example is meant to illustrate that we must think of the Russian nobleman in his youth, say, “the Russian nobleman as a twenty-year-old”, as different from the Russian nobleman in his older age, say, “the Russian nobleman as a forty-year-old.” And inasmuch as this is the case, we can see the example as one in which the young Russian nobleman treats his future self in a paternalistic manner.<sup>11</sup> The young Russian nobleman does not trust his future self

<sup>10</sup> Part of that work I have done elsewhere (Bengtson and Lippert-Rasmussen, n.d.).

<sup>11</sup> How to define paternalism is highly debated in the literature. One prominent definition—the one I will adopt in this paper—is Shiffrin’s according to which “paternalism by A towards B is characterized as behavior (whether through act or through omission): (a) aimed to have (or to avoid) an effect on B or her sphere of legitimate agency; (b) that involves the substitution of A’s judgment or agency for B’s; (c) directed at B’s own interests or matters that legitimately lie within B’s control; and (d) undertaken on the grounds that compared to B’s judgment or agency with respect to those interests or other matters, A regards her judgment or agency to be, in some respect, superior to B’s” (Shiffrin, 2000: 218). Clearly, assuming this understanding, the young Russian nobleman treats his future self paternalistically. An anonymous reviewer asks how the case satisfies condition (b). It does so in the sense that the Russian nobleman as a twenty-year-old substitutes his judgment of what would be best for himself as a forty-year-old (to give away the estates) for his forty-year-old’s judgment of what would be best for himself (to not give away the estates). For other definitions of paternalism, see, e.g., Dworkin (2020) and Quong (2011: 80).

to choose in what he believes is the best manner, namely to give away his estates. In this sense, he binds his future self. Inasmuch as the young Russian nobleman paternalises his future self, it follows that the two subpersons are relevantly socially related according to the Moralized One-way View.<sup>12</sup> Thus, given this understanding of what it means to be socially related, a person's self-relations do fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism.

In fact, to make the argument that self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism assuming the One-way View, we do not even need to appeal to a person's *future* self.<sup>13</sup> Suppose that "the Russian nobleman as a forty-year old" reads a letter written by his past self, "the Russian nobleman as a twenty-year-old." The letter asks "the Russian nobleman as a forty-year-old" to carry out a project on behalf of his former self, namely to publish his book manuscript that he has hidden in the door of the cupboard. "The Russian nobleman as a forty-year-old" reads the book manuscript and finds out that it is terrible. Indeed, it is so terrible that despite the wishes of his past self, he decides that it would be better for his past self that this book manuscript not be published. He therefore burns the manuscript. This is an instance in which his contemporary self treats his past self in a paternalistic manner—he substitutes his judgment for the judgment of his past self (who wanted him to publish the book) because he believes it would be better for the past self if the book is never published. In this sense, the case is similar to one in which a wife promises her husband to publish his book manuscript once he is dead but decides to act against her husband's wish because she believes the book is bad and that it would be better for him to avoid the reputation of having published a bad book. Thus, given that relational egalitarians object to paternalism, the relation between the past self and the present self falls within the scope of relational egalitarianism given the Moralized One-way view because the contemporary self treats the past self paternalistically.

One may object to the arguments in this section that these subpersons ("the past self," "the contemporary self," and "the future self") are not different agents. It is simply the same person at different times. But given that it is the same person at different times, it does not make sense to classify these interactions between the "subpersons" as social relations. I have three responses. First, in one sense, we may say that if it does not make sense to speak of these interactions between subpersons as social relations, this speaks against the Moralized One-way View as a view of what it means to be socially related, rather than against my arguments that the contemporary subperson may treat the past subperson paternalistically and that the contemporary

<sup>12</sup> To be clear, because, as mentioned in the previous section, relational egalitarians qua relational egalitarians object *pro tanto* to paternalism. For instance, Anderson, in her criticism of luck egalitarianism, points out that luck egalitarians can only secure the imprudent from destitution by turning to paternalism: "Luck egalitarians do entertain modifications of their harsh system, but only on paternalistic grounds. In adopting mandatory social insurance schemes for the reasons they offer, luck egalitarians are effectively telling citizens that they are too stupid to run their lives, so Big Brother will have to tell them what to do. It is hard to see how citizens could be expected to accept such reasoning and still retain their self-respect" (Anderson, 1999: 301; cp. Flanigan 2017: 299; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018: 133–134; Quong 2011; Schroeder, 2020; Tsai, 2018: 351).

<sup>13</sup> Some may be skeptical of such appeal given that the non-identity problem may also apply intrapersonally, see, e.g., Andersen (2021). For discussion of the non-identity problem, see, e.g., Boonin (2014) and Parfit (1984). For a potential solution, see, e.g., Kumar (2003).

subperson may treat the future subperson paternalistically. So perhaps it simply shows that the Moralized One-way View is not the proper view of what it means to be socially related in relational egalitarianism.

But, second, I think it does make sense to see the subpersons as different agents. One reason why it may be hard to see them as different agents is that we usually do not think of them as existing simultaneously. And thus we usually cannot imagine interaction between the different subpersons in the way we can with two metaphysically distinct persons. But as Dietz (2020: 367) explains, we can use time travel to create scenarios in which the different subpersons are salient to each other. As he says, suppose you travel back in time to meet your past self. In that case, it seems that the two selves—your present self who has travelled back in time and your past self—can treat and think of each other as different agents, and also that third persons may think of them as distinct agents. Indeed, as Dietz exemplifies, if the two selves wanted to play cards, they would not be stuck with solitaire—they could play a two-player game. The fact that the different selves are not usually salient to each other should not lead us to the conclusion that they are not different agents (Dietz, 2020: 367–368).<sup>14</sup> Another way to illustrate this is to look to projects that require work over an extended period of time. In such cases, you may find yourself thinking that you owe it to your past self to continue the project that he started, e.g., you may think that, for fairness reasons, you owe it to your past self to complete the education that he started or to finish writing the book that he started a long time ago (Brink, 1997: 114; Dietz 2020: 368).

Third, even if it is false that subpersons are different agents, we can still make the argument that self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism if we assume the Moralized One-way View of social relations. In his argument for why such a thing as duties to oneself exists, Schofield (2015; see also Schofield 2018; 2021) argues that a person can relate to herself second-personally<sup>15</sup> because she occupies distinct perspectives over time. A perspective is “a point of view from which one perceives, or feels emotions, or has sensations, or judges a proposition to be true, or wills some particular action, and so on” (Schofield, 2015: 517). For there to be two distinct perspectives, numerical distinctness is not a requirement. A single

<sup>14</sup> Perhaps this shows that the demands of relational egalitarianism *could* apply to people’s relations to themselves, but does it show that they *actually do* (given that time travel is not possible for us)? If only the former, why is that an interesting conclusion? If I could only show the former, then that would be much less interesting than if I could also show the latter. It would not, I think, be uninteresting because it would still show that there are conditions under which relational egalitarianism applies to self-relations (and most relational egalitarians might not even have thought that would be the case). But, fortunately, as we will see, I do not need time travel cases to make my argument. And as I emphasise in the beginning of this paragraph (in the main text), the time travel case is used mostly to make vivid that we might see these subpersons as different agents (cp. Dietz 2020: 377). I thank an anonymous reviewer for pushing me on this.

<sup>15</sup> In exemplifying the second-personal, Darwall (2006) asks us to consider a case in which an individual steps on another’s foot, thereby causing her pain. In this case, the foot-stomper is accountable to the person whose foot he has trampled upon. If the foot-stomper were to remove his foot because he believed that would cause more good, he would fail to appreciate the fact that he is responsible to the person whose foot he has trampled. If he instead were to resonate that if I do not remove my foot, I wrong the other person, he would appreciate the fact that it is something he owe *to her*. The second-person standpoint is thus a perspective from which individuals “make and acknowledge claims on one another’s conduct and will” (Darwall, 2006: 3; see also Schofield 2019: 69–70).

person can occupy distinct perspectives, e.g., her present perspective, with her ends and interests, and a future perspective, in which she may have different ends and interests (but this, according to Schofield, does not mean that it is not the same agent). In this way, she may, from her present perspective, judge herself to be accountable to the occupant of the future perspective (which happens to be her). For instance, she may out of a sense of obligation to the occupant of the future perspective's interests decide not to take on massive debt (Schofield, 2018: 72). But then she may also, from her current perspective, paternalise her future perspective. Suppose that she, from her current perspective ( $P_1$ ) decides not to start smoking because she does not trust herself to be able to stop from the future perspective ( $P_2$ ), and because it would be better, from the point of view of  $P_2$ , to not be smoking. As Schofield (2018: 76) explains, "she might plot against herself, committing herself to pursue values she endorses now in ways that will prevent her from exercising her will in the future if her values change—much in the way that she might plot against others to prevent them from pursuing their values."

This argument thus does not require that we accept that the different subpersons, or perspectives in this case, are metaphysically distinct entities. Indeed, "because a single person occupies many distinct temporal perspectives, it is possible for her—a single enduring entity—to play the role of both wrongdoer and victim" (Schofield, 2015: 520). Because of this, and because a person, from her current perspective, may treat herself, from the future perspective, paternalistically, as we have just seen, this provides an additional argument for why self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism, assuming the Moralized One-way View. Given this view of social relations, how a person relates to themselves is a matter of relational egalitarian justice. It also means that in societies as we know them, relational egalitarian justice speaks to how people relate to themselves, irrespective of whether this affects how they relate to other persons, because people may treat their future selves, or perspectives, in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians to be objectionable. Let us now analyze whether self-relations also fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism if we instead assume the Non-moralized One-way View of social relations.

## 2.2 The Non-moralized One-way View and Self-relations

The Non-moralized One-Way View says that  $X$  and  $Y$  are socially related if and only if  $X$  can communicate with  $Y$  or  $Y$  can communicate with  $X$  (the causal condition is also necessary, but I will assume, to keep things somewhat simple, that if  $X$  can communicate with  $Y$ ,  $X$  can also causally affect  $Y$ ). That is, in any case, the case in the examples I consider). Can the different subpersons, or perspectives, such as "past self", "present self" and "future self", engage in one-way communication? If they can, self-relations do fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism. We do not need to look far for an example which illustrates that the present self can communicate, in the one-way sense, with the future self. Suppose the present self (or perspective, in Schofieldian terms) writes a letter to the future self, asking the future self to publish the book manuscript that he has hidden in the door of the cupboard. Suppose also that the future self reads this letter at some point in the future. In this case, the present self clearly communicates with the future self in the one-way sense.



Similarly, if the Russian nobleman writes an idealistic manifesto to his future self to convince him to give away the estates that he is due to inherit (in the future), the Russian nobleman's present self communicates with his future self. This means that self-relations do fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism, assuming the Non-moralized One-way View. In that sense, the Moralized and the Non-moralized One-way Views are similar. In both views, self-relations do fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism. Before turning to discuss what this means for how persons ought to relate to themselves according to relational egalitarianism, let us first analyze whether the Moralized and Non-moralized Two-way Views also imply that self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism.

### 2.3 The Moralized Two-way View and Self-relations

Let us start with the Moralized Two-way View, i.e., the view that X and Y are socially related if, and only if, X is able to treat Y in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians as objectionable *and* if Y is able to treat X in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians as objectionable.

It is not conceptually impossible for two, temporally distinct subpersons to treat each other in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians as objectionable. Consider again the case of time travel. Suppose the contemporary self travels back in time to meet the past self. In their encounter, they may treat each other paternalistically, e.g., the contemporary self may hide the candy that the past self is about to eat because he believes it will be better for the past self not to eat the candy, and the past self may hide the contemporary self's cigarettes because he believes it will be better for the contemporary self not to smoke. In that sense, they are relevantly socially related.

But if we set aside time travel cases, the temporal argument—irrespective of whether it refers to subpersons or perspectives—does not establish that self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism if we assume the moralized two-way view (contrary to what was the case for the moralized one-way view). Consider again Parfit's example with the Russian nobleman in which "the Russian nobleman as a twenty-year old" is different from "the Russian nobleman as a forty-year old." We saw that this is a case in which "the Russian nobleman as a twenty-year old" treats "the Russian nobleman as a forty-year old" paternalistically. But what is also clear is that "the Russian nobleman as a forty-year old" cannot qua future person treat "the Russian nobleman as a twenty-year old" in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians as objectionable for the simple reason that he simply does not (yet) exist. It is true that in the future, "the Russian nobleman as a forty-year old" may be able to act paternalistically towards "the Russian nobleman as a twenty-year old." But in this case, "the Russian nobleman as a twenty-year old" will not be able to treat "the Russian nobleman as a forty-year old" paternalistically for the simple reason that he no longer exists. Thus, this presents a difference between this view and the one-way views discussed earlier.

However, it is still the case that self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism if we assume the moralized two-way view. To see why, we may return to Schofield's argument. As mentioned, he argues that a person can relate to herself

second-personally because she occupies distinct perspectives over time. But a person does not only occupy distinct perspectives over time; she also occupies distinct perspectives at the same time qua having more than one practical identity (Schofield, 2019: 224; see also Korsgaard 1996). A practical identity is, Schofield explains (2019: 224), “a characterization of who or what an individual is that entails she has particular reasons for acting.” To exemplify, he points to the practical identity of being a philosopher. Qua philosopher, a person has particular reasons for acting. She has reason to read, write and teach philosophy—and if she never did any of these things, we would hardly think of her as a philosopher. Similarly, being a mother is also a practical identity. Qua mother, she has particular reasons to spend time with her child, to make sure the child has a stable childhood, to make sure the child is well-nourished, etc. Given these particular reasons which attach to these practical identities, it is clear that interests also attach to these identities. From a person’s standpoint as a mother, it will be good for her to spend time with her child. From a person’s standpoint as a philosopher, it will be good for her to spend time writing philosophy. This also means that conflicts can arise between these different practical identities and that “a person might address herself from one perspective, making demands that will be received from another of her perspectives. So, she might, for instance, demand from her perspective as a philosopher that her family life not always preempt her professional life” (Schofield, 2019: 225).

At this point, one might say that while the possibility of occupying different practical identities shows that one can in some sense relate socially to oneself, it is unclear whether this sense is the one that relational egalitarians have in mind when they say that the requirements of relational egalitarianism only apply to those who are relevantly socially related.<sup>16</sup> In response, consider Habib’s (2009: 542n9) case of an army captain who is also the army paymaster (a person with two practical identities). Habib argues that this person owes it to themselves to pay their salary in the same way that they owe all the other soldiers to pay their salaries. It is an obligation they owe, qua paymaster, to themselves, qua soldier. Suppose now, in one case, that the paymaster does not pay themselves qua soldier for racist reasons. Compare this case to one in which the army paymaster does not pay another soldier for identical racist reasons. Importantly, these cases do not seem relevantly different from the point of view of what relational egalitarians worry about: as explained earlier, that different -isms, such as racism, sexism, etc., do not determine how social relations are structured, including in how people are perceived, treated, and so on. Indeed, it is the exact same racist norms which are at play in both cases and as a result of which the two soldiers are not paid (or are not paid as much as the other soldiers). In other words, the concerns of relational egalitarians may arise in both intra- and interpersonal social relations. This also shows that relational egalitarianism not only applies to what a person does to their future (or past) self (e.g., as the Russian nobleman who ties their future self to the mast), but also to what a person does to themselves right now (e.g., as the army paymaster who treats themselves qua soldier in a racist manner). Again, relational egalitarian concerns may arise in both types of intrapersonal cases. But we started with the former type of case because it clearly illustrates the

<sup>16</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

kind of intrapersonal conflict of interests which may, sometimes in combination with particular norms in society, lead to treatment which is relevant from the point of view of relational egalitarianism.

Now, think of the person who has both the practical identity of mother and philosopher. From her perspective as a mother, she might believe that she spends too much time being a philosopher, to the detriment of herself both as a mother and a philosopher—as a mother because she does not spend enough time with her child; as a philosopher because if she keeps her current pace, she will soon suffer from burnout. Suppose that she from her perspective as mother decides, for these two reasons, to make an agreement with her child’s day care that she will pick up her daughter every day at 14.30, in this way binding herself from the perspective of philosopher.<sup>17</sup> This is an instance of paternalism: from her practical identity as a mother, she believes it will be better for her qua philosopher to work less so she intervenes to make it impossible for her qua philosopher to work after 14.30 when she has picked up her daughter. But conversely, from her perspective as a philosopher, she might believe that she qua mother spends too much time with her daughter to her own detriment—because when they spent more time together, she gets angry at her daughter in a way that pushes her daughter away and leads to a less close relationship between them. So, from her perspective as a philosopher, she calls for a babysitter to spend Saturdays with the daughter. This is similarly an instance of paternalism. This synchronic argument (focusing on what a person does to themselves now)—as different from the diachronic argument explored earlier (focusing on what a person does to their future (or past) self)—thus shows why self-relations also fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism if we assume the moralized two-way view. From the perspective of one practical identity, she might treat herself qua occupant of another practical identity in a paternalistic manner, and vice versa.

## 2.4 The Non-moralized Two-way View and Self-relations

Let us then finally turn to the non-moralized two-way view, i.e., the view that X and Y are socially related if and only if X can communicate with Y and Y can communicate with X. What we need to settle in this case, building upon the argument from the previous section, is thus whether there is a sense in which there can be communication between these practical identities. If that is the case, self-relations also fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism assuming the non-moralized two-way view of what it means to be socially related.

Note that it is not conceptually impossible for two, temporally distinct subpersons to communicate with each other. Consider again the case of time travel. Suppose the contemporary self travels back in time to meet the past self. Upon meeting the past self who is engaged in eating a hamburger, the contemporary self says, “You should eat more healthily!” To this, the past self responds: “That is none of your business!” In this case, there is two-way communication which means that self-relations do fall

<sup>17</sup> Cp. “from her perspective as an artist, she might issue a demand to herself, telling her to give up on what is required of her as a community member in order to ensure that she does what’s required of her as an artist” (Schofield, 2019: 229–230).

within the scope of relational egalitarianism if we assume the non-moralized two-way view.

But we might not have to turn to time travel cases to establish this conclusion. If a person has (at least) two practical identities, there are (at least) two perspectives from which she can address herself and make demands. “Indeed,” as Schofield (2019: 225) explains, “while people don’t usually address themselves aloud, our linguistic practices seem to capture well the phenomenon [that a person qua having several practical identities have several perspectives from which demands can be made] ... We often talk of the ‘competing demands’ placed upon a person by her various roles and identities, or of a person’s being ‘torn’ between two roles or aspects of herself. In both cases, we acknowledge the possibility of a divided self—a self that recognizes normative pressure applied in opposite directions from competing perspectives that she occupies.”

But is this in the relevant sense communication? For our purposes, that depends on why two-way communication matters for relational egalitarians: Whether (a) two-way communication is important because it bridges an information gap which exists because two people who can communicate are separate; or (b) two-way communication is important because people who can communicate can subject each other to the treatments which relational egalitarians worry about. If they could not communicate in the two-way sense, they would be too far removed from each other to pose such a threat to each other. In this understanding, two-way communication is actually a proxy for a certain kind of closeness; a closeness which makes possible treatment constitutive of relational inequality such as racism and paternalism from both parties (and not just from one of the parties). I think (b) is more in line with the spirit of relational egalitarianism: that two-way communication is important because it signals that there is a certain kind of closeness between people—a closeness that makes them vulnerable to each other—a closeness that implies mutual vulnerability, as it were—and for which reason an equal relation becomes the solution.<sup>18</sup> But since I do not have the space to further argue for this claim, I will simply make my argument in this section conditional: if (b) is the proper understanding of the importance of two-way communication in relational egalitarianism, a person’s practical identities may be said to be relevantly socially related since there is the kind of closeness between them for which two-way communication is a proxy. Indeed, there is a closeness such that the person from the practical identity of being a philosopher can make a demand addressed to her practical identity as a mother, e.g., “You need to spend less time in care activities to free up time to being a philosopher!,” and vice versa (cp. Schofield 2018: 72; think also of Habib’s army soldier-paymaster case).

<sup>18</sup> But, one might object, then it seems that vulnerability, and not being socially related, is crucial to whether relational egalitarian requirements apply (since one can be vulnerable without being socially related). I think this worry is alleviated since, first, it is *mutual* vulnerability (it is not sufficient that one person is vulnerable to the other and that narrows the extension of the claim significantly), and, second, it is vulnerability to the forms of treatment which relational egalitarians worry about (so not just vulnerability in general). But it is true that two-way communication (which is what is required for social relations on this view) is a proxy on this interpretation of the view, so to the extent that there is a residual worry, this might lead some relational egalitarians to prefer another understanding of social relations (e.g., the moralized two-way view) or another interpretation of the non-moralized two-way view. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

### 3 The Relational Egalitarian Requirements on Self-relations

We have now seen that in the four definitions of social relations, self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism (with the argument in relation to the non-moralized two-way view being conditional). In other words, relational egalitarianism places demands on how persons must relate to themselves.<sup>19,20</sup> This raises the question: what does relational egalitarianism require when it comes to self-relations? In this section, I tackle this question. I will not provide a fully-fledged answer—but that would require more space—but point to relevant ways in which relational egalitarianism places demands on self-relations.

Let us start with Scheffler who argues that to relate as equals, in the interpersonal case, the parties must satisfy the following constraint:

*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” (Scheffler 2015, 25; cp. Cohen, 2013: 196; Viehoff, 2014: 353).

But if a person’s self-relations must also be equal—as they must if we are relational egalitarians, as we have just seen—then the EDC must also be satisfied in these relations. One way to violate it would be for the contemporary self to take on massive debt now which will be left to their future self.<sup>21</sup> Suppose she did so to be able to live a luxurious life in her early twenties, in effect leaving her future self with a debt that she needs to spend almost all her time working off. In this case, the contemporary self violates the EDC in relation to the future self: the future self’s interests to be able to live a life according to her values do not play as significant a role as the contemporary self’s interests to do so—indeed, they do not play any role.<sup>22,23</sup> This means that the

<sup>19</sup> For more general discussion on duties to self, see Hills (2003); Kanygina (2021); Muñoz (2020); Schaab (2021); Schofield (2015; 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Could relational egalitarians not say that self-relations are of a special kind to which requirements of relational egalitarian justice do not apply? Perhaps, but we have seen that what relational egalitarians worry about may take place in self-relations. Indeed, we saw in the army soldier-paymaster cases that it was the same racist norms which were at play in both the self-relation case and the non-self-relation case. So it would seem arbitrary and ad hoc to say that the latter is a matter of justice, but the former is not; at least that would require an explanation. And this investigation may indeed have shown that self-relations are not of a special kind from the point of view of relational egalitarian justice. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

<sup>21</sup> Schofield (2018: 80) uses this example of taking on massive debt when young to argue that state paternalism may be justified in such a case.

<sup>22</sup> Similarly, we may imagine a person with several practical identities who neglects her one identity, thereby failing to give appropriate weight to the strong interests attaching to that perspective. This would likewise be a case of self-relations in which the EDC is violated.

<sup>23</sup> There is a complication here since, on some accounts of self-interest, my future self’s interests are promoted by my present enjoyment. But if the satisfaction of a present interest—say, smoking cigarettes—

contemporary self and the future self will relate as unequals. And insofar as there should not be inequalitarian self-relations, the person qua contemporary self violates the requirements of relational egalitarianism.

A relational egalitarian may wonder at this point whether it suffices that self-relations are sufficient, rather than egalitarian—that the different subpersons or perspectives relate as sufficient, as opposed to equals, where a sufficient is one whose standing is sufficiently high (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 9; cp. Bengtson and Nielsen, 2023; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2021).<sup>24</sup> If self-relations must only be sufficient, and not equal, it means that the EDC does not have to be satisfied in such relations. The resulting view would likely still imply that the case of the contemporary self incurring massive debt would be unjust—since the future self’s standing may not be sufficiently high in that case—but it would mean that the contemporary self may make decisions without it being unjust not to give equal weight to the interests of her future self.

Whether or not this is a viable option seems to depend on what the relational egalitarian believes in the interpersonal case. If the relational egalitarian wants to argue that interpersonal relations must be egalitarian but also that self-relations must be sufficient, an argument explaining why there is a relevant difference between the two is needed. And it is hard to see what the argument could be. It could not appeal to the fact that interpersonal relations involve two metaphysically distinct entities whereas self-relations do not. After all, we have seen that, from the perspective of relational egalitarianism, there is not a relevant difference between relations involving one metaphysical entity and relations involving two metaphysically distinct entities (e.g., the same racist norms may be at play and constitute unequal relations in both cases, as we saw, for instance, in the army soldier-paymaster cases in which both racist treatments were a result of these norms). What matters is that there are different perspectives with different interests from which demands can be made—and that does not require two metaphysically distinct entities (Schofield, 2015, 2018)—and that the relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism, and we have seen that this is the case for self-relations. So if the relational egalitarian wants to pursue this strategy, she must provide a different argument for why there is a difference between intrapersonal and interpersonal relations. I am not saying that such an argument necessarily cannot be given, only that relational egalitarians have not offered such an argument.

Another option for the relational egalitarian would be to say that not all interpersonal relations have to be egalitarian—for some relations, they might claim, justice

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conflicts with the satisfaction of the future self’s interest—say, good health—then it seems that the future self’s interest is not promoted by present enjoyment. And these are the kind of cases with which I have been concerned. This is, of course, compatible with there being other cases in which present enjoyment promotes my future self’s interest, so this comment raises a broader complication for duties to self-views which make their case by appealing to intrapersonal temporal cases. I thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

<sup>24</sup> Cp. discussions of distributive justice where sufficientarians argue, against egalitarians, that justice does not require equal distributions—only that everyone has enough (see, e.g., Axelsen & Nielsen 2015; Crisp, 2003; Frankfurt, 1987; Huseby, 2010; Shields, 2016).

only requires that they relate as sufficientists.<sup>25</sup> This would obviously require an explanation. But if such an explanation were given, it may be the case that the explanation for why some interpersonal relations do not have to be egalitarian, but only sufficientarian, could also explain why (some) intrapersonal relations do not have to be egalitarian, but only sufficientarian. It is hard to see how such an argument could explain why *no* self-relations should be egalitarian, as opposed to *some* self-relations. After all, that which explains why some interpersonal relations must be egalitarian is likely to also imply that *at least some* self-relations must be egalitarian, given that these two types of relations, as argued above, do not seem relevantly different.

So I will continue with the assumption that at least some self-relations must be equal (and even if that is not the case, the following argument would apply even if self-relations must only be sufficientarian). Although for relational egalitarians, an equal distribution (of whatever is the relevant currency of justice)<sup>26</sup> is not necessarily a requirement of justice, they still argue that it is unjust if distributions become too unequal because relations will then fail to be egalitarian (e.g., Anderson 1999; Schemmel, 2021). For instance, peonage would constitute an unequal relation between the parties involved. But if that is the case interpersonally, that is arguably also the case intrapersonally. Let us return to the example in which the contemporary self incurs a massive debt which the future self must spend most of his time working off. In this case, there is a highly unequal distribution of resources between the contemporary self and the future self—to such an extent that the future self is in effect so badly off that he cannot afford doing much else than working off the debt. This is thus an intrapersonal case of peonage that constitutes an unequal relation between contemporary and future self (cp. Schofield 2018). Thus, this way of incurring massive debt would not only be unjust qua violating the EDC; it would also be unjust qua leading to a highly unequal distribution between the contemporary and the future self that would constitute an unequal relation.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, relational egalitarians, as mentioned, object to discrimination, racism and sexism (e.g., Anderson 1999: 312; Anderson 2010: 59; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018: 86). With ageism being a particular form of discrimination, they also object to ageism. Consider the following example by Bidadanure (2016: 241):

*Unequal City* “Imagine an ‘Unequal City’ where elderly people live in miserable, overcrowded retirement homes with little prospect for happiness, while younger people live in lovely affluent residences.”

Although this is not the argument Bidadanure makes—she argues that Unequal City is unjust because it leads to segregation of elderly and younger people where the elderly is set aside and will become marginalized from the rest of the community (Bidadanure, 2016: 246)—suppose elderly people live in these miserable retirement

<sup>25</sup> For instance, Anderson (1999: 335; see also Lippert-Rasmussen 2018: 9, n. 21; Lippert-Rasmussen 2021) argues that when it comes to aesthetic standing, relational egalitarianism only requires that people relate as sufficientists.

<sup>26</sup> For discussions on what is the relevant currency of distributive justice, see, e.g., Arneson (1989); Cohen (1989); Dworkin (1981a, b).

<sup>27</sup> Note that such intrapersonal peonage would also be unjust if it would lead to the future self not being able to relate to other people as equals.

homes because the interests of elderly people, *because* they are elderly people, are viewed as less important than the interests of younger people. For this reason, not enough money is allocated to elderly people politically. This, I take it, would be an instance of ageism and would be objectionable from the point of view of relational egalitarianism for the same reason that racism and sexism are objectionable—it is to relate to some as if they are moral inferiors (cp. Lippert-Rasmussen 2018: 170). We can similarly imagine an intrapersonal Unequal City case. Suppose that the contemporary self decides not to save for the future because he believes that the interests of the elderly, future self are not as morally important as his current interests *because* they belong to an elderly person (or perspective). This intrapersonal version, like the interpersonal version, is objectionable qua being an instance of ageism. And ageism is constitutive of an unequal relation in the same way that racism is.

We have now seen three ways in which the fact that self-relations fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism affects how individuals must relate to themselves: (i) they must satisfy EDC in relation to their different subparts/perspectives; (ii) they must avoid (too high a degree of) distributive inequality between their different subparts/perspectives; (iii) they must avoid ageism. As I said, this is not a fully-fledged exploration of what relational egalitarianism requires when it comes to self-relations. But it illustrates well that what is required in interpersonal cases will (often) also be required in intrapersonal cases. Indeed, what we do to ourselves is a matter of relational egalitarian justice.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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