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Equal Respect, Accountability, and Democracy

by

Carter Delegal

Under the Direction of Christie Hartley, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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ABSTRACT

What justifies democracy? Recently, some philosophers have argued that because an unequal distribution of political power would necessarily lead to an objectionable hierarchy, democratic institutions and procedures are required for social relations of equality. On one construal of this argument, unequal political power is objectionably hierarchical because it embodies a widespread inegalitarian judgement. But this version of the argument fails to show that unequal political power is always objectionable, nor does it capture the reason-giving authority of democratic decisions. In this thesis, I draw on relational egalitarianism to argue that persons' moral equality specifically demands relations of equal respect, which excludes relations in which some are treated as having greater fundamental authority than others. Such an account, I argue further, can show why unequal political power will necessarily constitute an objectionable hierarchy and can better capture the authority of democratic decisions.

INDEX WORDS: Democracy, Relational egalitarianism, Hierarchy, Respect, Second-personal reasons, Political power

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2023

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family and friends. To my Mom, Dad, and two wonderful siblings, thank you for your unwavering support and love. To Jordan, Rory, and Sebas, thank you for accompanying me on the crazy journey that was this year and keeping my spirits high during this writing process. I could not have finished this thesis without you all.

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1 INTRODUCTION

What reasons do we have to uphold and maintain a democratic form of government? We might think that democracy produces the best outcomes over time or that it is especially stable. These sort of instrumental justifications do not do justice to a number of our judgements about the value of democracy and the authority of democratic decisions. For one, it entails there would be nothing wrong in principle with a society in which some have greater political power than others, so long as this society produced better overall outcomes or achieved greater stability than democratic alternatives. Yet we tend to think that such a society would be failing in some important respect regardless of its ability to produce the best consequences all-things considered. We should look for a justification of democracy, then, that does justice to these judgements, a justification that can make intelligible the intuition that an equal distribution of opportunity to influence political decisions is in itself better than an unequal one.

Several authors have drawn on relational egalitarianism to argue that democracy is an essential requirement of social relations of equality.¹ Relational egalitarians hold that persons' moral equality demands equal respect, the realization of which requires and forbids certain interpersonal relations within the context of public life and social institutions.² It can be contrasted with luck egalitarianism, or the view that persons' moral equality demands the absence of arbitrary disadvantage.³ On the latter view, persons ought to relate as equals in a thin sense: no one should be arbitrarily disadvantaged *relative* to others. On the former view, the

¹ Niko Kolodny. 2014. "Rule Over None II: Social Equality and the Justification of Democracy." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42 (4): 287-336; Elizabeth Anderson. 1999. "What Is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics*, 109 (2): 287-337; Elizabeth Anderson. 2010. "Equality" in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ed. David Estlund (New York: Oxford University Press): 40-57.

² See Elizabeth Anderson. 1999. "What is the Point of Equality?" *Ethics* 109 (2): 287-337

³ See, e.g., Cohen. 1989. "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice," *Ethics* 99 (4): 906-944; Arneson. 2004. "Luck Egalitarianism Interpreted and Defended," *Philosophical Topics* 32 (1): 1-20.

demanding relation is thicker: persons ought to have social relationships in which others exhibit respect towards them, or, interpersonally relate to them as equals.

The relational egalitarian justification of democracy is supposed to give us reasons for upholding democracy as a normative requirement. If democracy is necessary for persons to relate as equals, then it will be an essential component of an egalitarian ideal. This justification would show that democracy is justified, or at least has a weighty reason in its favor, even if our separately considered, non-egalitarian interests were worse achieved under democratic institutions. The merits of this justification, and the challenges it faces, will be the focus of this thesis.

There are two central claims in the relational egalitarian argument for democracy. First, a society of equals requires the absence of certain sorts of social hierarchies—call them “objectionable social hierarchies”. A society of equals is one in which there are social relations that appropriately respond to members’ fundamental moral equality. Second, a society with unequal political power will necessarily have an objectionable social hierarchy. Note that the unequal political power that is taken to instantiate an objectionable social hierarchy is *unequal opportunity to influence political decisions*.⁴ Mere unequal exercise of the genuinely equal opportunity to influence political decisions does not itself amount to a social hierarchy. By contrast, a society that gives some less opportunity to influence political decisions than others might consign the disenfranchised to an inferior social position, creating the sort objectionable hierarchy with which relational egalitarians are concerned. I will continue to talk about equality of political power for ease of reference, but this should be taken to refer to equality of opportunity for influence.

⁴ Kolodny, “Rule Over None II”

That unequal political power necessarily instantiates an objectionable hierarchy is an important part of the relational egalitarian argument. If unequal political power is a sufficient condition of an objectionable social hierarchy, then we have reason to treat democracy as a normative requirement. Call this the *strong relational egalitarian argument*. The strong relational egalitarian argument vindicates democracy “as an ideal in its own right.”⁵ It purports to show that equal political power is essential for citizens to relate as equals.

If, by contrast, unequal political power is only contingently related to the presence of an objectionable social hierarchy, the relational egalitarian argument for democracy is much weaker. All that could be claimed is that there is some connection between nondemocratic distributions of power and whatever it is that constitutes an objectionable hierarchy, such as a widespread inegalitarian belief. This is Daniel Viehoff’s contention: relational egalitarians can at best only claim that *under certain conditions* nondemocratic arrangements will be inimical to our relation as equals.⁶ Call such a claim the *weak relational egalitarian argument*.

In comparison to the weak relational argument, the strong argument has the virtue of explaining the authority of democratic decisions. Here, one explanandum is the fact that political officials (or others tasked with implementing political decisions) are taken to have special reason to implement democratic decisions in virtue of something about the democratic process. Even if a political decision is substantively bad, the fact that it was democratically made provides *some* reason, perhaps overridable, to implement it.⁷ On the strong argument, democratic control over political decisions is essential for relations of equality, which is why democratic decisions have authority. If I fail to implement a democratic decision, I give myself greater influence over

⁵ Daniel Viehoff. 2019. “Power and Equality” in *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy V*, eds. David Sobel, Peter Vallentyne, and Steven Wall (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 3-38.

⁶ Viehoff, “Power and Equality”

⁷ Kolodny, “Rule Over None II,”290; Viehoff, “Power and Equality,” 8.

political matters than others and thereby relate to others in an objectionably hierarchical fashion.⁸ Here, the greater influence I have is itself a strike against our relating as equals.⁹

By contrast, if we can only make the weak relational egalitarian argument, then my failure to implement a democratic decision would not necessarily count as a strike against our relating as equals. Suppose that unequal political power is undesirable only because it tends to lead to inegalitarian beliefs over the long-term. But suppose I am a political official who knows that my decision to not implement an isolated democratic decision will not promote inegalitarian beliefs nor undermine democratic institutions. On the weak version of the argument, there would be no reason at all against my decision to not implement the decision, as my greater influence would not be constitutive of an objectionably hierarchical relation.

In this thesis, I consider Viehoff's claim that unequal political power is itself not a sufficient condition for objectionably hierarchical social relations and, as such, the strong relational egalitarian argument fails. I ultimately argue that, to the contrary, the presence of unequal political power necessarily constitutes such relations. Egalitarian social relations are relations in which citizens respect the normative authority of others. For these relations to exist, it must not be the case that some citizens cannot be made accountable to other citizens. Put positively, relations of equal respect require the conditions for maintaining mutual accountability. And because societies with unequal political power necessarily lack such conditions, they will necessarily be objectionably hierarchical.

To make this argument, I first present Viehoff's argument. Then, in order to make sense of what is distinctively problematic about objectionable hierarchies, I unpack what I take to be the

⁸ Kolodny, "Rule Over None II," 315

⁹ While I have framed the issue of democratic authority as relating to the decisions of political officials, it is also relevant for the duties of persons *qua* citizens. I will discuss how the strong argument can account for such duties further on in the thesis, where I discuss this general issue in more detail.

central commitments of the relational egalitarian view. I argue there that we can best understand that view as claiming that equality requires relations mediated by recognition and respect for each person's second-personal standing, or what I will call their fundamental normative authority. Then, I argue that respect for persons' normative authority requires that we can make each other equally accountable. Conditions in which some class persons are immune to claims for accountability constitute objectionable hierarchies. Finally, I show why unequal political power necessarily gives rise to these conditions of immunity, which shows that unequal political power is a sufficient condition for the presence of an objectionable hierarchy.

2 VIEHOFF'S CHALLENGE

As multiple authors suggest, there is something inherently problematic about societies structured by social status hierarchies. These societies, such as those structured by slavery or class, assign persons superior and inferior social statuses that determine much of their social interaction and permitted actions.¹⁰ In addition to whatever consequences these hierarchies have on people in them, they are also objectionable in that their very existence embodies a failure of relational equality. Viehoff calls this view the “anti-caste paradigm”: societies structured by social status hierarchies display features that “paradigmatically violate the ideal of equality” to which relational egalitarians are committed.¹¹ He suggests that by analyzing the features of these societies, we can then determine what is “distinctly problematic” about them, which is the inequalitarian social relation to which we object.¹² Ultimately, he argues, we find that inequality of political power does not necessarily instantiate the social relation of concern.

Viehoff first identifies a few necessary features of social status hierarchies.¹³ First, such hierarchies are “generalizable” in two senses. On one hand, if a hierarchy exists between X and Y, the position it assigns to X (and Y) marks X as someone who holds that particular position and structures all of X’s relationships with other members of the society, and not just X’s relationship with Y. An enslaved person in the pre-civil war United States was not just a slave to their master, but someone who had the status of a slave across all (or at least many) of society’s social contexts.¹⁴ These hierarchies are also generalizable in the sense that they are upheld by a

¹⁰ See Kolodny, “Rule Over None II,” 292; For the view that social equality is best characterized by the absence of such caste-like distinctions, see Wolff, “Social Equality and Social Inequality,” in *Social Equality: On What It Means to be Equals*, eds. Carina Fourie, Fabian Schuppert, and Ian Wallimann-Helmer (New York: Oxford University Press): 209-225

¹¹ Viehoff, “Power and Equality,” 11

¹² *Ibid*, 12

¹³ Note that Viehoff uses “social status hierarchy” throughout his text to mean the sort of society-wide hierarchy that fits the anti-caste paradigm. Thus, Viehoff takes all social status hierarchies to be objectionable hierarchies.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 12

system of norms and rules that are “representative of society as a whole.”¹⁵ Though Viehoff does not give a full analysis of when hierarchical norms are representative of a society, he notes that such an analysis would need to specify when norms are truly representative rather than the mere expression of a single person’s or a small sub-group’s view.¹⁶

The next key feature of intrinsically objectionable hierarchies is that the generalizable positions they assign are status positions. Status positions are socially agreed upon, or at least socially upheld, positions that afford their holders a set of rights, duties, and responsibilities.¹⁷ Thus, the hierarchies of concern are not merely discrepancies in how people respond to certain characteristics of others, but rather discrepancies in the socially operative positions people are granted in virtue of their characteristics.

So far, it seems like the strong relational egalitarian argument for democracy is on solid footing. A nondemocratic arrangement grants certain people statuses that gives them disproportionate influence over society compared to those who occupy lower statuses. The discrepancy in power attributed to the different status positions would be enough, it seems, to constitute the enfranchised as the social superiors to everyone else. Intuitively, the characteristics that ground the statuses would make no difference to whether the hierarchy was objectionable in this way; the large inequality in status-based power would be sufficient to constitute such a hierarchy.

Viehoff argues further, however, that an inequality in status-based power itself does not constitute the disrespectful social relation that is of concern in objectionable social hierarchies.

¹⁵ Ibid, 13

¹⁶ Ibid 13

¹⁷ Ibid, 15

Rather, what's of concern in objectionable hierarchies is that they assign status positions on the basis of characteristics in a way that reflects an inegalitarian judgement.

Consider his example of medical service providers.¹⁸ They have a status that allows them to put on lights and force all other road-users to get out of the way, but this differential advantage of theirs doesn't seem to embody disrespect for all other road-users. Or, more to the point, consider "Necessary Representation": Two nomadic tribes need to make an agreement about hunting grounds to avoid conflict, but are rarely in a position to communicate. After two members of each tribe meet by happenstance and decide on an agreement, the rest of the members of each tribe are expected to accept and comply with the agreement. Here, the two members wield greater political power than the other members of their respective tribes, but intuitively, Viehoff contends, they are not made the social superiors by virtue of this greater power.¹⁹

Viehoff explains these cases by claiming that objectionable hierarchies exist not merely in virtue of large inequalities in status-based advantages, but by the way in which such advantages are justified. More specifically, an objectionable hierarchy exists within a society when the members of that society take a difference in a status-based advantage to be justified on grounds that are incompatible with society's own understanding of each person's moral equality. What's wrong with objectionably hierarchical societies is that they embody the fact that some members of society do not judge others to be their moral equals. Note here that Viehoff takes the normatively relevant feature to be society's actual justification. There might be an objectively egalitarian, instrumental justification of a social hierarchy, but the hierarchy could still be

¹⁸ Ibid, 17

¹⁹ Ibid, 20

objectionable insofar as the society does not recognize that egalitarian justification and instead takes the hierarchy to be justified on an inegalitarian basis.

So, the equality-disrespecting feature of objectionable hierarchies is that they “*embody* society’s judgement that some people are *fundamentally more important* than others.”²⁰ There is some ambiguity about how to interpret what’s objectionable here. On one hand, the objection could be about society *as a whole*: what matters is that our social relations, rather individuals’ attitudes, embody or express the disrespectful judgement. Describing the equality-disrespecting feature of hierarchies in connection with “society’s judgement” might suggest this view.

However, I think it is more plausible to interpret Viehoff as saying that “society’s” disrespectful judgement ultimately reduces to some sufficiently large group of people who do not recognize the equal moral status of some and effectively assent to some social justification that embodies that judgement. It matters that we relate as equals, and thus avoid hierarchies that don’t treat us as equals, because our basic equality demands respect. Respect is essentially second-personal, something that is given or denied within the context of interpersonal exchanges. So, we should locate the objectionable feature of hierarchies that Viehoff identifies in the individual attitudes, i.e. the individual modes of relating to others interpersonally, that comprise society’s judgement.

An example of an objectionable hierarchy will help us understand Viehoff’s analysis. Consider a society in which those who are white have the status of social superiors and are thereby granted a greater set of socially upheld advantages than those who are non-white, who are deemed social inferiors. On Viehoff’s analysis, what is wrong here is that the greater advantages afforded to white people reflects the attitude that people of color are fundamentally less worthy of equal moral concern. Since granting differential privileges on the basis of race

²⁰ Ibid, 19 (emphasis in-text)

could not be reasonably interpreted as an instrumentally justified means to satisfy each person's equally considered interests, the society has to be interpreted as having some sufficiently large proportion of its population regard white people as morally more significant than people of color.

We can now turn to the implications for the strong relational egalitarian argument for democracy. Consider:

The Ph.D Society: A society in which there is tiered system of voting in accordance with one's educational credentials. While all citizens have a vote, and thus some influence on political decisions, the votes of the citizens without a PhD merely function to communicate citizens' preferred outcome. After citizens vote, those with PhDs vote.

Their votes determine the chosen policy.

Suppose that such a system could produce political decisions that promoted the equal satisfaction of person's interests better than any other political arrangement. On Viehoff's view, so long as this arrangement were justified on the basis of an egalitarian judgement, e.g. its optimal satisfaction of each person's interests equally considered, there would be no objectionable hierarchy. Persons in this society might be reasonably interpreted as not believing that non-PhDs have less moral significance given that the arrangement exhibits some respect for their views on political matters and ranks the satisfaction of their interests as equally important as that of anyone else. The special status of the PhDs, and the great power it affords them, might be instrumentally justified on the basis of their greater ability to construct optimal laws, not their greater moral significance. Thus, on Viehoff's analysis, no objectionable hierarchy exists.²¹

²¹ Note that this example is my own. I doubt that Viehoff would accept the empirical contention that such a society would produce the best outcomes. For one, an *epistemic* objection to this arrangement might be that to produce the best results for citizens, democracy is needed because it collects information from a diverse range of perspectives. While likely true, this contention fails to make sense of the egalitarian intuition that, even if it were possible for the Ph.D.-led society to produce the best outcomes, it would fail to respect our moral equality. Someone might also

As this example, as well as Viehoff's Necessary Representation, is supposed to show, the strong relational egalitarian argument fails if Viehoff's analysis is successful. Remember that argument claims that democracy is essential for relations of equality, and is supported by the combination of two further claims: (1) Persons' moral equality requires the absence of objectionable hierarchies and (2) Unequal political power necessarily creates an objectionable hierarchy. Viehoff thinks we can hold (1) but deny (2) because what is distinctively problematic about objectionable hierarchies, exemplified in caste-like societies, is a social relation that unequal political power does not necessarily give rise to.

Viehoff's main claim is not that unequal political power is unproblematic, but that it doesn't in itself give rise to the distinct, egalitarian objection to social hierarchies, an objection that might have special normative weight. However, we might wonder whether the equality-disrespecting judgement Viehoff has identified is exhaustive of the social relations that give rise to what's distinctively problematic with social status hierarchies. In the next section, I tackle this question by unpacking the fundamental moral objection that relational egalitarians have to unequal societies. I then use this analysis to suggest that Viehoff's identified social relation is just one social relation that gives rise to the distinct egalitarian objection to objectionable hierarchies.

doubt that such a society could be supported by an egalitarian judgment. However, the important point is that if the society were instrumentally justified and didn't require inegalitarian judgements to be sustained (a possibility we may not be able to rule out), it would not count as objectionably hierarchical on Viehoff's view.

3 RELATIONAL EGALITARIANISM AND EQUAL RESPECT

Relational egalitarians believe that recognition of the equal moral standing of societal members requires that we stand in certain sorts of social relations. These relations—realized in shared institutions, cooperative enterprises, public discourses, etc.—are such that every member’s status as a moral equal is recognized and appropriately responded to.²² But what does the status of a moral equal amount to and how does it affect the sorts of relations we ought to have? In this section, I will argue that the relational view of equality is best understood as being committed to the combination of two views: (1) each person has fundamental normative authority and (2) social relations ought to be mediated by equal recognition respect for the authority of persons.

Relational egalitarians hold that our status as equals means we each have fundamental normative authority, or what Stephen Darwall calls “second-personal authority.”²³ This is the authority to make claims on another person, where such claims have normative weight on the other just by virtue of the fact that they flow from another free and rational being. To recognize the fundamental normative authority of another person is to recognize that they have a certain dignity that essentially grants them standing to make claims on one as another free and rational agent.²⁴ It is to recognize that they are “self-originating sources of claims,”²⁵ such that claims that flow from them have a special weight that one ought to respond to.

²² Here, I use “societal member,” instead of citizen so as to remain neutral on the scope of relationships with which relational egalitarians should be concerned. For two views that suggest that the requirement of egalitarian relations extend beyond relations among fellow citizens, see Rekha Nath. 2015. “On the Scope and Grounds of Social Equality,” in *Social Equality: On What It Means to be Equals*, eds. Carina Fourie, Fabian Schuppert, and Ian Wallimann-Helmer (New York: Oxford University Press): 186-208; and Daniel Sharp. 2022. “Relational Equality and Immigration,” *Ethics* 132 (3): 644-679.

²³ Stephen Darwall. 2006. *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

²⁴ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 14

²⁵ John Rawls. 1980. “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory,” *Journal of Philosophy* 77:546.

To illustrate, imagine that I have rear-ended someone while driving through Atlanta traffic. The other driver is obviously mad, indicating that they hold me accountable for the problem. When I respond to this by trying to rectify the situation, it is not merely because there is a negative outcome that I am in a good position to change. If I responded to the situation because of this consideration, I would only be recognizing a *third-personal* reason: a reason that solely depended on the negative or positive valence of a state of affairs. But this would not likely be my (or anyone else's) sole consideration. Instead, I'd recognize that the *specific other person* who I've harmed has the authority to hold *me* responsible for not complying with the claims that they can reasonably make of me. In doing so, I'd be recognizing a *second-personal reason* for responding in certain ways, a reason which presupposes what I'm calling the normative authority of the other person.²⁶

Consider two ways of responding to the situation. First, imagine I apologize to the driver. In apologizing, I would be responding to the fact that the other person has the legitimate authority to expect or demand an apology of me. My apology would not solely based on a desire to promote a positive state of affairs, nor a belief that the driver can reasonably claim *an* apology. Instead, I recognize that they can reasonably claim an apology from me. Second, imagine that I provide my legal information, in line with the legal regulations requiring me to do so. One reason to comply with such regulations is not second-personal: complying is justified insofar on self-interested grounds and insofar as it contributes to a well-ordered society. But another reason is that by complying, I rectify the rear-ended driver's harm for which they have the authority to hold me accountable as another moral agent.

²⁶ The presentation of this example is similar to Darwall's example of responding to someone who steps on your foot: *ibid*, 5-8.

If I were to adequately respond to the rear-ended driver's authority, I would be displaying respect for her normative authority. Note that in being a type of response that flows from the recognition of persons' authority or standing, this respect is a type of "recognition respect." Contrast this with the type of respect that is in response to some appraisal of its object, or "appraisal respect."²⁷ To respect other persons as persons is not to revere their skills in some dimension: I do not fail to respect my students as persons if I judge their philosophy skills to be inferior to my professors'. Rather, to respect persons is to recognize their normative authority and appropriately respond to the legitimate demands they can make of one by virtue of that authority.

The value of interpersonal respect for persons informs the relational egalitarian vision of a society of equals.²⁸ In general, relational egalitarians hold that one constitutive feature of social relations in which people are treated as equals is that each person's status as someone with fundamental normative authority is equally respected, i.e. equally recognized and appropriately responded to. This fundamental authority doesn't grant each person equal exercisable authority in all contexts, of course. Persons can rightly demand special deference to their authority in a variety of contexts given their legitimately decided social position.²⁹ But relational egalitarians insist that no person as such is treated as having greater authority than others to have their claims be recognized and complied with when it comes to the basic terms of social cooperation. To

²⁷ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 123; See also, Darwall. 1977. "Two Kinds of Respect," *Ethics* 88: 36-49.

²⁸ For the claim that respect informs the relational egalitarian account of equality, see Samuel Scheffler. 2015. "The Practice of Equality" in *Social Equality: On What It Means to be Equals*, eds. Carina Fourie, Fabian Schuppert, and Ian Wallimann-Helmer (New York: Oxford University Press): 21-44; and see Alexander Motchoulski. 2021. "Relational Egalitarianism and Democracy," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 18 (6): 620-649. Motchoulski in particular emphasizes the role of recognition respect for persons in mediating relations of social equality.

²⁹ How positions of social authority are legitimately decided in line with everyone's equal normative authority is another question. One suggestion, developed by Kolodny, is that positions of authority are legitimate and/or unobjectionable when they are countenanced by a society in which people enjoy equal political power. See "Rule Over None II."

recognize the normative authority of all persons involved in some social context is thus to recognize them as part of a “community of equal, mutually accountable, free and rational agents”³⁰ whose claims have equal weight on the structure of that social context.

Emphasizing the role of respect for persons’ normative authority helps us understand the distinctive nature of the relational egalitarian conception of equality and its contrast with others views. First, consider “respect-sufficientarianism.”³¹ On this view, there are certain norms, e.g. norms of basic interpersonal courtesy, we ought to follow that exhibit a baseline level of respect to all persons. But some people, given their intelligence or the quality of their character, are afforded more respect. While everyone would be entitled to some recognition of their authority in the context of social relations, some could be appropriately treated as having a fundamentally more important authority to make claims on others and the shared structure of social relations.

Relational egalitarians would not accept respect-sufficientarianism. While relational egalitarians need not require that persons of lesser character be given appraisal respect on par with the honest and virtuous, it does require that each person is recognized as the sort of being whose claims on the conduct of others are of equal *prima facie* weight as anyone else’s. To recognize another person’s normative authority just is to recognize that they are an equal in this claim-making regard. Thus, when it comes to making claims on our shared social relations, no one person’s claims ought to have greater weight on our deliberations on grounds of respect.³²

³⁰ Darwall, *Second-Person Standpoint*, 101

³¹ The idea of a “respect-sufficientarian” was suggested to me by Bill Edmundson. My thanks to him for getting me to think about the contrast between relational egalitarianism and this view.

³² Of course, some social decisions are best left to those who are affected by them. It doesn’t seem like the fact that I am unable to vote in the city of Chicago’s elections is representative of Chicagoans’ disrespect of my normative authority. But we can explain this as being compatible with the claim that no one’s claims ought to have greater *prima facie* deliberative weight on social relations: insofar as the boundaries of lower-level decision-making authority are what people would reasonably agree to—or, more strongly, insofar as they are countenanced by a political system in which each person has the opportunity to exercise their normative authority—then the exclusion of some does not amount to unequal respect.

Next, consider relational egalitarianism's contrast with luck egalitarianism.³³ The latter holds that our moral equality requires in the first instance social relations in which no one is arbitrarily disadvantaged relative to others. As Larry Temkin puts it, "It is bad—unjust and unfair—for some to be worse off than others through no fault of their own."³⁴ Elizabeth Anderson's influential critique of this view, which at the same time kickstarted the development of the relational egalitarian account of equality, brings attention to the possibility that certain objectionable hierarchies would exist in a society that perfectly realized the luck egalitarian ideal.³⁵

Consider Johnathon Wolff's critique of the sort of policies that would follow from a luck egalitarian framework. Since equality is conceived as primarily a type of fairness, what matters in determining whether to provide support to those who are worse off is whether their situation results from factors in their control or not. If the individual is not responsible for their worse-off situation, then their disadvantage is morally arbitrary and thus has a claim to be addressed. This conditional character of welfare benefits, prescribed by the luck egalitarian view, presents problems. In particular, we can imagine people who are unable to get a job not for a lack of available opportunities, but because they lack basic skills or talents required. To make a claim for benefits, such people must make "shameful revelations": they must bring attention to their deficiencies in order to press a claim for benefits.³⁶

³³ See, e.g., Cohen. 1989. "On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice," *Ethics* 99 (4): 906-944; Arneson. 2004. "Luck Egalitarianism Interpreted and Defended," *Philosophical Topics* 32 (1): 1-20. Some authors have argued that the relational egalitarian and luck egalitarian account of equality are compatible. Nevertheless, key parts of the relational egalitarian view can be best explicated by considering the relational egalitarian critique of luck egalitarianism as an exhaustive account of equality.

³⁴ Larry Temkin. 1993. *Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press): 13.

³⁵ Anderson, "What is the Point of Equality?"

³⁶ Johnathon Wolff. 1998. "Fairness, Respect, and the Egalitarian Ethos," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 27 (2): 97-122.

Such a policy creates a failure of respect, Wolff claims, by licensing intrusive questioning into the nature of a citizen's disadvantage. More specifically, Wolff claims, this sort of policy expresses a lack of trust, which is antithetical to basic respect.³⁷ We can spell this out in terms of respect for normative authority. For persons to be respected as social equals, they must be treated as being agents who have equal competence necessary for making claims and holding one another responsible. If our social institutions exhibit distrust for persons, then they are not treated as having the equal competence that is constitutive of fundamental normative authority.³⁸

Anderson's discussion of the main contrast between relational and luck egalitarianism also highlights the centrality of equal recognition respect for persons' fundamental normative authority.³⁹ Specifically, relational egalitarians work with a second-personal conception of justification, whereas luck egalitarians hold a third-personal one.⁴⁰ In second-personal justification for states of affairs, it is shown that some agent is responsible for some conduct that another agent has the moral authority to hold them accountable for. While luck egalitarians take equality to be defined by some specifiable outcome, i.e. the absence of morally arbitrary disadvantages, relational egalitarians take it to be defined as a state of affairs in which the legitimate claims of each are recognized and complied with. This state of affairs is one in which the fundamental normative authority of each is respected, as proper recognition of such authority

³⁷ Ibid, 113-115

³⁸ Luck egalitarians might claim that this is just a superficial problem with their view. Perhaps on recognizing such policies would undermine the dignity of some, we could change it or its implementation so that dignity and overall fairness is preserved. This response faces a problem, however. On one hand, if we claim that the policy is *unfair* to those who are humiliated, such that they deserve compensation or an alternative implementation, then it looks like the single value of fairness generates conflicts: it both requires and speaks against shameful revelations. If, on the other hand, we appeal to the independent value of respect to ground this policy change, then we are giving up on the central luck egalitarian idea, namely, that equality is singularly defined by the value of fairness. Instead, the value of respect would be an independent source of the egalitarian framework. See Wolff, "Fairness, Respect, and the Egalitarian Ethos," 118

³⁹ Elizabeth Anderson. 2010. "The Fundamental Disagreement Between Luck Egalitarians and Relational Egalitarians," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* Supplementary Volume 36: 1-23.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 3

involves making oneself accountable for complying with what the other reasonably claims on one.

Thus, the relational egalitarian conception of equality is informed by the value of equal respect for persons' normative authority. Incorporating this value of respect into their account of equality sets them apart from other views. By understanding this central feature of the view, we can better understand how to evaluate the distinctive relational egalitarian objection to certain hierarchies. In turn, we can better understand whether societies with unequal distributions of political power necessarily give rise to this objection.

4 WHY EQUAL RESPECT REQUIRES EQUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Relational egalitarians hold the view that social equality is realized in social relations in which the fundamental normative authority of each person is respected. Here, I will argue that understanding the relational egalitarian objection to certain hierarchies in light of this view helps us save the strong relational egalitarian argument. In particular, equal recognition respect for the fundamental normative authority requires social conditions in which persons can ensure that others are accountable to them. Conditions in which some class of people are immune from the claims of others amount to objectionable social hierarchies in that persons cannot ensure that their authority bears on the deliberations of others.

First, consider an example. Say my friend and I want to do mutually enjoyable activities. When she makes plans for us, she considers the fact that I love going to the movies and talking philosophy and decides frequently enough to do those things. But, though she knows what I like to do, she never actually consults me when she makes plans. Instead, she announces what we'll do and takes her announcement as final without ever consulting me or allowing me to object.

Something seems missing from a friendship like this. But evidently it is not that my friend fails to consider my interests. Of course, it could be that being a part of the planning process is in my interests, but assume that I have no subjective preference for this sort of thing. So, my friend is not neglecting to take any of my interests into account. Nor does it seem like she is failing to *regard* me as her equal: she need not assume she is inherently superior to me to have the belief that, as it happens, she's better at figuring out what to do given an equal consideration of our stated interests.

To get a better grip on what's going wrong here, consider Darwall on the nature of respect. Respecting a person involves recognizing their normative authority, which requires, at minimum, believing that the other person does indeed have this authority. But this belief state is insufficient for actually respecting them. That is because, as Darwall writes, "this form of authority is itself something that is appropriately recognized second-personally...through relating to others in a way that acknowledges this authority."⁴¹ To respect someone, then, requires *being* accountable to them: to manifest the attitudes and responses that actually exhibit one's recognition *to* the other person that they have normative weight on one's deliberations and intentions just by virtue of being a person.

That respect requires relations of exhibited accountability does not yet completely make sense of what's going wrong in my friendship. After all, we stipulated that I don't have an interest in making plans and have expressed no interest in plan-making. My friend isn't accountable to me, but this is not due to a failure to exhibit recognition of my authority to me.

The problem, instead, is that I have no opportunity to demand anything of my friend, as she has undermined the possibility of my exercising my authority and issuing claims with regards to how our interactions go. My friend thus fails to respect me: she fails to manifest the responses and attitudes to me that recognize my authority.

Here, we have a different threat to relations of equality than the one Viehoff identifies. On one hand, someone (or some class of persons) can fail to relate to another as a moral equal by acting on judgements that presuppose unequal worth. For instance, some class of people can fail to relate others as equals by endorsing social status hierarchies that distribute privileges on the basis of morally arbitrary characteristics. However, we have seen that relations of equality

⁴¹ Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint*, 141

require, positively, relations in which persons' equal fundamental normative authority is given recognition respect. Someone might refrain from arbitrarily discounting persons interests on the basis of morally arbitrary characteristics, but nevertheless fail to *recognize* another person's normative authority.

This latter failure to relate to others as equals can occur if there one maintains conditions that prevent them from having to be accountable to the other agent. In particular, if a person or a class of persons undermines another's ability to be actually authoritative, the former is not actually accountable to the latter. As such, they are not manifesting the attitudes and responses that exhibit recognition respect of the other's fundamental normative authority.

One might worry that this account of what respect requires asks too much. Clearly there are many cases in which we do not or cannot give others the opportunity to be authoritative regarding the terms of our interaction and yet do not fail to respect them. A teacher does not fail to respect his students, for example, by not letting them dictate the structure of assignments for class.

Though we cannot always give people the opportunity to be authoritative, I claim that there is a special problem when a person or a class of persons cannot make an effective demand to be authoritative. Perhaps my friend's failure to respect me is not particularly worrisome because I have the ability to change the terms of our friendship. I can, for example, make a complaint and convince my friend that they are not fully manifesting the responses necessary to respect me. However, when one party (a person or a class of persons) cannot exercise its normative authority in the context of its relations with another party due to some underlying failure of recognition *and* lacks effective recourse to make the other party accountable to them, there is a special problem for the possibility of respect between the two parties. In these cases, the fact that there

are social conditions that prevent a class of persons from even making demands that others must appropriately respond to, i.e. the conditions that prevent relations mediated by respect, may also prevent that disrespected class from changing those conditions.

To make things more concrete, consider again the PhD society. Though the PhDs in this example recognize the equal importance of the other members' interests, and thus the justification of their authority need not be based on inegalitarian judgements of relative intrinsic worth, they fail to respect other members as equals because they fail to give them the opportunity to make equal claims on their shared social structure. They are, as a matter of fact, unaccountable to the other members.

Importantly, the condition that renders the PhDs unaccountable—the fact that they have a monopoly on the positions of authority tasked with deciding laws and policies—is also the condition that prevents the other members of society from changing the circumstances so that they can exercise their normative authority and make the PhDs accountable. The PhDs are immune from being made accountable to the normative authority of their fellow citizens: their outsized power prevents the other members of society from exercising the normative authority (thereby preventing respect from being exhibited to them) *and* prevents those people from changing the underlying condition that itself undermines respect. Call these *conditions of immunity*: conditions that undermine accountability and by the same token undermine the ability of people to change such conditions.

This leads us to an account of objectionable social hierarchies. Hierarchies “create *classes* of people who relate to one another as superiors and inferiors.”⁴² Different classes of people are assigned different statuses that are mediated by some underlying characteristic, and those

⁴² Anderson, “Equality,” 42

statuses assign different privileges. Objectionable social hierarchies, we can say, arise when by virtue of their status privilege one class of people can be immune to the claims of another class or other classes. Under this condition, those in the superior class do not have to be accountable to the normative authority of others and, as such, are *not* accountable. As a result, superiors do not treat inferiors with full recognition respect and do not relate as equals.

One thing to note about this account is that it doesn't focus on privilege or power-based inequalities themselves as the condition of objectionable hierarchies. I'm not claiming that a large discrepancy in political power *alone* gives rise to an objectionable hierarchy. That discrepancy might (or, as I claim later, does) necessarily give rise to an objectionable hierarchy, but if so that is because of the relation between political power and conditions of immunity.

One worry about this account of objectionable hierarchies is that it is over-inclusive. To make this worry concrete, consider a specific example: families. In families, a parent typically has more influence on familial decisions and more opportunity to exercise their authority. Moreover, children do not typically have the means to change this fact. It is not as if children delegate decisions to parents, but retain the ability to replace them if the parents' decisions are not to their liking. Rather, a parent has greater opportunity to exercise authority and typically does not have to respond to children's claims to be granted greater, let alone equal, opportunity. As such, it might seem like families, by instantiating conditions of immunity, are thus objectionably hierarchical, which is a counterintuitive implication.

My account, however, does not imply that typical family structures are necessarily objectionably hierarchical. First, note that a certain sort of rational competence and accountability is constitutive of normative authority, respect for which is what relational egalitarians insist on. Insofar as children (of a certain age) do not yet possess the full capacities

associated with normative authority (a claim that itself ought to be worked out), relational egalitarians will need to find an alternative principle that governs their treatment. Perhaps the fact that children are developing their ability to recognize second-personal reasons and hold themselves accountable for complying with them means that they need to be provided some opportunity to exercise their normative authority, even if their opportunity is not equal to that of their parent(s).

More substantively, there are some hierarchy-related worries about family structures that I believe my account of objectionable hierarchies can explain. For one, it seems like there are spheres of family decision-making in which it would be inappropriate and objectionably hierarchical were a parent to deny a child the opportunity to make claims as an equal. A child, for instance, can reasonably demand that a parent give weight to the child's decisions about favored activities and friends. A parent that did not recognize that a child's claim in favor of pursuing some activity was *some* reason for allowing them to do it would count as relating to their child in an objectionably hierarchical way. This is an implication we should accept. Additionally, there are legal measures a society ought to put in place that ensure that parents' greater exercise of authority does not prevent children from ever having an opportunity to exercise their own. Even if parents are not required to give their children equal opportunity to exercise their authority, they might be required to give them some opportunity on grounds of respect. If a society has no (publicly available and recognized) recourse for children to contest oppressive parents, then it will count as objectionably hierarchical because parents will enjoy conditions of immunity.

In general, I do not think my account is over-inclusive. Objectionable hierarchies exist when there are conditions of immunity. In many cases, there might not be conditions of immunity due

to the presence of mechanisms that exist outside of, but put checks on, the social relation of concern.⁴³ To the extent that those checks do not exist, or exist but are not strong enough to ensure that people can make an effective demand that their normative authority is respected via an opportunity to exercise it, then there is an objectionably hierarchical social relation.

Before moving on to consider the implications for the strong relational egalitarian argument, it will be helpful to consider my account of objectionable hierarchies in relation to Viehoff's. Viehoff, recall, claims there is a *distinctive* relational egalitarian objection to certain sorts of society-wide hierarchies. That objection, he argues, is that certain distributions of privileges on the basis of status, which are mediated by underlying characteristics, reflect a judgement on part of society's members that some have greater moral significance than others. Thus, hierarchies are objectionable from an egalitarian point of view insofar as they embody an inegalitarian judgement or belief.

I've argued that relational egalitarianism is best understood as claiming that we should have society-wide relations of equal respect for persons' fundamental normative authority. This conception of relational egalitarianism can unify Viehoff's account of objectionable hierarchies with my own. The sort of feature Viehoff identifies is objectionable specifically because it manifests a failure of recognition respect: by discounting persons' claims for arbitrary reasons, one fails to give the weight to their claims that is constitutive of recognizing their fundamental normative authority. The sort of hierarchy I identify is also a failure of recognition respect. Here, however, the failure of recognition manifests as a failure to give others the opportunity to be actually authoritative and a failure to be actually accountable to them. Thus, the distinctive relational egalitarian objection to certain hierarchies is less specific than Viehoff suggests: it's

⁴³ Kolodny makes a similar claim about why the concern over equal power is more salient in political cases as opposed to non-political cases. See "Rule Over None II," 303-307.

that certain hierarchies embody a failure of recognition respect, a failure to appropriately respond to the weight of persons' claims that flows from their fundamental normative authority.

One benefit of this unified analysis is that it helps us make sense of and justify the egalitarian objection to hierarchies that are supported by mistaken beliefs about what moral equality requires. For instance, the gender hierarchy might be sustained by false beliefs about the naturalness of assigning roles on the basis of sex classification. Many people might mistakenly believe that the gendered division of labor, say, is an appropriate way of meeting everyone's interests, hence manifesting an equal regard for each person's claims. But this division of labor disempowers women and thus makes men unaccountable to the normative authority of women. My analysis of objectionable hierarchies helps us straightforwardly critique this arrangement without having to show that these false, patriarchal beliefs are really just cynical guises.

We have seen that relational egalitarianism is best characterized as incorporating the value of basic recognition respect into its account of equality. We have also seen that people can fail to recognize others' normative authority by failing to be actually accountable to the exercise of their authority. Accounting for this type of failure of respect helps us identify a special problem in society-wide relations, which I have called conditions of immunity. When conditions of immunity occur, there are objectionable hierarchies. In the next section, I show why unequal political power necessarily gives rise to conditions of immunity. If that argument is correct, then the strong relational egalitarian argument is vindicated.

5 UNEQUAL POLITICAL POWER AND CONDITIONS OF IMMUNITY

In his defense of the strong relational egalitarian argument, Niko Kolodny argues there are three features that explain why equal opportunity to influence political decisions seems to be particularly important to relations of equality in a way equal opportunity to influence non-political decisions does not.⁴⁴ First, political decisions do not allow for the ongoing freedom of exit. If one is an inferior when it comes to political decision-making, one cannot exit that relation without incurring serious difficulties. Second, political decisions have “final de facto authority”⁴⁵: given that political decisions set the rules that regulate all other nonpolitical decisions, there is no higher authority to which we have recourse. That one is an unequal in the context of some nonpolitical decision can be mitigated by the fact that one has recourse to equality in the realm of political decision-making; if one lacks that, then one lacks recourse to make others accountable. Finally, political decisions govern the use of physical force, which means that those who enjoy control over them will have special means for ensuring the realization of their decisions.

The latter two of these three features help show why unequal power over political decisions give rise to conditions of immunity and, in turn, objectionable hierarchies. First, if a class of people A has greater power over political decisions than class B, then persons in class A will be treated as having greater authority over the whole swath of nonpolitical decisions that political decisions shape. Their demands will have greater effective weight over the shared social structure and, as such, people in this society will be more accountable to their normative authority than that of persons in class B.

⁴⁴ Kolodny, “Rule Over None II,” 303-307

⁴⁵ Ibid, 306

It is important to note that the fact that persons in class A will be treated with *more* authority than persons in class B is itself objectionable from the relational egalitarian view. Even if class B has some power over political decisions, there will be greater accountability to the decisions of persons in class A so long as they have more power than those in class B. Put more generally, there will be unequal levels of accountability to persons. Moreover, these unequal levels of accountability will manifest throughout social relations, since political decisions structure all the rest. There will be unequal respect exhibited in social relations, which is what relational egalitarians claim is inimical to our equality. So, a system in which everyone has a vote, but some votes are weighed more heavily than others will be a strike against relations of equality on the view I am defending here.

Now consider the second part of conditions of immunity, namely, that the relation of unequal accountability itself undermines the possibility of changing that relation. In particular, the fact that political decisions have final authority make it such that those who have less power over them, and are thus unequally treated, cannot change their condition of disempowerment. If political decisions have final authority over what can be done within the context of nonpolitical decisions, then lacking power over the former undermines the possibility of using the latter to enact change and create conditions of equal respect. Of course, people who are politically disempowered can and do use their authority within nonpolitical contexts to enact change within the political realm. But these movements are ultimately dependent on changing the minds and subsequent exercise of authority of those who already have power, indicating the relation of unaccountability that is objectionable.

So, unequal political power leads to conditions of immunity. In societies in which some have greater political power than others, people will exhibit greater actual accountability to some

rather than others. Since exhibiting accountability to the authority of a person is constitutive of respecting their normative authority, in an undemocratic society there will be unequal respect for society's members. Moreover, the conditions for changing that unequal respect are undermined. As such, there will necessarily be an objectionable hierarchy in societies with unequal political power.

We can now see that the strong relational egalitarian argument is on strong footing. That argument holds that because a society of equals requires the absence of objectionable hierarchies and because an undemocratic society necessarily gives rise to an objectionable hierarchy, democratic institutions are an essential requirement for us to relate as equals. I have spelled out a society of equals in terms of equal respect for persons' normative authority, which requires the absence of a certain type of hierarchy, namely, conditions of immunity. Since unequal political power creates conditions of immunity, we can accept the second claim in the strong relational egalitarian argument and thus accept that democracy is an essential requirement for relations of equality.

But what type of democracy? Clearly something like a direct democracy would be justified on this view, but it might seem to speak against representative democracy. After all, citizens grant elected representatives relatively greater control over political decisions. Moreover, these representatives appoint unelected officials to make further political decisions. It looks like representative democracies will permit inequalities in status privileges that give political officials greater authority and thus create relations of unequal respect. Alexander Motchoulski calls this the self-defeat objection: the strong relational egalitarian argument ends up showing that

democracy itself, at least in the form it is usually undertaken, will create an objectionable hierarchy.⁴⁶

Note, though, that a discrepancy in the actual exercise of normative authority creates an objectionable hierarchy only when the powerless have no control over the conditions of that discrepancy, i.e. when the powerful enjoy conditions of immunity. Thus, the self-defeat objection does not hold against this version of the strong relational egalitarian argument. Within a representative democracy, citizens can in principle hold officials accountable for making decisions in a way that represents the claims of those who elect them. As such, their exercise of normative authority is an expression of that of citizens. Moreover, if they stray from the demands of citizens, they can be made to be accountable with the threat of recall. The self-defeat objection does not then undermine the strong relational egalitarian argument, but it does point out that the sort of democracy justified must have fairly stringent constraints on the exercise of delegated authority.⁴⁷

So, the version of the strong relational egalitarian argument I'm putting forward leaves open the choice between representative and direct democracy. It can also countenance limits on the scope of democratic decision-making and thus give support to a liberal or constitutional democracy. In particular, relational egalitarians can claim that though equal political power is necessary to avoid objectionable hierarchies, we ought to establish certain rights persons have that are not subject to democratic decision-making so as to ensure the conditions necessary for people to relate as equals. These rights must be protected even if a majority would rule against

⁴⁶ Motchoulski, "Relational Egalitarianism and Democracy", 640; Kolodny, "Rule Over None II," 317 also raises a version of this worry. Note that Motchoulski's construal of the relational egalitarian argument for democracy is a bit different than the one discussed here. For him, relational egalitarians should worry about inequalities of political power because they robustly cause inequalitarian beliefs about relative social standing. But the self-defeat looms for the accountability-based construal of the argument, as I indicate in the above paragraph.

⁴⁷ What these constraints would have to be is a further question.

them. For instance, a right to basic education would need to be protected, as the ability to develop the competence and responsibility that is constitutive of normative authority depends on a certain type of education.

Finally, the version of the strong relational egalitarian argument I'm suggesting might also have implications for the type of opportunity people have to exert influence over political decisions. In particular, in addition to requiring equality of formal opportunity to influence political decisions, the argument considered here might require equal *informal* opportunity for influence, too. As Kolodny notes, if our concern is social equality, it doesn't seem to matter much whether an inequality of opportunity to influence political decisions results from inequalities in resources or available leisure time rather than formal rules governing the political process.⁴⁸ We can explain the requirement of equal informal opportunity by appealing to equal respect. What matters is equal accountability to the exercise of persons' normative authority. Just as formal rules can prevent persons from equally exercising this authority, so can differences in relative wealth and/or resources. Moreover, inequalities of the latter sort may amount to objectionable hierarchies insofar as they prevent those who are unable to exercise their authority from changing the underlying conditions and making others accountable to them.

Working out whether the strong relational egalitarian argument for democracy requires equality of informal opportunity, and working out what that requires of society more generally, is another task altogether. Here, we can rest with the conclusion that democracy is an essential requirement for a society of equals.

⁴⁸ Kolodny, "Rule Over None II," 332

6 CONCLUSION

We have seen that there are two distinct forms of the relational egalitarian objection to certain hierarchies. On one hand, hierarchies might be objectionable in that they embody an inegalitarian judgement on the part of its population. If this were the only source of the relational egalitarian objection to hierarchies, all we could vindicate is what I have called the weak relational egalitarian argument. This argument could only point out that, as a matter of contingent fact, unequal political power could only be supported by inegalitarian beliefs, which would make it an objectionable hierarchy. There would be no problem with unequal political power as such. Instead, the problem would be with the way in which such unequal power would be justified given current social conditions.

There is, I have claimed, another source of the relational egalitarian objection to hierarchies: that they embody a failure of some persons to recognize other persons' normative authority insofar as they manifest a failure of some to be accountable to the exercise of other persons' normative authority. More specifically, an objectionable hierarchy exists when some class of persons enjoys conditions of immunity, meaning that they are unaccountable to the demands of another class and that latter class cannot change the external conditions that create the unaccountability. If we accept this additional characterization of objectionable hierarchies, then we can defend the strong relational egalitarian argument. Unequal political power will necessarily create conditions of immunity, i.e. an objectionable hierarchy, and thus is necessarily incompatible with a society of equals.

I will end by noting a couple of the implications of this view. First, by vindicating the strong relational egalitarian argument, we are able to account for the reason-giving nature of democratic decisions. To see this, first note the trouble other accounts have in explaining the authority of

democratic decisions. A purely instrumental justification of democratic procedures that appealed to, say, democracy's ability to satisfy interests, cannot easily explain why an official tasked with implementing a democratic decision should not choose to defy it when a better decision, one that happens to better satisfy people's interests, is available. Someone defending this view might suggest that in the long-run defying democratic decisions will undermine the standing of democratic institutions and, in turn, take away from the instrumental value they are stipulated as having. However, this response doesn't account for the authority of any particular democratic decision: if my defiance of the democratic decision would not make a causal difference to the integrity of democratic institutions, then there is *no reason* to abide by the democratic decision on the instrumentalist account.⁴⁹

Similar problems afflict the weak relational egalitarian argument. Suppose that I live in a society in which no public justification of a non-democratic arrangement could be given that did not rest on inegalitarian judgements. The absence of a democracy would create an objectionable hierarchy and we would thus have reasons, on the weak relational egalitarian account, to have a democracy. Here, while there would be reasons for general conditions of equal political power, there would be no reason against defying a particular democratic decision unless one believes doing so would undermine the integrity of democratic institutions long-term. So long as my defiance is not grounded on an assumption of my own moral superiority nor intended to produce an outcome that cannot be justified unless I assume inegalitarian premises, there is no special reason to obey the democratic decision.⁵⁰

The strong relational egalitarian argument, by contrast, can account for the authority of a democratic decision. In particular, it can say that, whatever reasons there might be for choosing a

⁴⁹ Kolodny calls this the "Bridging Problem." See "Rule Over None II," 291.

⁵⁰ Viehoff, "Power and Equality," 25

substantively better decision, there remains a *pro tanto* reason for obeying a democratic decision. If I were to choose to defy the democratic decision, I would be making myself unaccountable to the claims of others and failing to respect them. Moreover, there would be no opportunity for others to contest my disrespect, as political decisions are final. Thus, I would be instantiating an objectionably hierarchical relation between me and my fellow citizens by failing to implement the democratic decision.

This sort of account of the authority of democratic decisions is perhaps unintuitive when it comes to the duties of citizens. We do not typically think that people who break democratically decided laws thereby make themselves unaccountable to the rest of us. In fact, we can hold them accountable by enforcing criminal laws and legal punishments.

Yet there is another sense of accountability that is important. Insofar as laws are expressions of mechanisms that give us equal opportunity to express our normative authority, compliance with them creates a social outcome produced by relations of equal respect. To disobey a democratically decided law gives one greater influence over social outcomes and so undermines the equal opportunity to exercise normative authority.. Moreover, no one can change the fact that one has exerted such influence and thus no one can change the fact that, as it relates to the social outcome one has produced, one is unaccountable to the normative authority of others. Thus, even in disobeying a democratic law as a citizen, one relates to others in an objectionably hierarchical fashion. As such, there is a *pro tanto* reason to comply with democratic decisions.

Finally, note the general difference in the type of justification of democracy offered by the strong and weak relational egalitarian argument. The latter says that democracy is required to the extent that its absence could not be justified on an egalitarian consideration of persons' interests. As such, it in principle permits giving some greater political power on the basis of their

intellectual or agential superiority. “It is not because you are less important that you don’t deserve political power,” someone relying on this argument could say, “but simply because you are less intelligent or less equipped to make the best decisions.”

The version of the strong relational egalitarian argument I’m defending here would not allow this sort of justification. Instead, it holds that, for us to stand in relations of equal respect, we must be accountable to the exercise of everyone’s normative authority and must not create conditions where making others accountable is not possible. It does not matter if someone is less intelligent or less equipped to make the right political decisions. For a person to be treated as an equal, they must be given equal influence over political decisions.

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