Can Relational Egalitarians Supply Both an Account of Justice and an Account of the Value of Democracy or Must They Choose Which?

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Abstract: Construed as a theory of justice, relational egalitarianism says that justice requires that people relate as equals. Construed as a theory of what makes democracy valuable, it says that democracy is a necessary, or constituent, part of the value of relating as equals. Typically, relational egalitarians want their theory to provide both an account of what justice requires and an account of what makes democracy valuable. We argue that relational egalitarians with this dual ambition face the justice-democracy dilemma: Understanding social relations in such a way that renders relational egalitarianism plausible as an answer to what makes democracy valuable comes at the price of understanding social relations in a way that makes it less plausible as a theory of justice, and *vice versa*. We also argue that there is no easy way out of the dilemma and that relational egalitarians, who want relational equality to provide both accounts mentioned, may simply have to set their ambitions lower on behalf of relational equality.

Keywords: boundary problem; democracy; justice; relational egalitarianism; social relations.

1. Introduction

Construed as a theory of justice, relational egalitarianism says that justice requires that people relate as equals (e.g., Anderson, 1999; Bidadanure, 2016; Fourie et. al., 2015; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018; Scheffler, 2015).[1] Construed as a theory of what makes democracy valuable, it says that democracy is a necessary, or constituent, part of the value of relating as equals (Anderson, 1999; Kolodny, 2014; Viehoff, 2014). These may be said to represent two strands in the existing literature on relational egalitarianism, with the first strand—such as Anderson (1999) and Scheffler (2003)—focusing on relational egalitarianism as a theory of justice, and the second strand—such as Kolodny (2014) and

[1] Or, at least, it requires that people do not relate as unequals. If all we care about is that no one relates as unequals, we would be satisfied with a situation in which there are no social relations at all, e.g., because all individuals live Robinson-Crusoe-style on different, isolated islands. If we also care about people relating as equals, this situation is not desirable. We set aside this distinction in the next sentence in the main text.

Viehoff (1999), but also Anderson (1999)—focusing on relational egalitarianism as a theory of democracy.[2] Typically, relational egalitarians do not explicitly distinguish between these two strands or ways of construing relational egalitarianism. One reason for this is that they assume that justice requires that people relate as equals and that democracy is valuable because it is a necessary, or constituent part, of relating as equals. However, construed in the latter way relational egalitarians could simply say that democracy is a necessary part of relating as equals and that relating as equals is valuable, albeit not a requirement of justice. There would then still be a reason to have democracy, only not a reason of justice.

In this article, we argue that relational egalitarians face a dilemma—henceforth the justice-democracy dilemma—if (NB: *if*) they want their theory to provide both an account of what justice requires and an account of what makes democracy valuable. The dilemma is that understanding social relations in a way that renders relational egalitarianism plausible as an answer to what makes democracy valuable comes at the price of understanding them in a way that makes it less plausible as a theory of justice, and *vice versa*.

To establish the existence of the justice-democracy dilemma, we start (Section 2) by discussing what it means to be socially related, since relational egalitarianism only applies to those who are socially related. In presenting two distinctions, which cut across each other, we identify four different accounts of what it means to be socially related. We then analyze what these accounts imply in terms of whether future people (Section 3a) or dead people (Section 3b) should be included in democratic decision-making. The motivation for this analysis reflects the assumption that the boundary problem in democratic theory—the problem of identifying those who should be included in democratic decision-making—must be solved through an appeal to the value of democracy (Lippert-Rasmussen and

[2] We thank an anonymous reviewer for this way of describing the literature on relational egalitarianism.

Bengtson, 2021; López-Guerra, 2005; Miller, 2009; Song, 2012). However, not all the four understandings of what it is to be socially related enables relational egalitarianism to provide a plausible solution to the boundary problem. Also, this analysis (Section 3c) brings to the fore the justice-democracy dilemma. Section 4 concludes by briefly addressing five suggestions about how relational egalitarians could respond to the justice-democracy-dilemma, that is, they could (i) restrict the scope of their theory to justice, while being silent on the value of democracy; (ii) restrict their theory to be solely a theory of what makes democracy valuable, while being silent on justice; (iii) propose an understanding of what it means to be socially related that is different from ours; (iv) bite the bullet, e.g., by accepting that rational egalitarianism does not condemn certain acts that are widely believed to be unjust or by accepting that dead people should be included in the demos; or (v) argue that relational egalitarianism is not one coherent theory but a disjunct of two different ideas of how social relations ought to be, where what it means to be socially related is judged differently on the two. Although there is no way out of the dilemma which does not come with significant costs for relational egalitarians, option (v) may be their least bad option. Whichever response relational egalitarians adopt to the justice-democracy dilemma, our article shows that they must be more explicit on what it means to be socially related.

Before we move on, we should say a bit about how we understand justice, both when it comes to how we are conceptualizing justice, and what we take justice to apply to.[3] Let us start with the former. As Peter Vallentyne (2014: 40) notes, "the term "justice" is, unfortunately, used to mean different things by different authors." He then goes on to distinguish several different meanings. Two of those views are particularly relevant for our purposes. On the first, justice is "understood to mean (something like) *moral permissibility of social institutions* … [On this view] the specific content of justice is determined by the objects assessed rather than by the set of moral concerns relevant for the

[3] We thank an anonymous reviewer for urging us to explain how we understand justice.

assessment" (p. 40). On the second view, "justice is interpersonal morality understood as *the duties that we morally owe each other* … What we owe others is what they can claim from us, and this is that to which they have a right against us" (p. 41). We will understand justice in this second sense, but our argument does not require this understanding. When relevant, we present arguments appealing to cases that bear on justice whether one accepts an institutional or interpersonal understanding thereof.[4] When it comes to the second issue—what we take justice to apply to—it is common to distinguish between an *institutionalist* and a *non-institutionalist* view. According to the former, justice only applies to the basic institutions of society (Rawls famously defended this view). According to the latter, justice applies both to the basic institutions of society and to individual acts (or, in relational egalitarian terms, to institutional-individual relations and inter-individual relations).[5] Relational egalitarians are divided over this issue.[6] Relational egalitarians such as Pogge (2004) and Schemmel (2012; 2021) are institutionalists. Other relational egalitarians—such as Anderson (1999), Kolodny (2014) and Scheffler (2015)—are non-institutionalists. Fortunately, for our purposes, we do not have to take sides in this debate. As with the previous distinction, our arguments below apply to both institutionalist and non-institutionalist versions of relational egalitarianism. When relevant, we present arguments appealing to cases that bear on justice whether one thinks that justice pertains to institutional-individual or to inter-individual relations.

2. Being socially related: Two distinctions

[4] We return to this issue in Section 4.
[5] There is also the anti-institutionalist view that relational egalitarianism only applies to inter-individual relations. Miller (1997) may be taken to support this view (Voigt, 2018: 441). We set this view aside, but our argument applies to such relational egalitarians as well.
[6] For a nice overview, see Voigt (2018: 441).

Relational egalitarianism focuses on social relations—people must relate as equals. Usually, they motivate their view by pointing to inegalitarian relationships that we find objectionable, for example, "the servant is subordinate to the lord of the manor, the slave subordinate to the master … the plebian is lower than the patrician, the untouchable lower than the Brahmin … the paradigms [these examples of inegalitarian relationships] provoke in us a sense of unease" (Kolodny, 2014: 292). The theory has gained traction in recent years and is now prominent both as an account of justice and as an account of what makes democracy valuable (Anderson, 1999, 2010; Bidadanure, 2016; Fourie, 2012; Fourie et al., 2015; Garrau and Laborde, 2015; Kolodny, 2014; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018; McTernan, 2018; Miller, 1998; Nath, 2011; 2015; 2020; O'Neill, 2008; Scheffler, 2003; 2005; 2015; Schemmel, 2011; 2012; Viehoff, 2014; Voigt, 2018; Wolff, 1998; 2010).

As seems obvious, relational egalitarianism only speaks to groups of people who are socially related. After all, it is only among those who are socially related that inegalitarian or egalitarian social relationships may exist (e.g., Kolodny, 2014: 293). Also, relational egalitarians point to this feature of their theory as an advantage over distributive theories of justice, which implausibly, so relational egalitarians claim, apply to distributions across individuals who are not socially related, for example, 14th century French people and present-day French citizens (see Anderson 1999: 313). Accordingly, relational egalitarians must tell us what it means to be socially related on relational egalitarianism—a task that has so far mostly been neglected by relational egalitarians,[7] as they have tended to assume an already bounded community of people who must then relate as equals. In this article, we take some steps in the direction of fulfilling the task of analyzing what it means to be socially related in such a way that the ideal of relational equality applies to people who are in these relations.[8]

[7] Exceptions include Lippert-Rasmussen (2018) and Nath (2011).
[8] There is a sense (of relevance to zoologists) in which wolves are socially related, e.g., there is a clear hierarchy in the pack. Yet, wolves are not socially related in the way that gives rise to the demands of relational equality. Or, alternatively, they cannot wrong each other in the ways relational egalitarians object to and, thus, on the moralized version of social relations are not socially related.

In determining what it means to be socially related on relational egalitarianism, we start by distinguishing a moralized from a non-moralized view of social relations. A *moralized view* determines what it means to be socially related in line with the concerns of relational egalitarians. For instance, relational egalitarians oppose racism (Anderson, 1999: 312; Anderson, 2010: 59; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 86).[9] A moralized view would then specify that X and Y are socially related if and only if one, or both, can treat the other in a racist way. Relational egalitarians are not only concerned with racism. For instance, they also object to domination (Anderson, 1999: 297, 300, 312–313; Garrau and Laborde, 2015; O'Neill, 2008: 130; Schemmel, 2012: 366; Tomlin, 2014: 152; Young, 1990: 9), exploitation (Anderson, 1999: 312) and paternalism (Anderson, 1999: 301; cp. Flanigan, 2017). On a moralized understanding, we would also include these concerns, for example, X and Y are socially related if and only if X is able to dominate/exploit/paternalize Y and/or Y is able to dominate/exploit/paternalize X. The resulting general concept of being socially related would thus be as follows: X and Y are socially related if and only if X treats (or is able to treat) Y in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians to be morally objectionable and/or Y treats (or is able to treat) X in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians to be morally objectionable.

On a *non-moralized view*, we do not define social relations in a way which is tailored to the concerns of relational egalitarians. Instead, we try to come up with a lexical account of what we mean when we say that two people are socially related. This is what Lippert-Rasmussen (2018: 126) intends to do with the following definition: "X and Y are socially related [if and: AUTHORS] 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." In motivating the notion, he asks us to suppose there are people on Venus. The fact that

[9] Often a definition is said to be moralized if it implies that the definiendum is unjust or morally wrong, etc. Our notion of moralized is weaker in that it only implies that the definiendum could be unjust or morally wrong, etc.

we, as Earthlings, cannot causally affect Venusians means that we are not socially related to Venusians, he submits. Suppose, however, that we could and do communicate with Venusians. In that case, we may want to say that we are socially related to Venusians, in the same way that we want to say that Beth is socially related to her cousin, Adam, whom she can and does communicate with via Facebook although she lives in Europe and he lives in the US (and they have never met in person). Thus, what may be driving our taxonomical disposition to say that we are not socially related to Venusians in the aforementioned case is that we cannot communicate[10] or interact with them (and what is driving our view that Beth is socially related to her cousin in the US, although they have never met physically, is that they often communicate with each other). Presumably, this is why Lippert-Rasmussen adds a third necessary condition for X and Y being socially related, namely that X and Y must be able to adjust their conduct in light of each other's conduct and communicate (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 128). It thus seems that a plausible non-moralized notion of what it means to be socially related takes ability to communicate and/or[11] interact, or actual communication and/or interaction, to be necessary (especially) and sufficient for being socially related. We will assume so in what follows. But note also that this—that some form of interaction is required for relevant social relations—is in line with what other relational egalitarians have emphasized. Take, for example, Kolodny. He presents the following case:

[10] Perhaps what is important is whether we actually communicate. Whether it is ability to communicate or actual communication that is important does not make a difference to our arguments in this paper, as we will see, so we can leave this question open.

[11] The "and/or" is needed because of the distinction between a one-way and a two-way view which we will introduce shortly. As an area editor points out in relation to the non-moralized one-way view (which we will, again, introduce shortly), it is hard to see how there can be one-way *interaction*. This is why, on the non-moralized one-way view, the "or" is needed (if we do not want to stretch the concept of interaction too much) such that what is required is communication or interaction. And there can at least be one-way communication (also of a significant sort, as we will see below).

> *Rabbit Hunters*: 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 (Kolodny, 2014: 293).

Commenting on this example, he says, "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, 2014: 293). And he adds: "Since there is no further interaction between them [in Rabbit Hunters], the theft does not produce any disparity in power or authority *over* their victims" (Kolodny, 2014: 299). There is no objection from a relational egalitarian point of view in this case—although there is from a distributive point of view—precisely because "there is no further interaction between them" and thus no relevant social relations between the parties. In short, he takes temporally extended interaction to be required for there to be social relations of a kind that should concern relational egalitarians. And Schemmel seems to make a similar point—emphasizing interaction—when he says, "it is natural to think of requirements to set up significant social and political relations on an egalitarian footing as triggered primarily, or even exclusively, by patterns of already existing, non-trivial, social interactions. That is, it is natural to demand relational *content* of social justice on the basis of a relational *grounding* of it" (Schemmel, 2021: 294). In our terminology, they seem to have a non-moralized view of social relations in mind.

The distinction between a moralized and a non-moralized view of social relations cuts across another distinction, namely the distinction between a *One-way View* and a *Two-way View*. According

to the One-way View, it is necessary and sufficient for the existence of a social relation between two parties that one of them satisfies that which we identified as the necessary and sufficient requirements in relation to the former distinction (between a moralized and a non-moralized view). To illustrate, on the moralized view for X and Y to be socially related, it suffices that X is able to treat Y in a racist manner (even though Y is not able to treat X in a racist manner). Or, on the non-moralized view, X and Y are socially related if and only if X can communicate with Y *or* Y can communicate with X. This is not sufficient on a Two-way View. On this view, it is necessary and sufficient that both parties satisfy that which we identified as the necessary and sufficient requirements in relation to the former distinction. To continue with the racism example, on the moralized view for X and Y to be socially related, X must be able to treat Y in a racist manner *and* Y must be able to treat X in a racist manner (or in some other manner relational egalitarians find unjust).[12] Or, on the non-moralized view, X and Y are socially related if and only if X can communicate with Y *and* Y can communicate with X.

The One-way View and the Two-way View are clearly different. Consider the following example:

> *Racist Nurse*: A black person is in the hospital after a car accident. He has become paralyzed because of the accident—literally, he cannot move and he is unable to communicate. The only thing he can "do" is to lie down. His nurse is a white racist who steps into his room and says aggressively: "Our society would be better off without black people like you!"

[12] On some views, social settings determine who can treat others in racist ways, e.g., a black person cannot engage in racist treatment of a white person in a society where white people form a dominant racial group. We take no stand on this matter. Even on this view, a black person could treat a white person in a racist manner if the social setting were different.

We are aware that there are different views on what *racism* amounts to. On one view, racism is a matter of having certain non-cognitive mental states and dispositions, or, as one prominent defender of this view puts it (Garcia 1996; 1997; 1999): racism is "in the heart" of the racist. Racism, on this view, "is something that essentially involves not our beliefs and their rationality or irrationality, but our wants, intentions, likes, and dislikes and their distance from the moral virtues" (Garcia, 1996: 6). On another view, racism is (if not only, then at least also) a matter of having certain cognitive mental states and dispositions. Shelby (2002), a leading proponent of this view, argues that beliefs are essential to racism. He suggests that "we view racism as fundamentally a type of *ideology* [where] ideologies are widely accepted illusory systems of belief that function to establish or reinforce structures of social oppression (p. 415). On a third view, racism is not just a matter of what goes on in the heads of racists. Rather, racism is crucially tied to hierarchical social structures such that were these structures to be eliminated racism would cease to exist (e.g., Haslanger, 2012; 2015; Mills 1997; Young, 2009; 2011). And, of course, there are other views. Now, it is far beyond the scope of this paper to settle how we should understand racism. Taking into account this fact, we will simply assume that Racist Nurse involves racism in whatever sense the reader favors.

The One-way View implies that in this case, the black patient and the white nurse are socially related since the white nurse treats the black patient in a racist manner. This is not the case on the Two-way View since the black patient is not able to treat the white nurse in any way disfavored by relational egalitarians. What this shows is that if relational egalitarians were to base their understanding of social relations on a Two-way View, they would be unable to object to this instance of racism

qua relational egalitarians because the relationship would not fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism. If relational egalitarians want to be able to object to *Racist Nurse* qua relational egalitarians, they must support a One-way View, and not a Two-way View, of being socially related.[13]

One may say that these two distinctions—between moralized/non-moralized and one-way/two-way—fail to capture the complexity in our concept of what a social relation is. There are many kinds of social relations that are qualitatively distinct. We stand in cooperative relations, religious relations, familial relations, and so on. However, we must be wary here to distinguish between the *type* of relation, on the one hand, and whether a social relation is in place, on the other hand. Clearly, once social relations are in place, such relations can, qualitatively speaking, take many different shapes. Familial relations are different from friendship relations. And religious relations are different from cooperative relations. And so on. But that speaks to the type of social relation, e.g., whether it is of a religious or familial character. We are interested in the question, not of the quality of the social relation, but when there is a social relation to begin with. We take our question to be, at least in some respects, prior to the quality question, although there is, to be sure, some overlap between the two. However, there might still be other ways of defining social relations than those we have so far considered. We explore some of these later, when discussing possible ways out of the dilemma.[14] But we also believe that the understandings of social relations we have proposed are a natural starting point, both because of what we typically have in mind when we say of two people that they are socially related and the commitments of relational egalitarians.

[13] There might be other options than these two. We discuss such options in Sections 3c and 4. Moreover, some might be tempted to think of the case as one of institutional injustice rather than interpersonal morality. We explain in footnote x why understanding the case in this way does not make a difference to our main argument that relational egalitarians who want to speak to both justice and democracy face a dilemma.

[14] Another option would be to go for a threshold view of social relations on which one-off interactions would not suffice for there to be a social relation. We discuss this option in Section 3c.

For now, it is important to notice that the distinction between a moralized and a non-moralized view and the distinction between a One-way View and a Two-way View cut across each other in a way which gives us the following quadripartite taxonomy of what it means to be socially related:[15]

	One-way view	**Two-way view**
Moralized	*Moralized One-way View*	*Moralized Two-way View*
Non-moralized (communication)	*Non-moralized One-way View*	*Non-moralized Two-way View*

That we may distinguish between these four accounts of what it means to be socially related, which may in turn underlie four different accounts of relational egalitarianism, is interesting for several reasons. First, it is interesting because it shows that relational egalitarians must be clear on which account of being socially related that they prefer. There are large differences between these views, as we will see. Second, in laying out their view more fully, relational egalitarians may be vulnerable to novel objections which were hidden by the lack of clarity regarding what it means to be socially related, as we will also see. A third reason, which is connected to the second, is that who are socially related in the relevant sense matters for who should be included in democratic decision-making. Let us start by turning our attention to this third point.

3. Democratic inclusion on the relational egalitarian view of the value of democracy

To see why these four views of what it is to be socially related matters to democratic inclusion, we must start with the relational egalitarian view of the value of democracy. According to relational

[15] These views, and the table, are also presented in (Bengtson, 2023).

egalitarians, democracy is not, or at least not only, valuable due to the outcomes it produces.[16] Democracy is valuable because it is a necessary, or a constituent, part of relating as equals. We may illustrate this through Kolodny's prominent relational egalitarian view of the value of democracy (see also Lovett and Zuehl, 2022; Viehoff, 2014; Wilson, 2019; but see Viehoff, 2019). He argues that democracy is a particularly important constituent of relating as equals because democratic decisions (i) cannot usually be escaped at will; (ii) characteristically involve the threat of force against non-compliers; and (iii) have final *de facto* authority (Kolodny, 2014: 304–307). They have final de facto authority, first, because political decision-making cannot be moderated by a higher court of appeal, and, second, because political decisions have final authority over nonpolitical decisions (Kolodny, 2014: 306).[17]

According to the relational egalitarian view of the value of democracy, social relations between people and democracy go hand in hand (Lippert-Rasmussen and Bengtson, 2021). If people are socially related and do not make democratic decisions together, they do not relate as social equals, as explained by Kolodny's account. But, as we have seen, relational egalitarians may choose between different accounts of what it means to be socially related. These lead to different answers as to who should be included in democratic decision-making. Hence, which account of being socially related relational egalitarians subscribe to may matter as to whether the relational egalitarian view of the value of democracy is promising as a solution to the boundary problem in democratic theory.

[16] See Motchoulski (2021) for an instrumental relational egalitarian account of the value of democracy. For criticism of this view, see Zuehl (2023).

[17] Note that Kolodny's remarks here point to why, *once* people are socially related, they should have democracy. If not, there will be unequal relations. His remarks here are thus different from our earlier remarks about the non-moralized view, including Kolodny's example with the rabbit hunters, in that the non-moralized view is a view of what it takes for people to be socially related to begin with. In short, the former has to do with what it takes for socially related persons to relate as equals (here, democracy is a necessary requirement), whereas the latter has to do with what it takes for persons to be socially related to begin with. One might have the view that only those who are subject to the same political institutions are socially related (e.g., that political institutions put individuals in a certain kind of political relation as co-citizens). In that case, relational egalitarianism would not apply where there are no political institutions. We address this subjectedness view in Section 4. We thank an anonymous reviewer for asking us to clarify this.

The boundary problem in democratic theory is concerned with the question of who should be included in democratic decision-making (Arrhenius, 2005; Goodin, 2007; Miller, 2009). As it has been forcefully argued recently, the solution to the boundary problem derives from the value of democracy. That is, we must bound the demos in accordance with what makes democracy valuable in the first place (Lippert-Rasmussen and Bengtson, 2021; López-Guerra, 2005: 221; Miller, 2009; Song, 2012).[18] If the demos is bounded in accordance with the value of democracy, we cannot, out of a concern for democracy, complain against this demarcation.[19]

Why should we demand of a view of the value of democracy that it can provide a plausible solution to the boundary problem? To be clear, we do not want to suggest that this is the only requirement in relation to which we should evaluate a view of the value of democracy. But it clearly seems to be one such requirement. As López-Guerra (2005: 218) says,

> However democratic the procedures, if the demos in question is composed only of white men, the clergy, the rich, or the "best" people in society to the exclusion of others who are equally bound by the decisions (full adult members of the state but not of the demos), then we are certainly not in the presence of a democracy. Varying restrictions on membership in the citizen body while holding political institutions constant could, for example, produce either an aristocracy or an oligarchy. What makes the difference is who governs or, alternatively, who holds ultimate power over those who govern.

[18] Alternatively, we could solve the boundary problem through democratic procedures or through an appeal to the concept of democracy. One of the problems with these solutions is that they are sufficiently open-ended to not provide a clear answer to who should be included. For discussion of these, see Lippert-Rasmussen and Bengtson, 2021; López-Guerra, 2005.

[19] One could complain on grounds of other values, e.g., welfare or social cohesion, of course. However, the boundary problem is normally understood as the problem of whether *democracy* tells us how to bound the demos.

If this is true, then demanding that a view of the value of democracy provides a plausible solution to the boundary problem is a warranted requirement in the sense that, if it did not, it would no longer be a democratic view in the relevant sense, or at least it would not be a plausible theory of democracy. Suppose that a view of the value of democracy implied that only people with an IQ above 100 should be part of the demos. In that case, we may indeed be sceptical that this was a view of the value of democracy, as opposed to, say, the value of epistocracy. Or, less strongly, we may indeed be sceptical that this was a plausible view of the value of democracy. What distinguishes democracy, as López-Guerra explains, is not the decision-making institutions as such. As he says, "nothing precludes a military junta from adopting fair voting mechanisms and establishing deliberation rights among its members" (López-Guerra, 2005: 218). What makes a democracy (valuable) is (also) a matter of how the decision-making body is composed. It suffices for our purposes that the demos composition entailed by a view of the value of democracy is at least part of the basis on which we evaluate a view of the value of democracy such that a plausible view of the value of democracy must also deliver a plausible answer to the boundary problem. Thus, a view of democracy's value which led to an implausible demarcation of the demos need not fail to be a democratic view. However, it would be an implausible view, for that reason, of democracy's value.

As we said, those who are relevantly socially related should make democratic decisions together on the relational egalitarian view of the value of democracy. What we want to do now is therefore analyse what these different accounts of what it means to be socially related entail for who should be included in democratic decision-making on the relational egalitarian view of the value of democracy.

We will primarily be concerned with what the accounts entail in terms of whether future people and dead people should be included in democratic decision-making. We focus on future people because there is a central disagreement about whether a plausible answer to the boundary problem entails inclusion of future people (for a positive view, see, e.g., Goodin, 2007; for a critical view, see e.g., Beckman, 2008; Saunders, 2011; cp. Song, 2012).[20] Hence, analysing what the relational egalitarian view entails with regard to whether future people should be included places the view in relation to the two most prominent solutions to the boundary problem, namely the all-affected principle and the all-subjected principle (Goodin, 2007; Miller, 2009).[21]

We focus on dead people because it seems a considered moral judgment that dead people should not be included in democratic decision-making (Saunders, 2011: 296, n. 19; cp. Anderson, 1999: 313).[22,23] One may object to this by pointing out that dead people have interests in virtue of which they can be harmed or wronged—depending on your view of posthumous harm (e.g., Bradley, 2009; Wilkinson, 2011)—so they should be included to have their interests protected. That dead people have interests is insufficient to establish that it is plausible to claim that they should be included in democratic decision-making. Animals also have interests, but it would still be implausible to maintain that animals should be included in democratic decision-making in the way that competent human beings are. This does not mean, however, that people may ignore the interests of animals when making decisions democratically—the interests of animals ought to be considered by whoever form the

[20] Given these disagreements, it is not a considered moral judgment that future people should be included in democratic decision-making, nor is it a considered moral judgment that future people should not be included in democratic decision-making. That is different in the case of dead people, as we argue.
[21] Roughly, whereas the all-affected principle says that those who are affected by a decision should have a right to be included in making that decision (e.g., Goodin, 2007; Miller, 2009), the all-subjected principle maintains that those who are subjected (usually this means to be affected in a way that counts as coercive) should be included in making the decision (Beckman, 2014; Goodin, 2016; Miller, 2009).
[22] Cp. "The all-affected principle may require enfranchising future generations … Perhaps more problematic is that it may also require us to enfranchise past generations, since (on some accounts) we may have interests that persist and can be affected after our deaths" (Saunders, 2011: 296, n. 19).
[23] Most people do not consider a decision undemocratic because dead people were not included in making it.

demos even though animals should not be included. That may also be the case for dead people: Dead people should not be included, but this does not imply that contemporary people may rightfully ignore the relevant interests of dead people, if they have any such interests, when making decisions (Saunders, 2011: 286).

An objector may push further and say that even if a solution to the boundary problem were to imply inclusion of dead people, it is not clear why this should lead us to conclude that the view would be implausible as a theory of democracy. After all, not getting the right answer on dead people does not seem to have the same paradigmatically inegalitarian implications as some of the cases that seem to cut against the egalitarian core of democracy, such as distributing political power based on race, religion, wealth, etc.[24] But if we look to history and democratic theory, democratic inclusion of dead people is taken to cut against the egalitarian core of democracy. When it comes to history, Thomas Jefferson (1787) famously said,

> The question whether one generation of men has a right to bind another, seems never to have been started either on this or our side of the water. Yet it is a question of such consequences as not only to merit decision, but place also, among the fundamental principles of every government. The course of reflection in which we are immersed here on the elementary principles of society has presented this question to my mind; & that no such obligation can be so transmitted I think very capable of proof. I set out on this ground, which I suppose to be self-evident, '*that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living*': that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it.[25]

[24] We thank two anonymous reviewers and an area editor for pushing this concern.
[25] Kolodny (2014: 312) and Otsuka (2003) similarly point to Jefferson.

And when it comes to democratic theory, Otsuka (2003: 133) says,

> The complaint that the American Constitution is a dead hand from the past is a familiar one among some present-day democratic theorists [among which Otsuka includes Dahl, 1989]. Their complaint is directed against the entrenchment of these laws against repeal by anything less than a *super-majority* of the (democratically elected representatives of the) living, where this super-majority greatly exceeds fifty per cent plus one. The dead are able from their graves to thwart the will of a simple majority of the living, which seems an offence to democracy.

And in their recent discussion of the value of democracy, Lovett and Zuehl (2022: 470) similarly point to "the familiar democratic concern with government "by the dead hand of the past." It is a common and plausible idea that entrenched constitutional constraints are, in some way, anti-democratic." Thus, when we look to history and democratic theory, democratic inclusion of the dead has been considered anti-democratic.[26]

[26] It is also easy to point to hypothetical examples of why inclusion of the dead may cut against the egalitarian core of democracy. Imagine, for instance, that most dead people had written in their wills that they would never vote for a black candidate. If they should have a say, they may outnumber contemporary citizens and make it impossible for a black person to get elected (cp. Otsuka's (2003: 145) case of a long-lost civilization on American soil who had etched a detailed legal code on stone tablets). In fact, these observations may also help to alleviate the following concern (which we thank an anonymous reviewer for raising). We remain agnostic on whether future people should be included, but we maintain that dead people should not be included in democratic decision-making. But one might think that once we specify what it means to include future people—once we have such concrete institutions in mind—it becomes less obvious that dead people should not be included. There are different suggestions in the literature on how to include future people (see González-Ricoy and Gosseries (2016) for an overview). One suggestion, presented by Beckman and Uggla (2016), is to set up an ombudsman for future generations with a mandate to protect their interests. But, importantly, however we institutionalize the inclusion of future people, there is a relevant difference between future people and dead people. Because future people have not yet been able to exercise their agency—they have not, as it were, been able to tell us what they want—we must include them in this indirect sense. This is not the case when it comes to dead people—they have been able to exercise their agency while alive (cp. Saunders, 2011). Thus, if we were to institutionalize a practice of including dead people, they could start to provide clear instructions, while alive, for how they would want to vote in future elections, e.g., that they under no circumstances want to vote for a black candidate or a woman. As this

Note also that our argument does not require that getting the wrong answer to the issue of dead people has *exactly the same* paradigmatically inegalitarian implications as getting the wrong answer when it comes to, say, democratic inclusion of women. These implications may still be inegalitarian enough for a solution to the boundary problem which got the wrong answer to be implausible. As the above illustrates, this seems to be the case to many.

Thus, we take it to be a considered judgment that dead people should not be included in democratic decision-making. It follows that if the four accounts of being socially related were to imply that dead people should be included in democratic decision-making, this would show that the relational egalitarian view of the value of democracy cannot deliver a plausible solution to the question of who should be included in democratic decision-making. As we will see, analysing what the four views of what it means to be socially related entail for whether dead people and future people should be included in democratic decision-making is sufficient to show that relational egalitarianism suffers from the justice-democracy dilemma; and it is also (almost) sufficient to determine which account relational egalitarians should choose if they want relational egalitarianism as a theory of what makes democracy valuable to deliver a plausible solution to the boundary problem.

3a. Future people

Let us thus start by analysing whether the four views of what it means to be relevantly socially related entail that contemporary people and future people are socially related—and thus whether they entail that future people should be included in contemporary democratic decision-making.

shows, settling what it means to include future people does not make it less obvious that dead people should not be included.

We begin with the *Non-moralized One-way View*, that is, the view that X and Y are socially related if and only if X can communicate with Y or Y can communicate with X. What kind of communication satisfies the first and second disjunct? The form of communication required to satisfy the disjuncts clearly does not have to be face-to-face. Suppose that X is a middle-aged man and Y is a 25-year-old woman. Suppose that X writes a sexist message on Instagram to Y. It is not that this is not an instance of communication whereas it would be if he had told her face-to-face instead. Thus, communication on the internet clearly suffices to satisfy either of the disjuncts. Suppose that Y does not see and read the message until two days later. Or, suppose she reads it thirty days later. In these cases, we take it that we would want to say that X is able to communicate with Y and that the first disjunct is realized in this case. This may matter when it comes to future people. Consider the following case:

> *Letter*: Contemporary people decide to write a letter to people living twenty years from now, saying, "We have worked hard to make this society as good as possible for your sake. We now hope that you will do the same for your successors." The people who wrote the letter are dead once the future people read the letter.

This act of writing a letter may not be relevantly different from the case of communication in X sending a message to Y on the internet. In both instances the one receiving the message will not read the message when it is sent but only after some time. There is one difference between the two cases, however. In the first case, let us suppose, X is alive when Y reads his message, but that is not the case for the people writing in *Letter*. Does this mean that only the former is an instance of one-way communication? We do not think so. Suppose X suddenly dies after sending the message on Instagram.

When Y reads the message two days later, it seems to be the case that X is able to communicate with Y (although Y will be unable to communicate with X at that time).[27] This means that whether X is able to communicate with Y, in the one-way sense, does not seem to depend on whether X is alive when Y receives what X has said. Thus, by writing a letter to future people, contemporary people can communicate with future people in the one-way sense which means that contemporary people and future people are relevantly socially related given the Non-moralized One-way View. Since those who are relevantly socially related should make democratic decisions together on the relational egalitarian view of the value of democracy, it follows that the Non-moralized One-way View implies that future people should be included in contemporary democratic decision-making.

This is not the case on the *Non-moralized Two-way View*, that is, the view that X and Y are socially related if and only if X can communicate with Y and Y can communicate with X. Although contemporary people can communicate to future people, necessarily future people cannot communicate with contemporary people; after all, they do not exist until after contemporary people have ceased to exist (cp. Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 128). Hence, if contemporary people were to make a democratic decision, it is not the case that future people should be included in making that decision since they are not socially related on the Non-moralized Two-way View. Thus, the two non-moralized views differ regarding whether future people should be included in contemporary democratic decision-making.

Let us then turn to the *Moralized One-way View*, that is, the view that X and Y are socially related if and only if X can treat Y in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians to be objectionable *or* Y can treat X in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians to be objectionable.

[27] Things may be a bit more complicated, as we will explain.

Remember, these ways are, among others, domination, exploitation, paternalism, and racism. Consider the following example:

> *Racist Society*: Racistania is a society comprised of two groups. The first group is a group of white people whose members comprise 90% of the population, whereas the second group is a group of black people whose members comprise 10% of the population. The white people are racists who do not want black people to hold political office or have voting power. As the constitution allows black people to run for office and vote, a group of white politicians propose an amendment proposal to the constitution which reads, "From 2050 onwards, i.e., 30 years later, black people are not allowed to run for political office or vote. The future white people in the community will act on behalf of their ancestors and uphold the constitution" (they fear that with faster implementation the black people in the community may revolt). On election day, 88% vote in favor of the amendment proposal and it is adopted.

In *Racist Society*, setting aside how they treat contemporary black people,[28] contemporary white people clearly treat future black people in a racist manner by denying them the right to vote on the ground that they believe that black people qua black people are not worthy of being granted the right to vote,

[28] An area editor notes that the case is troubled because we set aside how they treat contemporary black people. While we agree that the way contemporary white people treat future black people may also affect contemporary black people, the fact that we set this aside does not make the case troubling given the purposes for which we use the case. What we want to illustrate with this case is simply that contemporary people can treat future people in a racist manner (i.e., in one of the ways relational egalitarians find objectionable). And the case illustrates this, even if it also illustrates that this treatment may affect contemporary black people as well. But if you are still wary of this case, you may instead imagine that contemporary people vastly overspend now to leave future people with massive debt. This is, we take it, a case in which contemporary people exploit future people (cp. Bertram, 2009). And since relational egalitarians object to exploitation, the case shows that contemporary people may treat future people in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians to be objectionable.

as opposed to white people who qua white people are deemed worthy of being granted the right to vote. Thus, contemporary people can treat future people in a racist manner. The same is true of domination, exploitation, and paternalism (Bertram, 2009). Since contemporary people can treat future people in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians to be objectionable, it follows that contemporary people and future people are relevantly socially related. The upshot is that if we choose the Moralized One-way View for what it means to be socially related on relational egalitarianism, future people should be included in contemporary democratic decision-making.

Let us finally consider the *Moralized Two-way View*, that is, the view that X and Y are socially related if and only if X can treat Y in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians to be objectionable *and* Y is able to treat X in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians to be objectionable. Future people qua future people cannot treat contemporary people in one of the ways identified by relational egalitarians to be objectionable for the simple reason that they do not yet exist and when they do contemporary people no longer do. This means that the second conjunct is not satisfied on the Moralized Two-way View although the first conjunct is satisfied. Contemporary people and future people are thus not relevantly socially related and future people should not be included in democratic decision-making given the Moralized Two-way View. Thus, whereas the Non-moralized One-way View and the Moralized One-way View imply that future people should be included in contemporary democratic decision-making because contemporary and future people are relevantly socially related, the Non-moralized Two-way and the Moralized Two-way Views imply that future people should *not* be included because they are not relevantly socially related. Let us then analyze what these four views entail regarding whether contemporary people and dead people are socially related.

3b. Dead people

As before, let us start with the Non-moralized One-way View. Regarding future people, we saw in *Letter* that contemporary people can communicate with future people in the one-way sense by writing them a letter that they will eventually read. Does this reasoning extend to the case of dead people? Suppose Beth's grandmother writes Beth a letter intended for her 18th birthday. Her grandmother is sick and is certain to die before Beth's 18th birthday. When Beth reads the letter on the day that she turns 18, her grandmother has already been dead for several years. Clearly, the grandmother did not write the letter qua dead person. She wrote the letter qua living person since dead people qua dead people cannot write. In *Letter*, the contemporary person qua living person wrote the letter. We thus concluded that contemporary, living people can communicate with future people.

This seems to point to the fact that we may determine an act of communication from two points of view: a *Sender View* and a *Recipient View*. The *Sender View* determines the parties in an act of communication from the time at which the message was sent. The *Recipient View* determines the parties in an act of communication from the time at which the message is processed (whether that is read, heard, etc.). These views differ. Whereas the Sender View entails that *Letter* involves contemporary, living people communicating with future people, the Recipient View entails that *Letter* involves dead people communicating with contemporary people (since those who wrote the letter will be dead once the letter is read by its recipients). As said before, dead people qua dead people cannot communicate so it seems more plausible to say in the grandmother case that a then contemporary person communicated to a future person (Beth as an 18-year-old). This also is most plausible in *Letter*. This is to say, then, that the Sender View is more plausible than the Recipient View. Accordingly, this is the view we will assume going forward.

The Non-moralized One-way View entails that contemporary people and dead people are not relevantly socially related. Contemporary people cannot communicate with dead people, although they may try, because the latter are dead (dead people are not, and do not become, alive to receive the communication, contrary to the case of future people in the previous section). Neither can dead people communicate with contemporary people, as we saw in the grandmother case, which is an instance of contemporary people communicating with future people. This means that dead people should not be included in contemporary democratic decision-making given the Non-moralized One-way View. The Non-moralized Two-way View is a conjunction of the two disjuncts from the Non-moralized One-way View. Since none of the disjuncts is satisfied, it follows that neither is the conjunction satisfied on the Non-moralized Two-way View.

What about the Moralized One-way View? Consider the following case:

> *Sexist Son*: The parents, a father and a mother, of a thirty-year-old man suddenly die in a car crash which leaves the son with the task of handling their wills. He decides to abide by his father's will (to publish his book manuscript) but not abide by his mother's will (to publish her book manuscript) solely because he is a very old-fashioned sexist who believes that women should not write books and feels strong revulsion at the thought of his mother publishing a book. Moreover, he believes it is not in the best interest of women to publish books.

Now, there are some issues we would like to set to the side here.[29] First, as we did in Racist Nurse, we will remain agnostic as to what exactly sexism amounts to—again, whether it is in the mind of the sexist (and, if so, in what way) or (also) outside the minds of sexists, e.g., in sexist social structures etc. as many feminists would submit (e.g., Haslanger, 2012; 2015; Postl, 2017)—and assume that the son is a sexist in these different ways. Second, the son might have duties qua executor to abide by their wills. But even if he has such duties, he may fail to abide by their wills in different ways. Compare our case, where he decides not to abide by his mother's will (to publish her book) because he is a sexist who does not believe that women should write books, with a case in which he does not have the funds to publish both his father's book and his mother's book and decides to publish his father's book by drawing lots. Although he fails to abide by his mother's will in both cases, the sexism in the former case seems to make a difference for the relational egalitarian precisely because relational egalitarians object to sexism in the same way and for the same reason that they object to racism (Anderson, 1999: 312). Third, we will assume that the son is wrong about what is in his mother's best interests (it is in her interest for her book to be published). And we will assume that the son does not in general believe that it is right for him, as executor, not to abide by a will's terms when he disagrees with the testator's judgment. It is just that he believes women should not write books. Fourth, for Sexist Son to speak to institutionalist relational egalitarians, who believe that relational egalitarianism does not speak to inter-individual relations (cf. our discussion in Section 1), we could tweak Sexist Son so that the case involves the state deciding to abide by recently deceased men's wills (to publish their books) but not to abide by recently deceased women's wills (to publish their books) because the sexist state does not believe women should write books. Surely, institutionalist relational egalitarians would find it unjust if the state were to issue and protect legal rights to make sexist decisions in cases such as Sexist Son.

[29] We thank an area editor for pushing us in this respect.

With these remarks out of the way, we can now say that the sexist son treats his dead mother worse than his dead father because he believes that his mother, as opposed to his father, should not write books precisely because she is a woman. This is thus a case of sexism towards a dead person. Given the Moralized One-way View of what it means to be socially related, contemporary people and dead people are socially related, which means that dead people should be included in contemporary democratic decision-making.

This is not the case on the Moralized Two-way View since although contemporary people can treat dead people in ways identified by relational egalitarians to be objectionable, dead people qua dead people cannot treat contemporary people in ways identified by relational egalitarians to be objectionable. Suppose a mother had written in her will that only her daughter, but not her son, should inherit her money because she believes men are inferior to women. As was true in the grandmother case, this is not an instance of a dead person treating a contemporary person in a sexist way. It is an instance of a then contemporary person treating a future or contemporary person in a sexist way. Thus, the Moralized Two-way View entails that dead people and contemporary people are not socially related.

3c. A dilemma and relational egalitarianism as a plausible solution to the boundary problem

What we have seen up to this point in Section 3 is the following:

Non-moralized One-way View: Inclusion of future people; non-inclusion of dead people.

Non-moralized Two-way View: Non-inclusion of future people; non-inclusion of dead people.

Moralized One-way View: Inclusion of future people; inclusion of dead people.

Moralized Two-way View: Non-inclusion of future people; non-inclusion of dead people.

We took it to be a considered moral judgment that dead people should not be included in democratic decision-making. Thus, if relational egalitarianism is to be a valuable solution to the boundary problem—remember, the question of who should be included in democratic decision-making—relational egalitarians must give up the Moralized One-way View of what it means to be socially related. This comes at a price, however. It would mean that they would be incapable of objecting to *Sexist Son* qua relational egalitarians (the same is true of *Racist Nurse*).[30] The son treating his dead mother in a sexist way cannot be captured by the Non-moralized One-way View or the Non-moralized Two-way View because the dead mother and the son cannot communicate with each other, which means that their relationship does not fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism. Neither can *Sexist Son* be captured by the Moralized Two-way View because the dead mother qua dead person cannot treat her son in one of the ways identified as objectionable by relational egalitarians, which means that they are not socially related.

The only of the four views capable of objecting to *Sexist Son* (and *Racist Nurse*) is the Moralized One-way View. This shows that there is an unavoidable tradeoff for relational egalitarians with the dual ambition of offering both a theory of justice and account of the value of democracy. If relational egalitarianism is to be a plausible solution to the boundary problem, relational egalitarians must give up on the Moralized One-way View of what it is to be socially related because it implies inclusion of dead people. Giving up on this view entails that there are some relationships they cannot object to qua relational egalitarians that most would think that a compelling account of relational

[30] Admittedly, relations egalitarians could be pluralists and object to Sexist Son on other grounds. However, our hunch is that most relational egalitarians think that Sexist Son involves a sexist injustice and that such injustices are captured by relational egalitarianism.

egalitarianism as a theory of justice must be able to deem objectionable, such as *Sexist Son* and *Racist Nurse*. Thus, making relational egalitarianism plausible as a solution to the boundary problem comes at the price of making relational egalitarianism less plausible as a theory of justice, and *vice versa*. This dilemma in relational egalitarianism has not been acknowledged before.

One might object that we have been treating the question of whether there is a social relation as an either/or matter. However, one might say that social relations is a scalar matter and that only when social relations between two individuals become sufficiently dense, i.e., that a sufficient number of social relations between them obtain, are they socially related in the relevant sense. Take the moralized one-way view. We have been using *Sexist Son* to argue that contemporary people and dead people are relevantly socially related on this view and that, by implication, relational egalitarianism as a view of what makes democracy valuable fail to provide a plausible solution to the boundary problem. But *Sexist Son* is merely *one* instance of objectionable treatment. One could assume a threshold view of the moralized one-way view and say that being relevantly socially related requires more instances of objectionable treatment. If so, *Sexist Son* does not establish that contemporary people and dead people are socially related in the relevant sense. And relational egalitarians with dual ambitions might escape the dilemma.

However, the trade-off does not cease to exist even if we turn to a threshold view of social relations instead. First, we could imagine several instances of objectionable treatment in which the son treats his mother in a sexist way, e.g., burning her unpublished book manuscript because he believes women should not write books, spreading lies about her to "put her in her proper, low place", etc. The point is that, assuming this threshold view, contemporary people and dead people might still be relevantly socially related such that dead people should, implausibly, be included in democratic decision-making.

Second, even if we set this aside, and assume that dead people are not socially related to contemporary people, such that relational egalitarianism looks plausible as a solution to the boundary problem, relational egalitarianism as a theory of justice becomes underinclusive. If they adopted the threshold view, relational egalitarians would not qua relational egalitarians be able to say that *Racist Nurse* is unjust, if we assume that it is only one (or a few) racist interaction(s). Similarly, a racial harassment on the street between two persons who would not interact in other ways would not be unjust.[31] And we can imagine plenty of examples of a similar structure. That relational egalitarianism becomes unable to object to such instances of racism is a problem since relational egalitarians point to racism as a paradigmatic relational injustice (see, e.g., Anderson, 1999: 312; Anderson, 2010: 59; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 86).[32] Thus, adopting the threshold view to make relational egalitarianism more plausible as a theory of democracy's value makes relational egalitarianism less plausible as a theory of justice.

Third, as with threshold views in general, there is the problem of specifying the threshold in a non-arbitrary way. How many objectionable interactions would suffice to reach the threshold? Five? Ten? And if ten, why are five interactions not enough? Moreover, there will be trouble around the threshold. Suppose we set the threshold at ten objectionable interactions. Then a racist treatment in a relation between X and Y, who have had eight objectionable interactions, would not be unjust, but racist treatment in a relation between Z and W, who have had ten objectionable interactions, would be unjust. It is hard to see how such a small difference in interactions should make all the difference between just and unjust.

[31] Perhaps some relational egalitarians would respond that if the persons are co-citizens, they are relevantly socially related (also if they only interact once or do not interact directly at all), and this shows that we need another analysis of what a social relation is. We discuss such a co-citizen view of social relations in the next section.
[32] This also speaks to why it would be costly for relational egalitarians to respond to *Racist Nurse* and *Sexist Son* by saying that there can be non-relational-equality reasons to object to certain forms of treatment. Although that might be true, it is clearly not something they should say in response to what they consider paradigmatic relational injustices, such as racism and sexism.

At this point, some relational egalitarians may submit that relational egalitarianism should solely work as a theory of justice, which means that we should not make relational egalitarianism, as a theory of why democracy is valuable, plausible as a solution to the boundary problem. Obviously, this is an unwelcome move in the light of Anderson's (1999) initial formulation of the view as a matter of democratic equality and the central role of the value of democracy in the theories of other relational egalitarians (e.g., Kolodny, 2014; Viehoff, 2014). Perhaps for this reason, some relational egalitarians may want to restrict the scope of relational egalitarianism in the opposite direction: On their view relational egalitarianism answers the question of why democracy is valuable—and thus offers a solution to the boundary problem—although it comes at the expense of relational egalitarianism becoming less plausible as a theory of justice.

In our view, neither of these options is appealing. Relational egalitarianism is a plausible account of justice. We should not relate to others in an inegalitarian manner, for example, by treating them in a racist way or by dominating them, as relational egalitarians have convincingly argued (Anderson, 1999; Nath, 2020; Scheffler, 2003; 2005; 2015; Schemmel, 2012). At the same time, relational egalitarianism is also plausible as an account of why democracy is valuable, as explained by Kolodny (2014) who argues that democracy is a particularly important constituent part of relating as equals and Viehoff (2014: 340) who argues that democracy enables us to "*avoid acting* on certain considerations that must be excluded from our intrinsically valuable egalitarian relationships" (see also Wilson, 2019). Indeed, relational egalitarianism seems to be (one of) the best view(s) on offer of why democracy is valuable. Given relational egalitarianism's plausibility as a theory of justice and as an answer to what makes democracy valuable, it is clearly disappointing that there is this trade-off, which becomes apparent once we determine what it means to be socially related on relational egalitarianism.

In terms of choosing the understanding of being socially related that is most plausible if relational egalitarianism is to deliver a convincing solution to the boundary problem, we are left with the Non-moralized One-way View, the Non-moralized Two-way View, and the Moralized Two-way View. They differ in that the Non-moralized One-way View entails that future people should be included in democratic decision-making whereas the other two views do not. If a plausible solution to the boundary problem must imply that future people should be included, relational egalitarians should settle on the Non-moralized One-way View. However, as we said earlier, there is disagreement in the literature on whether future people should be included in the demos. This leaves us with the following: (i) if a plausible solution to the boundary problem must entail inclusion of future people, relational egalitarians should choose the Non-moralized One-way View; (ii) if a plausible solution to the boundary problem must not imply inclusion of future people, relational egalitarians should choose either the Non-moralized Two-way View or the Moralized Two-way View. Which one they choose in (ii) does not matter from a democratic inclusion point of view, but the justice aspect may count as a tiebreaker. If so, relational egalitarians should choose the Moralized Two-way View, as we will now argue.

Let us first show why the Non-moralized Two-way View and the Moralized Two-way View are similar when it comes to democratic inclusion. Consider global democracy. Clearly, the Non-moralized Two-way View implies some form of global democracy given that people at different places in the world may communicate with each other on the internet. This fact also shows why the Moralized Two-way View supports some form of democracy. A person somewhere in the world may send a racist message on the internet to a person somewhere else in the world, and *vice versa* (cp. Nath, 2011; 2015). The two views are also similar when it comes to whether prisoners should be included in democratic decision-making. Regarding the Non-moralized Two-way View, prisoners can communicate with a handful of people, for example, family and close friends from whom they

can receive visits or whom they can call. Prisoners may also be able to communicate with many other people by, say, writing an op-ed. The Moralized Two-way View also entails that prisoners should be included. Suppose non-prisoners decide to deny prisoners access to cigarettes because they believe it will improve the prisoners' welfare and prisoners will not by themselves choose not to smoke. This is a case of paternalism which shows that non-prisoners may treat prisoners in (one of) the ways identified as objectionable by relational egalitarians. Prisoners may also treat non-prisoners in an objectionable way. For instance, a white racist in prison may send a letter to a black non-prisoner explaining to him why he is a moral inferior.

We can make the same arguments when it comes to children (except perhaps infants), immigrants and other groups. Clearly, from the point of view of delivering a plausible solution to the boundary problem, relational egalitarians should be indifferent between the Non-moralized Two-way View and the Moralized Two-way View. Given this, we may use the fact that relational egalitarianism is also supposed to deliver a plausible theory of justice as a tiebreaker when we are to choose between the two views. If one of the views of what it means to be socially related is more plausible when considered from the point of view of relational egalitarianism as a theory of justice, relational egalitarians have good reason to embrace that understanding of what it means to be socially related.[33] If X is able to communicate with Y and Y is able to communicate with X, which means that the Non-moralized Two-way View is satisfied, X is able to treat Y in a racist manner and Y is able to treat X in a racist manner, for example, by saying to the other that he is morally inferior qua his race.[34] This is to say that the Moralized Two-way View can capture the cases captured by the Non-moralized

[33] What about our pre-theoretical classifications of social and non-social relations? Perhaps they can count as a tiebreaker if the views are equally plausible when considered from the point of view of relational egalitarianism as a theory of justice.

[34] Admittedly, this possibility is ruled out for some values of X and Y on a strongly asymmetric conception of racism according to which members of a dominant racialized group cannot be subjected to racism by a member of a non-dominant racialized group, not even in situations where the latter is locally dominant—hence "strongly". We set this aside partly because not all of the social relations that relational egalitarians find morally objectionable in this way are strongly asymmetric (see Symmetrical Destruction below), partly because we find the position implausibly strong.

Two-way View. However, the Moralized Two-way View is also able to capture cases that the Non-moralized Two-way View is not, which a plausible account of relational egalitarianism as a theory of justice must be able to capture. As mentioned earlier, relational egalitarians object to domination (Anderson, 1999: 297, 300, 312–313; Garrau and Laborde, 2015; O'Neill, 2008: 130; Schemmel, 2012: 366; Tomlin, 2014: 152; Young, 1990: 9). Consider the following case by Schmidt (2018: 187):

> *Symmetrical Destruction*: "Country A has sufficient nuclear missile capacity to annihilate country B and vice versa. However, once one country sets off their nuclear missiles, it is too late for the other country to retaliate."

Let us add to this case that members of country A are unable to communicate with members of country B, say, because they inhabit islands far apart from each other and because their electronic systems of communication are incompatible. Both countries have seen through satellite pictures, however, that they are able to annihilate each other due to their nuclear missile capacity. This is, as Schmidt explains, a case of *mutual domination* in which two agents "hold equal power over each other yet are both precariously dependent on each other's will" (2018: 189).

Symmetrical Destruction being a case of mutual domination, the Moralized Two-way View entails that the members of the two countries are relevantly socially related in this case which means that relational egalitarians qua relational egalitarians can object to this situation. Since the members of the two countries cannot communicate, this does not satisfy the conditions of the Non-moralized Two-way View. Insofar as relational egalitarians want to object to cases like *Symmetrical Destruction*, as we suppose they do, the Moralized Two-way View is more plausible than the Non-moralized

Two-way View as a definition of what it means to be socially related to underlie relational egalitarianism as a theory of justice. Since the two views have similar implications when it comes to democratic inclusion, and since the justice aspect may then be the tiebreaker, relational egalitarians should prefer the Moralized Two-way View of what it means to be socially related. The upshot of this section is thus that (i) if a plausible solution to the boundary problem must entail inclusion of future people, relational egalitarians should choose the Non-moralized One-way View; (ii) if a plausible solution to the boundary problem must not entail inclusion of future people, relational egalitarians should choose either the Non-moralized Two-way View or the Moralized Two-way View. Which one they choose does not matter from a democratic inclusion point of view, but the justice aspect may count as a tiebreaker in which case relational egalitarians should choose the Moralized Two-way View.[35]

4. How may relational egalitarians deal with the dilemma?

According to relational egalitarians, those who are socially related must relate as equals. This means that relational egalitarians must determine what it means to be socially related. In answering this question, we proposed our quadripartite taxonomy in Section 2. We then argued that which one we choose makes a difference to who should be included in democratic decision-making, given that this question must be determined by what makes democracy valuable and given that relational egalitarianism is a plausible view on what makes democracy valuable.

[35] Relational egalitarians want their theory to say what justice requires and why democracy is valuable. It may be, however, that relational egalitarians want their theory to serve additional functions, for example, they may want relational egalitarianism to speak to the impersonal value of people relating as equals as well (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 166–170). Suppose there are such further desiderata. In this case, it may be that there are further trade-off problems on relational egalitarianism, because realizing these additional desiderata may make relational egalitarianism less plausible as a theory of democracy and/or justice.

In analyzing what these four accounts imply for whether dead people and future people should be included in democratic decision-making, we argued that given the assumption that it is a considered moral judgment that dead people should not be included in democratic decision-making, relational egalitarians are left with the following options: (i) if a plausible solution to the boundary problem must entail inclusion of future people, relational egalitarians should choose the Non-moralized One-way Vie*w*; (ii) if a plausible solution to the boundary problem must not entail inclusion of future people, relational egalitarians should choose either the Non-moralized Two-way View or the Moralized Two-way View. These accounts have similar implications when it comes to democratic inclusion, but the justice aspect may count as a tiebreaker in which case relational egalitarians should choose the Moralized Two-way View. This investigation interestingly showed that there is a fundamental dilemma for relational egalitarianism: Making relational egalitarianism plausible as an answer to what makes democracy valuable—and thus as a solution to the boundary problem—comes at the price of making relational egalitarianism less plausible as a theory of justice, and *vice versa*. Or, if you are wary of justice talk, what we have shown is that relational egalitarian complaints against racism and sexism cannot be understood in the same terms as relational egalitarian complaints against non-democracy. There is no unified relational egalitarian theory that makes sense of both complaints.[36]

How, if at all, may relational egalitarians deal with this dilemma?[37] There seems to be at least five options (some of which we have already briefly exhibited): (i) relational egalitarians could restrict their theory to be solely a theory of justice; (ii) relational egalitarians could restrict their theory to be solely a theory of what makes democracy valuable; (iii) relational egalitarians could propose a different understanding of what it means to be socially related; (iv) relational egalitarians could bite

[36] We thank an anonymous reviewer for this framing suggestion.
[37] Readers should note that it is possible to agree with our arguments above for the existence of the indicated dilemma, while disagreeing with us in our assessments of the five ways out of the dilemma discussed below.

the bullet, for example, by accepting that dead people should be included in the demos or by accepting that relational egalitarianism is compatible with certain racist acts, which, however, might be objectionable on grounds other than those captured by relational egalitarianism; or (v) relational egalitarians could argue that relational egalitarianism is a disjunct of two different ideas of which social relations there ought to exist and where these ideas are premised on being socially related in different senses, i.e., what it takes for individuals to stand in social relations such that relations of justice obtain between them is different from what it takes for individuals to stand in social relations such that they should be bound only by democratically made collective decisions.

As already indicated, we believe that (i) and (ii) are not appealing options. In isolation, relational egalitarianism provides a plausible account of what justice requires and of what makes democracy valuable. This means that we are left with (iii), (iv) and (v). Perhaps relational egalitarians can find another understanding of social relations which avoids the dilemma. We have already seen that a threshold view cannot do the job. Part of the reason why relational egalitarians end up in this trade-off is because the non-moralized understanding of what it means to be socially related involves communication. Perhaps relational egalitarians can find a non-moralized understanding that does not require communication. One option here might be a *subjectedness* view according to which those who are subject to the same (state) institutions enforcing the law are relevantly socially related. For instance, if (but not only if) X and Y live in the same state, subject to those state institutions, they are socially related. One problem with this option is that it is not clear that dead people are not subject to state institutions. When Steve Jobs was granted new patents after his death, he may have been said to be subjected to state institutions, at least in some sense (Bengtson, 2020). Another problem is that, if we assume this state view of social relations, giving aid to one country instead of another country because of racism towards the latter country's citizens would not be unjust because the relations

would not fall within the scope of relational egalitarianism.[38] But what if we assumed an understanding of subjectedness which entailed that everyone globally were socially related? First, it is not clear that everyone globally is subjected to the same institutions enforcing the law in the relevant sense. And, again, it is not clear that Steve Jobs is not subjected in this sense, and so it is not clear that this would avoid the dilemma.[39] Second, even if we set that aside, it has the surprising, and for most relational egalitarians unwelcome, implication that relational egalitarian justice would require global democracy. And, in any case, it would indeed be a surprising upshot if they had to accept global democracy to escape the dilemma.[40] Instead of another non-moralized view, perhaps relational egalitarians can come up with an alternative moralized understanding of what it means to be socially related. But it seems that a plausible moralized view must at least in some sense include the concerns of relational egalitarians; and then it seems that relational egalitarians cannot avoid the dilemma.

Option (iv) would be to bite the bullet.[41] They might say, for example, that while most sexist etc. acts are objectionable from the point of view of relational egalitarianism, some outlier cases, e.g.,

[38] At this point, perhaps they could say that we are socially related if we can communicate or if we are subjected to the same state. However, this would not avoid the global democracy implication which we mention shortly in the main text nor the implication that we are then socially related to dead people.

[39] As a reviewer suggests, might relational egalitarians not escape cases like Racist Nurse by saying that the racist nurse and patient are related through the larger social, political, and economic systems that sustain white supremacy (e.g., Sommers, 2023)? The Steve Jobs case illustrates why this will not let them escape the dilemma. And we can strengthen this point. The social, political, and economic systems that sustain white supremacy have been in place for a long time—indeed, one might say that they go back to the time of slavery. And so, if being socially related is to be part of these systems, dead people and contemporary people are socially related. Indeed, on this understanding, contemporary people may be related to former slave owners. So, again, this understanding of social relations, even if it entails that the racist nurse and the patient are relevantly socially related, does not let relational egalitarians escape the dilemma precisely because it entails that dead people are socially related to contemporary people.

[40] Moreover, if they go for this option, it is no longer clear that the concerns of relational egalitarians are in line with the concerns of real-life egalitarians, a feature which they otherwise take to speak in favor of their theory (Anderson, 1999: 312; for discussion, see Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 174-177).

[41] Does this dilemma make relational egalitarianism less plausible than alternative theories? Not necessarily. Suppose luck egalitarianism is a relevant, competing theory (but see Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 181–210). Luck egalitarianism is solely a theory of what a just distribution is (and thus not (also) a theory of what makes democracy valuable). For this reason, luck egalitarianism cannot end up in the dilemma that relational egalitarianism does. However, from this it does not necessarily follow that we should prefer luck egalitarianism to relational egalitarianism. Sometimes we may prefer a theory which says more, but ends up in a dilemma, to a theory which says less, but does not end up in a dilemma. In the case under consideration, we would like to know who should be included in democratic decision-making, so even if the fact that relational egalitarianism provides an answer to this question makes relational egalitarianism vulnerable to a dilemma, relational egalitarianism may still be preferable to luck egalitarianism since the latter does not say anything

such as those involved in Sexist Son, are not. However, such acts may be objectionable on grounds other than those captured by relational egalitarianism, in effect committing to a pluralist view of justice, or at least of what we owe to each other.[42] Alternatively, relational egalitarians could say that although such sexist etc. acts are not unjust, those treating others in a sexist manner can still be blamed for their character, e.g., because their reasoning is flawed. But then that would mean that some instances of sexism etc., which, as explained, relational egalitarians take to be a paradigmatic relational injustice, would not be unjust on relational egalitarian grounds. So that would in essence be for relational egalitarians to, at least partly, give up on a central motivation for their view. And, in any case, if some relational egalitarians had a view along one of the lines suggested in this paragraph in mind, this would then be an important point about the restricted scope of their view which relational egalitarians should have mentioned, i.e., that their view was only meant to capture *some* cases of racism and sexism.

Perhaps (v) is, after all, the most promising way for relational egalitarians to deal with the justice-democracy dilemma. It would be to say that whereas we might have suspected that relational egalitarianism is one coherent theory, it is a disjunct of two different ideas of how social relations ought to be—one focused on justice, the other focused on democracy—where what it means to be socially related such that one is bounded by these two ideals differs. However, this would conflict with the aim of (at least some) relational egalitarians, for example, Anderson's account of relational egalitarianism as a matter of democratic equality. Hence, this option does not come as cheap as it might initially seem. But it might still be their best option.

about who should be included in democratic decision-making. Thus, possibly biting the bullet may be the best choice for relational egalitarians.

[42] We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing to a suggestion along these lines as well.

However, if they want to tackle the dilemma, relational egalitarians, going forward, must reflect seriously—when laying out their theory of justice and/or their theory of what makes democracy valuable—on what it means to be socially related. If they do not, we will be unable to judge whether relational egalitarianism in general is plausible as a theory of justice or as a theory of what makes democracy valuable. This is unfortunate given the prominent position of relational egalitarianism in both discussions of justice and discussions of democracy. Perhaps this indication of a future line of research which relational egalitarians ought to embark on is the most important upshot of this article.

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