

What Relational Egalitarians Should (Not) Believe

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Abstract: Relational egalitarianism is a theory of justice according to which justice requires that people relate as equals. According to some relational egalitarians, X and Y relate as equals if, and only if, they (1) regard each other as equals; and (2) treat each other as equals. In this paper, we argue that relational egalitarians must give up (1).

Keywords: relational egalitarianism; beliefs; the akratic racist.

Section I - Introduction

According to relational egalitarianism, justice requires that people relate as equals. On a common view, X and Y relate as equals if, and only if, they (1) *regard* each other as equals; and (2) *treat* each other as equals. Here are some quotes that express this view:

“[According to relational egalitarianism] X and Y relate as equals if, and only if: (1) X and Y treat one another as equals; (2) X and Y regard one another as equals.”¹

“[I]t [relational egalitarianism] identifies a social ideal, the ideal of a society in which people regard and treat one another as equals.”²

“[T]his ideal [relational egalitarianism] prescribes equal treatment as well as equal regard ... Indeed, believing that others are unable or unlikely to make the right decision or manage a particular situation in a way that will effectively advance their good implies a failure to regard them as equals in a relevant sense, namely in terms of their moral agency.”³

¹ Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 117.

² Miller, “Equality and Justice,” 224.

³ Hojlund, “What should relational egalitarians believe?”, 56

We will refer to this view—the view that for X and Y to relate as equals, they must regard and treat each other as equals—as *the two-part view*.⁴ Consider a case that paradigmatically falls within the scope of this view:

The Racist: Albert is a white racist. He believes that black people are morally inferior to white people. Stumbling upon a black person, Bertram, on the street, Albert regards him as inferior (thinking to himself, “this person is inferior to me”) and treats him accordingly, by shouting racial slurs at him.

Clearly, Albert fails to *regard* and *treat* Bertram as an equal, i.e., he violates (1) and (2). Albert’s belief that Bertram is morally inferior is sufficient for Albert not regarding Bertram as an equal. And his action—shouting demeaning racial slurs—is sufficient for Albert not treating Bertram as an equal.

⁴ Voigt (“Relational Equality and the Expressive Dimension of State Action”) argues that Anderson and Scheffler (in addition to Miller) also (at least) endorse the two-part view. In relation to Anderson, she says (439-440):

“For Anderson, all three criteria—equal treatment, equal regard and expressive concerns—seem to be requirements of relational equality. She considers hierarchies of esteem— ‘whereby those on the top elicit honor and admiration, while those below are stigmatized and held in contempt as objects of ridicule, loathing, or disgust’ (Anderson 2008: 263)—as inimical to social equality, suggesting that citizens’ attitudes towards one another clearly fall within the remit of relational equality. Her account also requires that citizens meet certain standards of conduct when interacting with one another: ‘To stand as an equal before others in discussion means that one is entitled to participate, that others recognize an obligation to listen respectfully and respond to one’s arguments, that no one need bow and scrape before others or represent themselves as inferior to others as a condition of having their claim heard’ (Anderson, 199: 313).”

Voigt does not, however, say why she takes Scheffler to endorse the two-part view. It may be because Scheffler argues that to relate as equals, the parties must satisfy *the egalitarian deliberative constraint*:

“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, “The Practice of Equality,” 25).

However, as we will see, attitudes and dispositions come apart (see also Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 201-205). We thank two anonymous reviewers for pushing us to further clarify this.

This is as it should be: clearly relational egalitarianism should find the relationship between Albert and Bertram objectionable *qua* being an inegalitarian relationship. Consider next:

The Akratic Racist: Connor is a white racist. He believes that black people are morally inferior to white people. However, after reading a complicated treatise on how one ought to treat morally inferior people, Connor finds it an insurmountable mental task to derive practical guidance on how he ought to treat others from his belief in the inferiority of black people. For this reason, his belief never manifests itself in how he acts, let alone in his deliberations about how to act. Stumbling upon a black person, Derek, on the street, Connor *treats* him as his equal by walking past him.⁵

Some may find *The Akratic Racist* psychologically suspicious. They may find that racist beliefs (regard) and racist treatment cannot come apart in this way; the belief will manifest itself somehow in how Connor treats black people, e.g., in microaggressions.⁶ However, this concern is not available to the relational egalitarian since the two-part view already assumes that beliefs and treatment can be separated—otherwise there would be no reason to mention both in laying out what it takes to relate as equals. And since we are scrutinizing the two-part view, we follow relational egalitarians in assuming that they can be separated. Thus, Connor has what we may refer to as a ‘free-floating belief’ about the moral inferiority of some people. Although Connor *treats* Derek as his equal—and thus

⁵ The akratic racist is thus different from a *strategic* racist, i.e., a racist who regards black people as morally inferior but treats them as equals to avoid criticism by others (cp. Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 72). There is a relevant difference between the two in the sense that the racist belief does enter the deliberation of the strategic racist—that is not the case for the akratic racist. We return to the strategic racist later.

⁶ For those who are sceptical, note that for our purposes, any case in which a person regards somebody as morally inferior but where these attitudes do not affect how this person *treats* others (perhaps even due to mere luck) will do. Alternatively, imagine that the government announces that they will be deploying a mental scanner that will reveal to everyone when a person relies on the belief that somebody is morally inferior in their deliberation. Presumably, some of those who believe like Connor will be deterred from relying on this consideration in their deliberations, even though they possess the belief.

satisfies (2)—he fails, due to this free-floating belief, to *regard* Derek as his equal—and thus fails (1).⁷ For this reason, Connor and Derek fail to relate as equals. And since justice requires that people relate as equals, Connor commits an injustice.

Here is a problem with this line of reasoning that this paper is dedicated to spelling out. Although the two-part view suggests that Connor instantiates an injustice, it turns out that nothing in the stock of arguments found in the literature on relational egalitarianism supposed to flesh out what it means to relate as equals justifies saying that Connor instantiates an injustice *qua* failing to regard Derek as a moral equal.⁸ Or so we argue in Section II. Another way of stating the same point: the regard-requirement—i.e., (1)—of the two-part view appears unjustified. We consider in section III whether relational egalitarians can avoid this result by dismissing the akratic racist as a relevant test case.

A natural question then arises: despite this shortcoming, can we—on behalf of relational egalitarians—nevertheless come up with an argument which enables us to justify why Connor instantiates an injustice and thereby vindicate the (regard-part of the) two-part view? Although we have a less decisive answer to this question, we argue in Section IV that the prospects here are not excellent, and that any forthcoming solution will be deeply controversial. In any case, relational egalitarians who are attracted to the two-part view face a challenge.

⁷ Or so we shall assume. Connor’s behaviour to walk past Derek on the street does not strike us as objectionable.

⁸ We write “instantiate an injustice”, but an anonymous reviewer asks if it follows from this that we should judge that Connor is blameworthy. Not necessarily. Suppose that Connor had the belief that black people are morally inferior because he was taught so in public institutions. In that case, it is clearly regrettable that Connor has this belief, but he may not be blameworthy, and it may not be fitting to condemn him. This points to the wider question of what relational egalitarians who support the two-part view should say about the causes of ‘bad’ beliefs. Perhaps the public institution who fosters the belief that black people are inferior to white people should be condemned. In fostering this belief, they treat black people as inferiors. But this also raises the question: does the wrongness turn on whether the public institution also communicates the view that white people nevertheless ought to treat black people as equals? Presumably, if one supports the two-part view, this is better in the sense that they encourage white people to at least satisfy the treatment component (as opposed to violating both the regard and the treatment components). We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

We conclude by pointing to three ways in which relational egalitarians could modify their theory to deal with our challenge. They could: i) adopt a treat-only view of relating as equals; ii) come up with a novel argument which justifies the regard-requirement; or iii) weaken their commitment to the regard-requirement.

Section II – Relating as Equals and Free-floating Beliefs

We will start by discussing several arguments proposed by relational egalitarians on what it takes to relate as equals and why we should relate as equals. We will argue that none of the arguments entail that ‘free-floating beliefs’, such as the belief entertained by Connor, are objectionable. In other words, we will argue that relational egalitarians have failed to establish that justice demands that we *regard* other people as our equals. But before we do so, a bit of background on relational egalitarianism may be helpful.

Relational egalitarians sometimes present their view in contrast to distributive theories of justice.^{9,10} According to relational egalitarians, distributive theories of justice fail to focus on that which ultimately matters from the point of view of justice. What ultimately matters, justice-wise, is not that people have the same amount of resources (or welfare, opportunity for welfare or equal access to advantage, for that matter). After all, racism may be prevalent in a society in which everyone has the same amount of resources. Instead, justice ultimately requires that people stand in relations of equality to each other. And to stand in such relations—as explained in the introduction—requires that people regard and treat each other as equals. We will expand on this basic understanding of relational

⁹ E.g., Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?”; Scheffler, “What is Egalitarianism?”.

¹⁰ That the relational egalitarian project may be understood “negatively” in this sense should be distinguished from another sense in which relational egalitarianism may be understood as a “negative project”, namely in the sense that it finds it easier to describe what relational equality is not versus what it is (see, e.g., Wolff, “Social Equality and Social Inequality”). We thank an anonymous reviewer for this clarification.

egalitarianism in what follows as we investigate whether relational egalitarians can explain what is objectionable about the Akratic Racist.

II.A – Scheffler’s Egalitarian Deliberative Constraint

Let us start with Scheffler’s egalitarian deliberative constraint. Taking as his starting point close, interpersonal relationships—such as a marriage—Scheffler argues that 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 interests¹¹ 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.”¹²

This appears to be a plausible, necessary requirement of what it takes to relate as equals. Consider a marriage in which the husband’s interests always trump his wife’s interests in collective matters. We would clearly not say that this is a relationship among equals. Indeed, the husband seems to stand as a superior in relation to his wife. Can the EDC explain why free-floating beliefs are objectionable?

We may initially believe that it can. The EDC specifies that for me to relate as an equal to you, I must have a standing disposition to treat your strong interests as being as important as my strong

¹¹ Scheffler understands interests to include needs, values and preferences (Scheffler, “The Practice of Equality,” 26).

¹² Scheffler, “The Practice of Equality,” 25. See also Cohen, *Finding oneself in the other*, 196; Viehoff, “Power and Equality,” 353.

interests. But if I regard you as inferior to me, it seems that I do not have a standing disposition to treat your strong interests in accordance with this. In many cases, this would also be true. For many people, how they (are disposed to) treat others is determined in large part by how they regard others. But the relationship is contingent. Merely because, in many actual instances, attitudes and outward behavior align, it does not follow that they are necessarily so aligned. And this is exactly the case with the akratic racist, Connor. That he regards some people as inferior does not manifest itself in how he acts nor in his deliberations about how to act.¹³ So it is not the case that Connor has a standing disposition to treat the strong interests of black people as less important than the strong interests of white people. When interacting with black people, Connor, because he is akratic, treats their strong interests as playing just as significant a role as his in their collective affairs. This is to say, although Connor regards black people as inferior to white people, he does not violate the EDC. The EDC cannot explain why free-floating beliefs are objectionable. Notice that this explanatory shortcoming does not detract from the plausibility of Scheffler’s deliberative constraint as a component of relational egalitarianism. Dispositions to treat others as equals are clearly something that relational egalitarians may find valuable. One reason for this is that egalitarian dispositions are often conducive to people in fact treating one another as equals. Our claim is the narrower one that this line of reasoning does not help us diagnose why Connor instantiates an injustice.

II.B – Deontic Relational Egalitarianism

According to Lippert-Rasmussen, the most plausible reason for why we must relate as equals is that, “as a matter of fact, we are one another’s moral equals and in relating as equals we honour that fact.”¹⁴

¹³ Cp. “One might think that to regard someone as an equal is to be disposed to treat her as an equal. But that isn’t so. I can say, ‘I regard him as an equal, but I’m too selfish (or biased) to treat him as one’” (Cohen, *Finding oneself in the other*, 197).

¹⁴ Lippert Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 170. He says (171) that Anderson (“What is the Point of Equality?”, 313) and Schemmel (“Distributive and Relational Equality,” 366) support this argument—or at least an argument along those lines—for why we must relate as equals.

If X treats Y in a racist manner, X treats Y as his moral inferior, thereby dishonoring the fact that Y is his moral equal. Lippert-Rasmussen ultimately grounds the requirement that people must relate as equals in fairness.¹⁵ So, for our purposes, the question is whether it is unfair that Connor, the akratic racist, regards black people as inferior (given that it does not affect how he treats, nor how he deliberates about how to treat, black people).

Why would it be unfair for Connor to have such free-floating beliefs? It cannot be because he thereby treats black people as inferior since, after all, his belief does not in any way affect how he treats them. Neither can it be because he is disposed to treat black people as inferior since, once again, his belief does not affect his dispositions—they are independent. The problem with appealing to fairness is that, in a sense, it is assuming what needs to be proven. Something may be unfair in either an absolute or a comparative sense.¹⁶ But in either of these senses, that something can only be judged unfair if it has, prior to that, been established that persons have a claim to that something in the first place. But that is exactly what we are discussing. So relational egalitarians cannot merely say that it is unfair that Connor has this free-floating belief about black people; they must also provide an argument for *why* it is unfair. And it is hard to see what that argument might be, given that it cannot appeal to Connor's deliberation or treatment.

Perhaps Lippert-Rasmussen's argument is pointing us in the right direction in emphasizing that when Connor regards black people as inferior, he fails to live in accordance with the fact that they are moral equals. But then that does not have to do with fairness. It simply has to do with the fact that people should live in truth, and Connor fails to live in truth. Perhaps relational egalitarians may appeal to this argument when trying to explain why free-floating beliefs are objectionable.

¹⁵ Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 172.

¹⁶ Broome, "Fairness," 94-95; Estlund, *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*, 69.

II.C – Telic Relational Egalitarianism

In fact, some relational egalitarians have hinted at an argument along those lines for why it is bad that people relate as unequals. Scheffler argues that “inegalitarian societies [which are inegalitarian in the sense that relationships are inegalitarian] compromise human flourishing; they limit personal freedom, corrupt human relationships, undermine self-respect and inhibit truthful living.”¹⁷ When Scheffler says that inegalitarian relationships inhibit truthful living, it seems that he may have in mind the argument hinted at above. Even if he does not, we may create an argument which is Schefflerian in spirit.¹⁸ Such an argument may be formalized as follows:

P1: Justice requires that people live in truth.

P2: If people are moral equals, they live in truth only if they relate as equals.

P3: People are moral equals.

C: Justice requires that people relate as equals.

This argument can explain why Connor’s free-floating belief is objectionable. When Connor regards black people as morally inferior, he fails to relate to black people as his equals, and since they are his equals, he fails to live in truth. But justice requires that he lives in truth. So Connor’s free-floating belief is objectionable according to this relational egalitarian argument.

The problem with this argument is that P1 seems false. It may be good that people live in truth but from this it does not follow that justice requires that people live in truth. It may be good that people exercise every day, but it is clearly not a requirement of justice that people exercise every day. Similarly, many people have insufficient knowledge and therefore false beliefs about complicated

¹⁷ Scheffler, “Choice, circumstance, and the value of equality,” 19.

¹⁸ For our purposes, it is not important whether Scheffler supports this argument. What is important is whether this argument, as laid out, can explain why free-floating beliefs are objectionable.

matters—e.g., nuclear physics—and even though it may be good for people to not have false beliefs about nuclear physics, it is clearly not a justice requirement that people not have false beliefs about nuclear physics. Thus, an underlying assumption of the argument seems to be that because it is good to live in truth, justice requires that we live in truth. But that inference is not valid. This means that we would need an additional argument for why justice requires that people live in truth. And this raises a second problem: what could that argument be? Relational egalitarians have surely not come up with such an argument—and it is hard to imagine what that argument might be. Thus, it seems that the living in truth argument is not a promising argument for why free-floating beliefs are unjust.

One may object that we can present a stronger version of the living in truth argument which may offer better support for objecting to the free-floating belief. We could, for instance, weaken P1 such that it says: Justice requires that people live in truth *when it comes to truths that have relevance to justice*. We will refer to this as P1*. In support of P1*, suppose that Connor must believe that black people are inferior to white people to justify his privilege in society and justify the disadvantages that black people experience.¹⁹ If Connor believed otherwise, he would likely experience cognitive dissonance and be motivated to change his behavior (or beliefs). In this case, living in truth (where those truths have relevance to justice) is necessary for Connor to do his duty of justice.²⁰

We have the following two responses.²¹ First, this objection assumes that there is a tight connection between beliefs and actions because individuals will find it uncomfortable if their beliefs and actions do not align and will therefore push for consistency. In that sense, this objection assumes that regard and treatment will not come apart in practice. But as we noted in the beginning, this move is not viable to a relational egalitarian who supports the two-part view since that view already assumes that beliefs and treatment can be separated in some sense. Also, there are clearly examples where

¹⁹ E.g., Mills, “White Ignorance”.

²⁰ We thank an anonymous reviewer for developing and raising this objection.

²¹ But some of what we say in the next section in response to a central objection to the case of the akratic racist may also apply here.

beliefs in moral inferiority and egalitarian treatment stably co-occur. As mentioned earlier, a strategic racist is one who regards black people as morally inferior but treats them as equals to avoid criticism by others. For the strategic racist, there is not a tight connection between his belief that black people are inferior and his treatment of black people as equals precisely because he is strategic: he does not want to show his belief to others for fear of social sanctions.²² In that case, justice, treatment-wise, may be achieved even if one has the belief that some are inferior; living in truth is not necessary for him to do his duty of justice (unless we assume that regard is also a requirement of justice, but that is the question we are trying to settle). Second, even if the argument could work, it does not clearly establish what is constitutive for equal relations in the first place (whether that is regard, treatment, some combination, or something else). Instead, it might be said to speak to the question of what we should do to realize an egalitarian society, assuming we already know what an egalitarian society is (i.e., egalitarian beliefs may be strongly conducive to realizing the ideal of relating as equals, and for this reason we should instill egalitarian beliefs in people). But we are interested in the question of what it should mean for a relation to be equal on relational egalitarianism in the first place.

Relational egalitarians have also pointed to other reasons for why inegalitarian relationships are bad (and egalitarian relationships are good). Indeed, Scheffler points to some of them: that inegalitarian relations limit personal freedom, corrupt human relationships and undermine self-respect.²³

²² The more general point here is, of course, that we cannot pair any specific belief (such as a belief in the moral inferiority of black people) with a specific disposition or action since dispositions and acts tend to be complex functions of one's entire set of beliefs and desires.

²³ See also Scanlon, *The Difficulty of Tolerance: Essays in Political Philosophy*, 204, 212. Relational egalitarians point to a couple of additional reasons: that inegalitarian relationships are bad because they lead to less protection of the inferior's interests than an egalitarian relationship would (Anderson, "Expanding the Egalitarian Toolbox: Equality and Bureaucracy," 145-146); that inegalitarian relationships are bad because they lead to feelings of superiority in the superior (Anderson, "Equality," 50; Fourie, "What is Social Equality? An Analysis of Status Equality as a Strongly Egalitarian Ideal," 119-121; Scheffler, "Choice, circumstance, and the value of equality," 19); that inegalitarian relationships lead to servility and deferential behavior (O'Neill, "What Should Egalitarians Believe?," 126; cp. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, 87). The arguments we provide in the text also explain why these reasons cannot explain why free-floating beliefs are objectionable. A final additional reason that some relational egalitarians point to is the impersonal badness of unequal relations (most notably O'Neill, "What Should Egalitarians Believe?"). There are several problems with this suggestion for the purposes of explaining the akratic racist. First, why is the case of the akratic racist impersonally bad? That requires a further argument. Second, building a theory of justice upon impersonal badness provides a thin foundation—and one with which many will disagree. Third, relational egalitarians usually argue that it speaks

Clearly, the mere fact that Connor has this free-floating belief does not limit anyone's personal freedom. After all, this belief is never manifested in how he acts. Neither does Connor's belief corrupt human relationships.²⁴ Connor treats black people as he would have treated them if he had the belief that they are equal to him. It is hard to see how that could corrupt human relationships. And, finally, it does not undermine the self-respect of black people since black people will never find out that he regards them as inferior (they cannot infer from how he treats them that he regards them as inferior since his behavior is not different from how it would have been had he regarded them as equal). Thus, the reasons proposed by relational egalitarians as to why inegalitarian relationships are bad (and egalitarian relationships are good) cannot explain why free-floating beliefs are unjust.

II.D – Ross and the Level Playing Field

A new, interesting relational egalitarian argument has been proposed by Ross in the context of explaining why demographic profiling is undesirable.²⁵ According to Ross, relational equality requires “a level playing field with respect to earning the esteem of your fellow citizens.”²⁶ Securing a level playing field requires that citizens have particular attitudes, particularly a “default attitude of indifference” as to whether a person possesses certain characteristics that are worthy of high (or low) esteem. Among these characteristics are intelligence, virtue and vice. We must not think of a person as deserving more or less esteem than somebody else until the person has distinguished themselves in some way.²⁷ Indifference must be the default. These cognitive components are important, Ross argues, because they facilitate the autonomy of citizens: “it enables them to self-author how they are

in favor of their theory of justice that it is line with the concerns of real-life egalitarians (e.g., Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?”; Schemmel, *Justice and Egalitarian Relations*. For discussion of this, see Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 174-177). But clearly impersonal badness is not the (primary) concern of real-life egalitarians.

²⁴ One may object here that we seem to assume that relationships are all about treatment. But some may say that what we believe about each other is constitutive of our relationships. We consider this view below.

²⁵ Ross, “Profiling, Neutrality, and Social Equality”.

²⁶ Ross, “Profiling, Neutrality, and Social Equality,” 8.

²⁷ Ross, “Profiling, Neutrality, and Social Equality,” 9.

received by their fellow citizens, rather than to have the reception of their behavior coloured by prior assumptions.”²⁸ In this way, Ross provides a convincing argument for why demographic profiling is objectionable. In cases of demographic profiling, the profiler does not take indifference as the default, and he thereby hinders that the profilee can be autonomous in the sense of self-authoring how she is received by her co-citizens. May this argument also explain why Connor’s free-floating belief is objectionable?

We may think that it does. Connor does not provide a level playing field between black people and white people. Since he regards black people as inferiors, it takes more for a black person to earn Connor’s esteem than in the case of a white person. And in that sense, Connor grants the black person worse opportunities to be a self-author than he grants to a white person. But if we look closer at Connor’s case, we see that this is in fact not true. Connor’s belief that blacks are inferior to whites does not manifest itself in how he acts, let alone in his deliberations about how to act. Thus, when Connor encounters black people on the street, he deliberates and acts *as if* he is indifferent (even though he is not indifferent). He deliberates and acts as if there is a level playing field between blacks and whites. When they meet Connor on the street, black people have the same opportunity to self-author as white people do. A black person cannot convincingly say to Connor, “you gave me worse opportunities for earning your esteem than you gave to the white guy over there!” Another way of illustrating this is by contrasting Connor to another person, Erika, who does *not* regard black people as inferior. When encountering black people on the street, there is no difference in how Connor and Erika deliberate and act. So if Erika does not violate the requirement of providing a level playing field, then neither does Connor.²⁹

²⁸ Ross, “Profiling, Neutrality, and Social Equality,” 9.

²⁹ One may object that there should also be a level playing field in Connor’s mind but there is not since he regards black people as inferior. Without a further argument for why this must be the case even when the belief is not materialized in any sense in Connor’s interactions with black people, this objection simply begs the question.

Thus, Ross' argument cannot explain why free-floating beliefs are objectionable. Ross might be happy with that. After all, many people do not have free-floating beliefs in the way that Connor does. So his argument can explain why most, if not all, actual cases of demographic profiling are wrong. But that is not what we are after in this paper. We are exploring whether the arguments proposed by relational egalitarians for why we should relate as equals can explain why free-floating beliefs are objectionable—and ultimately whether relational egalitarian justice requires that we regard each other as equals. Thus, we must continue our investigation.

II.E – Schemmel's Expressivist Argument

Finally, we turn to Schemmel's expressivist relational egalitarian argument.³⁰ Although Schemmel is an institutionalist relational egalitarian—in the sense that the scope of relational egalitarian justice is limited to how the state treats its citizens—his argument can be extended to cover relations between citizens. And since his argument is interesting and original—and highly important in the literature on relational egalitarianism—it is worth investigating whether Schemmel's argument, once extended, can explain why free-floating beliefs are objectionable on relational egalitarianism.

In putting forth his argument, Schemmel starts from an example which he borrows from Pogge. We are to imagine five different scenarios in which a group of innocent persons is deprived of an important vitamin due to the arrangement of social institutions. The scenarios are as follows:

- 1) "The shortfall is *officially mandated*, paradigmatically by the law
- 2) The shortfall results from *legally authorized* conduct of private subjects
- 3) Social institutions *foreseeably and avoidably engender* (but do not specifically require or authorize) the shortfall through the conduct they stimulate

³⁰ Schemmel, "Distributive and relational equality"; See also Schemmel, *Justice and Egalitarian Relations*, ch. 2.

- 4) The shortfall arises from private conduct that is *legally prohibited but barely deterred*
- 5) The shortfall arises from social institutions *avoidably leaving unmitigated the effects of a natural defect.*³¹

In the five scenarios, the vitamin deficiency and the number of deprived people is exactly the same. This means that if we find the five scenarios unequally unjust, we cannot appeal to the distributions to explain why that is the case. Schemmel uses this to argue that “the attitudes of social and political institutions towards people expressed in the way such institutions treat them are relevant to justice”.³² Whereas what is expressed in 1), Schemmel argues, is outright hostility towards the deprived group because the state aims to bring about the deprivation, 5) expresses neglect in that the state fails to offer treatment of the genetic defect.³³ In the five scenarios, different judgments of moral worth are thus expressed. Whereas the people in all of the scenarios are treated unjustly, 1) expresses that the moral worth of the disadvantaged is much lower than the moral worth of the people in 5). This is why 1) is more unjust than 5). So what state (in)actions express is important to relational egalitarian justice according to Schemmel. We can extend Schemmel’s argument by claiming that what is expressed in how people treat each other—when this has nothing to do with the state—also matters to relational egalitarian justice. To answer whether this extended version of the argument may explain why free-floating beliefs are objectionable on relational egalitarianism, we must know how we determine what an act expresses.

According to Schemmel, “the meaning an action has is not just a matter of what the agent in question meant to express with her action, but also of how those who are subject to the action may reasonably understand it.”³⁴ Thus, we must answer two questions to determine what an act expresses:

³¹ Schemmel, “Distributive and relational equality,” 127.

³² Schemmel, “Distributive and relational equality,” 133.

³³ Schemmel, “Distributive and relational equality,” 134.

³⁴ Schemmel, “Distributive and relational equality,” 138.

(i) why did the person act as they did, i.e., what was their motivation?; and (ii) how was the action understood by those affected? Let us return to our akratic racist, Connor. Suppose he meets a black person on the street and just walks past him without saying hi. Since the fact that Connor regards black people as inferior never enters his deliberation, the reason why he did not say hi is not because he believes the black person is of inferior moral worth. Instead, it may be because Connor believes that the norms in the given society proscribe saying hi to people you do not know when you meet them on the streets; or it may be because Connor was immersed in his own thoughts and simply forgot to say hi. How may Connor's (in)action be understood by the black person? The black person may find it appropriate given that the norms in society proscribe saying hi to people you do not know when you meet them on the streets; or the black person may feel insulted by the fact that Connor did not say hi. But if that is the case, the same would happen in case another person, Rosa, who does not regard black people as inferior, did not say hi when she met the black person on the street. In other words, there is no relevant difference between Connor and Rosa in this case. But then the problem cannot be Connor's attitude. Thus, either Connor's inaction does not express anything inappropriate to the black person or it does. If the former, there is no problem from the point of view of relational egalitarianism. If the latter, the problem is that the analysis becomes overinclusive—the (in)action would also express something inappropriate if the person did not have Connor's belief. So Connor's belief cannot be the problem. The upshot is that Schemmel's expressivist argument, once properly extended, cannot explain why free-floating beliefs are objectionable on relational egalitarianism.

Section III – An objection to the akratic racist

Before turning to discuss, in the next section, whether relational egalitarians can vindicate the regard requirement by looking outside debates on relational egalitarianism, we want to consider an objection to our example of the akratic racist Connor. The objection may be put forward as a dilemma: either

the Connor case describes only a moment in time, in which case it fails to be a relevant relational inequality, or the Connor case extends over a longer period of time, in which case the example becomes unbelievable. With regard to the first horn, suppose that Connor meeting Derek on the street and regarding him as an unequal but treating him as an equal is meant to describe only this moment in time: that at this particular moment, there is a relational inequality between Connor and Derek. But if it is just a relational inequality at this particular moment in time, relational egalitarians may simply say that it is not an inequality that their theory is meant to capture: they do not care about time-slice relational inequalities. With regard to the second horn, suppose that Connor continues to be confused about how to make his beliefs about inferiority match his behavior and ends up always treating black people as equals. If so, the example becomes unbelievable. Surely someone who genuinely believed that black people were inferior would be *motivated* to make their behavior match their beliefs, even if for some period of time the beliefs and behavior did not.³⁵

We will start by addressing the first horn. Relational egalitarians in fact do, and should, care about time-slice relational inequalities. We may distinguish two conceptions of relational egalitarianism:

Whole lives relational egalitarianism: Justice requires that, from the perspective of their lives as a whole, people relate socially to one another as equals.

³⁵ We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection. The reviewer further points out that the notion of motivation—that a person would be motivated to make their behavior match their beliefs—could be one of the important ways in which “regarding as equals” could have value independently from “treating as equals.” It will create a disposition in akratic racists that the relational egalitarian could say is problematic even if it does not yet affect treatment. This points to another way of understanding the regard component: that regarding someone as X is motivation (a disposition) to treat them as such. Note, first, that our arguments in this paper actually leave the disposition view untouched as we also pointed out in our discussion of Scheffler’s deliberative constraint. Second, the following problem may arise for relational egalitarians if they adopt this view. As we mentioned earlier, a *strategic* racist is one who regards black people as morally inferior but treats them as equals to avoid criticism by others. For the strategic racist, his dispositions come apart from his beliefs: he is disposed to treat black people as equals even though he believes them to be inferior. This means that the proposed suggestion cannot capture the strategic racist as unjust. But we suspect that relational egalitarians are not satisfied, justice-wise, with a society in which some people are strategic racists and treat other people as equals only because they want to look good in the eyes of others.

Time-relative relational egalitarianism: Justice requires that, at any given moment, people relate socially to one another as equals.³⁶

These views differ. This can be illustrated through *changing places* cases: “Imagine a feudal society with two castes that swap position every 20 years. The first caste dominates the second for 20 years, then the second dominates the first for the subsequent 20 years, and so on. At the end of their lives, the two castes will have exerted equal amounts of control over each other.”³⁷ According to whole lives relational egalitarianism, the relations in the feudal society are not unjust since over their lives as a whole, people relate as equals. This is not the case according to time-relative relational egalitarianism since at no time slice does the two castes relate as equals. Bidadanure argues that relational egalitarians should accept (at least) the time-relative view. “What is problematic in our examples [including the feudal case],” Bidadanure argues, “is precisely that these societies may not be communities of relational equals *at any point*. Phases of domination, marginalization, or segregation cannot be thought to cancel out diachronically.”³⁸ In other words, relational egalitarians should object to time-slice relational inequalities precisely because such inequalities cannot be compensated at a later point in time. Thus, that Connor regards Derek as a moral inferior because he is black at a given time-slice is, and should be, objectionable according to relational egalitarians. This means that the first horn of the dilemma can be escaped; and this is sufficient to escape the dilemma raised against the

³⁶ See Lippert-Rasmussen, “Is it unjust that elderly people suffer from poorer health than young people? Distributive and relational egalitarianism on age-based health inequalities,” 154.

³⁷ Bidadanure, ““Making sense of age-group justice,” 241. Perhaps it is possible to specify relational inequalities that span such a short amount of time that they should be deemed morally insignificant (say, inequalities that exist for mere seconds). But even if so, it is hard to imagine that cases such as the akratic racist would *necessarily* fall below this threshold.

³⁸ Bidadanure, ““Making sense of age-group justice,” 246.

case of the akratic racist Connor. However, to not solely rely on this response, we would like to show that we can escape the second horn as well.

The second horn, remember, says that if the Connor case is considered over time, it becomes unrealistic because surely someone who genuinely believed that black people were inferior would be *motivated* to make their behavior match their beliefs. We have three responses. First, we agree that it is probably psychologically unlikely for many to behave as Connor. But there might be reasons why Connor does not make his behavior match his beliefs. Perhaps he simply does not realize that he is inconsistent in this way. And we take it that it is not uncommon at all for people to be inconsistent in the sense that their behavior does not match their beliefs, not even over time. Think, for instance, of the vast literature on cognitive biases.³⁹ Second, consider a variant of the Connor case in which Connor simply suspends judgment on the question of whether black people are equal to white people but decides to act cautiously in light of his uncertainty and therefore treat black people as equals even though he has not settled the question for himself. Such suspension seems to be possible over time. Importantly, Connor the suspender also fails to regard black people as equal. Third, the case of Connor the akratic racist is chosen for methodological reasons: because we want to separate the regard component from the treat component. This is necessary to investigate which role, if any, the regard component plays in relational egalitarianism. For this reason, we need a case that is somewhat psychologically unrealistic. If it was a typical psychological case in which beliefs and behavior were aligned, we might conflate our judgment of the one with the judgment of the other. Thus, for our purposes in this paper, it is not a problem—indeed, quite the contrary—that Connor the akratic racist is not typical, psychologically speaking.

³⁹ See e.g., Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.

Section IV - Beyond relational egalitarian resources

We have argued that nothing in the stock of currently available arguments given by relational egalitarians provide us with the resources to explain why it is unjust that the akratic racist fails to live up to the requirement that we regard relevant others as equals. This is problematic since it leaves one part of the two-part view insufficiently motivated. And the result is even worse if one has the pre-theoretical intuition that we *should* condemn the akratic racist on grounds of justice since this leaves us with a misfit between what is suggested by our best available theoretical arguments and our deeply held convictions.

Some may say at this point: perhaps the arguments we need will be forthcoming or come from outside the literature on relational egalitarianism. In this section, we entertain the latter possibility by exploring whether resources from the literature on the topic of what is now commonly referred to as *the doxastic wronging thesis* can vindicate the regard-requirement of the two-part view.

Recently, some have been moved by the thought that morality places demands on what we may believe is the case about others. According to the doxastic wronging thesis that captures this idea, it is possible to morally wrong someone merely in virtue of the contents of one's beliefs.⁴⁰

We should thus investigate if some of the arguments supposed to vindicate the doxastic wronging thesis can be used to explain why Connor affronts relational egalitarian justice by failing to regard Derek as a moral equal. A point is worth bearing in mind, however. The literature on the doxastic wronging thesis is still young and, for all we know, the best possible version and defense of the thesis may not yet have been put forward. Thus, some of what we suggest here may be subject to revision as the theory develops in the future. In any case, however, we are not directly interested in whether doxastic wronging exists but rather whether the arguments supposed to show why it is true can be

⁴⁰ See e.g., Basu, "What we epistemically owe to each other,"; "Radical Moral Encroachment: The Moral Stakes of Racist Beliefs"; Basu, "A Tale of Two Doctrines: Moral Encroachment and Doxastic Wronging"; Bolinger, "Varieties of Moral Encroachment"; Basu and Schroeder, "Doxastic Wronging"; Schroeder, "When Beliefs Wrong."

used to show that Connor instantiates a relational egalitarian injustice. Even if doxastic wrongings are possible, this does not by itself tell us if and how relational egalitarians should figure in this fact in their theorizing about the requirements of justice.^{41, 42}

Consider then how Basu, arguably the most prominent proponent of the doxastic wronging thesis, explains why doxastic wrongs are possible:

”We are, each of us, in virtue of being social beings, vulnerable, and we depend upon others for our self-esteem and self-respect. Respect and esteem, however, are not mere matters of how we’re treated in word or deed, *but also a matter of how we’re treated in thought*. The implication of this (quite minimal) Kantian and Strawsonian picture is that people should figure in both our theoretical and practical reasoning in a way that is different from objects. We care how we feature in the thoughts of other people and we want to be regarded in their thoughts in *the right way*; that is, *doxastic wrongs are failures to regard people in the right way* [...] The point I wish to emphasize here is that we have *both* a moral and a doxastic responsibility of holding one another. It matters how we hold others in our thought. The beliefs we have, after all, are constitutive of our relationships.”⁴³

⁴¹ As we shall suggest below, relational egalitarians may have reason to hope that the doxastic wronging thesis *cannot* be vindicated. The reason for this is that if there exists a substantive part of morality that bears on justice, and this part of morality lies outside the scope of what could be captured by an account of justice as “relating as equals”, then this may provide one reason to reject the relational account of justice.

⁴² Here we set aside the thesis known as moral encroachment which is sometimes used to motivate the doxastic wronging thesis. The reason for this is that, even if moral encroachment is true, we need an explanation of why encroachment-related failures of believing based on insufficient evidence is, say, a moral wrong or an injustice in the sense that should concern relational egalitarians. Moreover, the encroachment thesis is typically motivated by way of i) the stakes from acting on a false belief; or ii) the stakes of forming a morally problematic belief. But risk of subsequent action is ruled out for the akratic racist, and the second view presupposes an independent account of what makes some beliefs morally problematic.

⁴³ Basu, “A Tale of Two Doctrines: Moral Encroachment and Doxastic Wronging,” 110.

Another proponent of the doxastic wronging thesis, Schroeder, explains the possibility of such wrongs as follows:

“This leads me to think that in order to fully capture the ways in which beliefs can wrong, there must be some moral costs that beliefs carry in and of themselves, independently of their consequences or risked consequences. And this would be true, if our interpersonal relationships are in part constituted by our beliefs about one another. Insofar as our beliefs help to constitute our relationships, the effects of our beliefs on our relationships are not mediated by the effects of our beliefs on our actions or other behaviors. But it is in fact *plausible* that our interpersonal relationships are in part so constituted. It is plausible that the marriage is directly damaged when the jealous wife suspects her innocent husband of cheating, and if the daughter going into engineering feels betrayed by her father, upon learning of his belief, I would be hard pressed to tell her that she is wrong.”⁴⁴

Finally, Marušić and White motivate the possibility of doxastic wrongings:

”Doxastic wronging occurs when someone, through her beliefs and other doxastic responses (drawing conclusions, withholding judgment, etc.), falls short of another person’s legitimate expectation to be regarded in certain ways—in particular, to figure in the other’s reasoning in certain ways.”⁴⁵

We shall now discuss a representative sample of the thoughts invoked in these quotes.

⁴⁴ Schroeder, “When Beliefs Wrong,” 121.

⁴⁵ Marušić and White, “How Can Beliefs Wrong?—A Strawsonian Epistemology,” 110.

First, both Basu and Marušić and White seem to suggest that morality requires that we *figure in others' reasoning in certain ways*. It may not be wholly clear what they have in mind here, but one possibility is that they mean that beliefs typically come with a set of functional correlates, for instance, being disposed to rely on them in further reasoning, and that a belief may be problematic because committing to its truth thereby shoves such (objectionable) dispositions into subsequent reasoning. While this may be true, it does not help us in the present context. The reason is that Connor is committed to a belief that, deviant as he may be, plays no role in his deliberation due to akrasia. So even if Basu and others are right about the existence of a morality-derived reasoning-requirement, the thought cuts no ice against Connor.⁴⁶ In response one may say that *if* Connor has the belief that Derek is morally inferior, then this is a symptom of the fact that Connor previously deliberated in an objectionable way, since only objectionable deliberation could bring about a belief with this content. In this view, while the belief itself is not the problem, the belief is direct evidence that problematic reasoning took place. In response to this we are not persuaded that one can necessarily infer anything from a given belief about the deliberation that led to its formation. Perhaps Connor engaged seriously with philosophical argument beforehand and found the most compelling arguments for basic moral equality lacking. So, we think this move is unpersuasive. In sum, the point about reasoning should not obviously lead relational egalitarians to commit to a non-derivative concern for regard in the form of beliefs about others' moral worth.

Another argument figuring in both Schroeder's and Basu's views seems to be the claim that beliefs are *partially constitutive of interpersonal relationships*. This is an intriguing claim, but as we

⁴⁶ Compare Basu and Schroeder, "Doxastic Wronging," 183 for the thought that it is how beliefs dispose for reasoning or perception that marks out the wrong-making feature: "The racist is paradigmatically disposed to be influenced by her perceptions of race in the beliefs that she forms about another person – more easily persuaded that someone is dangerous, for example, if they are perceived as black. Racist beliefs are naturally taken not just to be morally problematic, but specifically to wrong their subjects."

shall show below interestingly problematic for several reasons given the dialectical context that concerns us.

On Schroeder's view, for instance, the thesis of doxastic wrongdoing can be motivated by intuitively problematic beliefs found in friendships and other intimate relations.⁴⁷ However, as Enoch has persuasively shown in his discussion of political paternalism, if we are interested in a kind of interpersonal relationship that reaches much beyond intimate relationships then we cannot obviously rely on this. He explains this in the context of Stroud's work on epistemic partiality in friendship:

"The friendship case is a case of partiality, as Stroud emphasizes (even in her title). It is grounded in the nature and value of a special, close, and non-universal relationship—that between you and specific others, others who are special to you. Whatever plausibility thoughts of the epistemic relevance of the moral norms have here it owes to these features of the friendship case. But these features are not shared by the case of political paternalism. There, the moral norms that are supposed to govern the belief (in the projected irrationality or akrasia of some others, say) are not partial, they are universal, and to call the relation between one and one's fellow citizens a close relationship would be a huge stretch (and a dangerous one too). Perhaps, in other words, there is some plausibility to the thought that 'Friendship requires epistemic irrationality' (Stroud 2006, p. 518). The thought that politics requires epistemic irrationality is almost beyond belief."⁴⁸

Although Enoch's focus is different from ours, his reasoning is applicable for our purposes. This is so because we, too, are interested in the content of an ideal that (we take it) is meant to apply between

⁴⁷ Schroeder, "When Beliefs wrong". See also Schroeder, *Reasons first*, ch. 9 and Stroud, "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship,".

⁴⁸ Enoch, "What's Wrong with Paternalism: Autonomy, Belief, and Action," 33. See also Enoch and Spectre, "The is no such thing as doxastic wrongdoing."

fellow citizens and not only within close relationships.⁴⁹ Thus, in the present context, Enoch enables us to appreciate that we cannot infer from the thought that there can be doxastic wrongs in close, interpersonal relationships that have several distinctive and typically morally salient features (such as shared history, partiality and so on) that there could be doxastic wrongs grounded in the thin relationships between co-citizens.⁵⁰ Since we can plausibly imagine that two people may be complete strangers to one another and yet plausibly have a duty to relate as moral equals when they interact—and since relational egalitarians in fact argue that this is the case—it is, if Enoch is correct, hard to see how relational egalitarians can vindicate the regard-requirement from such premises.^{51, 52}

Next, recall that some proponents of the doxastic wrongdoing thesis attempt to ground the thesis in the claim that beliefs (about others) are *partially constitutive of our relations to others*. If right, this certainly sounds like a kind of consideration that relational egalitarians should be receptive towards. Presumably, relational egalitarians should be concerned with moral wrongdoing that, specifically, occurs at sites that are constitutive of our social relationships. And if thoughts amount to one way of “treating others,” as Basu seems to maintain, it seems that we have all we need to justify the regard-requirement of the two-part view. On this proto-argument, it turns out, we “treat” others as morally inferior when we *regard* them as morally inferior.⁵³

In a sense, we cannot rule out that Basu is right here. Perhaps we should think of our thoughts as a way of “treating” other people in the same way as some relational egalitarians suggest that we

⁴⁹ Furthermore, we are interested in an ideal of relational justice that is meant to function as a *political* ideal, see, e.g., Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?”; Kolodny, “Rule Over None II: Social Equality and the Justification of Democracy”; Scheffler, “The Practice of Equality”; Viehoff, “Democratic Equality and Political Authority.”

⁵⁰ Compare Viehoff, “Power and Equality.”

⁵¹ See Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?”; Scheffler, “The Practice of Equality.”

⁵² Admittedly, some relational egalitarians have argued that we should look to relationships like friendship to distil what it means to relate as equals. However, not even these scholars would concede that equal relations in the sense relevant to relational egalitarianism should perfectly mirror the thick relationships of, say, friendship. Thus, even on such accounts the inference appears premature. See Chan, “Equality, Friendship, and Politics,” for discussion of this point.

⁵³ Interestingly, reliance on Basu’s reasoning here suggests that the two-part view should still be revised because, suitably interpreted, the best interpretation of the moral significance of ‘regarding others as equals’ identifies it as a form of *treatment*.

are “treating” others when we affect them causally: As Lippert-Rasmussen presents what he dubs the causal condition that is meant to hone in on what the “treatment”-requirement might amount to (notice that this is not a definition of what it means to treat others in the sense relevant for “treating as equals,” although it is clearly suggestive of what kinds of activities that should count as “treatment”): “X and Y treat each other as equals only if X and Y can affect their respective situations in a relevant way.”⁵⁴

What we can do instead is to show why this argument, *as it currently stands*, does not vindicate the regard-requirement of the two-part view. The first problem is that the argument begs the question in the context of vindicating the regard-requirement. Basu seems to suggest that we should infer the doxastic wronging thesis from the premise that thoughts constitute a part of interpersonal relationships (“It matters how we hold others in our thought. The beliefs we have, after all, are constitutive of our relationships”).⁵⁵ This way of reasoning may be perfectly fine for Basu’s purposes but notice that what we are after is a vindication of the claim that thoughts—or regard—is of relevance in specifying the ideal of “relating as equals.” Stated differently, the premise in Basu’s argument is the conclusion for which we are looking for a justification. So, this argument for the doxastic wronging thesis (which we, to reiterate, have no qualms with) is question-begging for the purposes of vindicating the

⁵⁴ Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 73. Relational egalitarians have not said much about what it means to *treat* others. But Kolodny may have a similar understanding in mind when he says (although, to be fair, he may simply refer to what it takes to *relate* in the first place): “Suppose that, in a state of nature, several people collaborate in producing some means. Then some of them run off with an unfair share of the fruits of their labors, never to encounter the others again. There is a disparity of means (snared rabbits, say) and a disparity that results from a failure of equal concern for people’s independent claims to them (given equal contributions, the rabbits should have been split equally). Nevertheless, because the thieves and their victims do not continue to live together, because the disparity is not, as it were, woven into the fabric of ongoing social relations, there is no structure of hierarchy or subordination between them” (Kolodny, “Rule Over None II: Social Equality and the Justification of Democracy,” 293). Because the thieves run away from the victims, and never see them again, they will lack the opportunity to treat each other as equals because they cannot affect each other’s respective situations. A similar understanding may be expressed by Anderson when she says: “To stand as an equal before others in discussion means that one is entitled to participate, that others recognize an obligation to listen respectfully and respond to one’s arguments, that no one need bow and scrape before others or represent themselves as inferior to others as a condition of having their claim heard” (Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?”, 313).

Of course, one could also take a narrower (or broader for that matter) view of what it means to *treat* others. Although this issue of what it means to treat others is important, we can set it aside since we are interested in the regard component (exemplified by the akratic racist case). We thank an anonymous reviewer for discussion on this.

⁵⁵ Basu, “A Tale of Two Doctrines: Moral Encroachment and Doxastic Wronging,” 110.

regard-requirement. One cannot justify the conclusion that thoughts—or regard—amount to a form of relating to others by claiming that thoughts—or regard—amount to a way of relating to others.

In response to this one may say that we ought to revise our notion of what it means to “relate to others” and accept the view that beliefs amount to a way of relating to others, since Basu’s remarks appear plausible. Perhaps, but notice now that relational egalitarians have independent reasons for not wanting to make that move since it may well *prove too much*.

How so? It is worth pointing out that relational egalitarians are not only committed to some account of what it means *to relate as equals*. They are also committed to a view of what it means to *relate as such* since it is only between people who are relevantly socially related that the ideal applies. The common understanding by relational egalitarians of what it means to be relevantly socially related is that “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.⁵⁶

But if Basu is right—that (some) beliefs amount to ways of treating others—then relational egalitarians cannot say this and simultaneously say—as they often want to, and do—that the ideal of justice as relating as equals is inapplicable between agents that cannot affect each other causally—after all, contemporary people may have beliefs about people in, say, the 11th century and such beliefs could presumably be wrongful on a vindication of the thesis of doxastic wronging. This combination of commitments could thus create an inconsistency for relational egalitarians. Our twinned argument, then, can be summarized as a dilemma of sorts. On the first horn, relational egalitarians accept the doxastic wronging-based vindication of the regard-requirement but must give up on their commitment to the usual scope of their ideal, e.g., that “relations” between contemporary people and Inca peasants

⁵⁶ Lippert-Rasmussen, *Relational Egalitarianism: Living as Equals*, 126, 128. See also Anderson, “What is the Point of Equality?”, 131.

do not fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism.⁵⁷ On the second horn, relational egalitarians abstain from invoking the doxastic wronging-line of defense, but, as we have shown above, then they cannot explain why the regard-requirement is a requirement of justice as relating as equals.

Let us summarize the findings of this section. We have discussed whether relational egalitarians can vindicate the regard-requirement of the two-part view, and thereby show that the akratic racist instantiates an injustice, by turning to the recent literature on the doxastic wronging thesis. While we cannot completely rule out that this strategy will work, we made three arguments against it. First, we suggested, with inspiration from Enoch, that the kind of relationships invoked to explain the possibility of doxastic wronging is disanalogous to many of the relationships that we should expect the ideal of relating as equals to (also) cover. So more must be said. Second, we pointed out that grounding the possibility of doxastic wronging in the claim that beliefs (about others) constitute interpersonal relationships is a question-begging move in the present context. Finally, we argued that even if the regard-requirement could be vindicated via the doxastic wronging thesis, it may prove too much and force relational egalitarians to substantially revise their view of what it means to be socially related.

Section V – Concluding remarks

We have argued that relational egalitarians face a challenge in terms of justifying the view that the ideal of justice as relating as equals requires that people regard each other as equals. We have shown that no currently available argument will do the job, and that it is hard to see which form an argument that would fit the bill should take. This, we take it, is bad news for anyone who subscribes to what we termed *the two-part view*.

How should relational egalitarians respond to this? One option would be to abandon the regard-requirement and endorse a narrower version of the two-part view according to which justice requires

⁵⁷ O’Neill, “What Should Egalitarians Believe?”.

solely that people treat each other as equals. We can call this strategy a *hard revision*. Alternatively, relational egalitarians may look for another argument that can vindicate the regard-requirement. Call this strategy *meeting the justificatory burden*. Although we cannot rule out this solution, we have noted significant skepticism about the prospects of this strategy. Finally, relational egalitarians could try to weaken the regard-requirement and thereby give it a form that is more easily justified but still captures some of the commitments that motivated the regard-requirement in the first place. Call this strategy a *soft revision*. We leave it to relational egalitarians to propose such revisions.

A further implication of our argument is that relational egalitarians lack the resources to condemn people like the akratic racist Connor that we have exploited as an expository device throughout the paper—at least on grounds of relational egalitarian justice. Is this a problem? We are not sure, and we can remain neutral here. If some relational egalitarians have the intuition that Connor affronts justice, there is even more push towards revising relational egalitarianism to meet this challenge. Others could say that Connor manifests a flawed moral character or that he is indeed engaged in wrongdoing (since wrongdoing does not look like a sufficient condition for a relational egalitarian injustice). But it may also be that some relational egalitarians, when confronted with Connor, see him as a mere illustration of a deeper point: that justice does not require, constitutively, that we regard each other as equals.

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