

Taking Equality Seriously

Why relational egalitarians should demand distributive equality

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*But shall these things ever be?
That, who can tell. Yet we must attempt it.*

Attributed to William Walwyn, leader of the Levellers in the England of 1647

The individual differences of which so much is made (...) will always survive, and they are to be welcomed, not regretted. But their existence is no reason for not seeking to establish the largest possible measure of equality of environment, and circumstance, and opportunity. On the contrary, it is a reason for redoubling our efforts to establish it, in order to ensure that these diversities of gifts may come to fruition.

R. H. Tawney, Equality, 1951, 4

Zusammenfassung

Meine Dissertationsschrift ist im Bereich der politischen Philosophie angesiedelt, genauer in dem spätestens seit dem 20. Jahrhundert mehr und mehr ausdifferenzierten Bereich der Gerechtigkeitsphilosophie. Im Zentrum meiner Arbeit steht die Beziehung zwischen den Theorien des distributiven (*distributive egalitarianism*, im Folgenden DE) und des relationalen Egalitarismus (*relational egalitarianism*, im Folgenden RE). Diese steht im Mittelpunkt einer so aktuellen wie komplexen Debatte. Während Vertreter von RE dafürhalten, dass es das vorrangige Ziel der Gerechtigkeit sei, egalitäre *Beziehungen* zwischen Individuen zu sichern, betonen Vertreter von DE dagegen die Notwendigkeit wie Dringlichkeit, Individuen einen gleichen Anteil an den relevanten *Gütern* zu sichern, deren Verteilung von der Gerechtigkeit gefordert wird (mögen diese Ressourcen sein, Fähigkeiten, Wohlergehen oder Chancen).

Obgleich innerhalb der Debatte der letzten Jahre relationale Ansätze im Rahmen von RE immer mehr in den Vordergrund gerückt sind, ist nur wenig im Hinblick auf ihre Implikationen für die Frage nach der Verteilung gesagt worden (Schemmel 2011; Moles und Parr 2019). Die vorliegende Dissertationsschrift stellt dagegen den Versuch dar, eine Antwort auf die wichtige Frage nach der distributiven Dimension der Theorie relationaler Gleichheit zu geben.

Meine These, für die ich in der vorliegenden Arbeit argumentiere, lautet, dass ein konsequenter relationaler Egalitarismus *notwendigerweise* egalitäre Implikationen für die Güterverteilung hat, wobei ich unter egalitär diejenige Verteilung verstehe, die willkürliche Ungleichheit ausschließt. Die Be-

gründung für diese These lautet ex negativo, dass willkürliche Verteilungsungleichheiten gegen eine *notwendige* Bedingung dafür verstoßen, miteinander als Gleiche in Beziehung zu stehen: dass die gleich wichtigen Interessen aller Individuen in gleicher bzw. gleichwertiger Weise die sozialen Entscheidungen bedingen, darunter diejenigen, die die Güterverteilung regulieren (vgl. Scheffler 2015, 35-36).

Meine Position steht damit im starken Kontrast zu der zunehmend prominenter werdenden Tendenz innerhalb der Debatte um relationale Gleichheit, Prinzipien von DE zugunsten der Grundsätze der *Suffizienz* abzulehnen. Genauer weise ich dabei die Ansicht zurück, dass im Rahmen der Frage nach der Güterverteilung eine egalitäre Gerechtigkeitstheorie beinhalten würde, Akteuren (lediglich) eine *ausreichende* Menge von Gütern zuzusichern, anstatt darauf abzielen, dass jeder Akteur *gleichviel* hat.

Damit zielt meine Argumentation in erster Linie gegen die von Elizabeth Anderson (1999) vertretene Spielart des Egalitarismus sowie all jene Positionen von RE, die aus Andersons Variante hervorgegangen oder von ihrem Suffizienz-Ansatz geprägt worden sind. Gegen Anderson halte ich dafür, dass unter der Voraussetzung einer Annahme von RE eine Befürwortung des Suffizienz-Grundsatzes im Gegensatz zum Prinzip der Verteilungsgleichheit nach DE verfehlt ist. Denn: RE ernst zu nehmen, bedeutet unter anderem, willkürliche Verteilungsungleichheiten *notwendigerweise* als eine Bedrohung des egalitären Charakters einer Beziehung zwischen Individuen zu verstehen, woraus sich die normative Forderung ergibt, jedwede willkürliche Ungleichheit der Güterverteilung aufzuheben – und zwar über jeden nur denkbaren Standard der Suffizienz hinaus.

Andersons kritische Haltung gegenüber der egalitären Verteilungsfrage hat die egalitäre Debatte so nachhaltig wie problematisch bestimmt als eine

Debatte, die sich *entweder* um die Frage nach relationaler Gleichheit *oder* über Verteilungsgleichheit dreht. Daraus folgt, dass meine Verteidigung der Verteilungsgleichheit aus einer relationalen Perspektive eine Ablehnung genau dieses ausschließenden *Entweder-Oder*-Charakters zwischen den beiden Ansätzen darstellt und demgegenüber einen wichtigen Schritt der Versöhnung beider Ansätze innerhalb *ein und desselben* Rahmens des Egalitarismus zu wagen.

Eine wichtige Voraussetzung zum richtigen Verständnis dieses Rahmens ist mein Dafürhalten einer externalistischen gegenüber einer internalistischen Definition von Beziehungsgleichheit (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018), wobei "externalistisch" hier bedeutet: ob zwei oder mehr Individuen sich als gleichberechtigt zueinander verhalten, wird nicht ausschließlich auf der Grundlage ihrer *Wahrnehmung* der Beziehung definiert – wie die internalistische Lesart behauptet –, sondern auch und gerade dadurch, wie gerechtigkeitsrelevante Güter unter ihnen verteilt werden (ebd.), d.h. aufgrund der *distributiven* Regelung außerhalb ihrer Beziehung.

Wenn das Argument, das ich im Rahmen meiner Dissertationsschrift entfalte, richtig ist, folgen aus ihm wichtige Implikationen für die Theorie des Egalitarismus sowie die philosophische Debatte rund um die egalitären Spielarten, die im Zentrum der Diskussion meiner Arbeit stehen. Diese Implikationen sind sowohl theoretischer als auch praktischer Natur. Auf der theoretischen Ebene impliziert meine Argumentation das Vorliegen einer direkten Verbindung zwischen RE und DE. Genauer zeige ich entgegen der prominenten Annahme, dass beide als einander entgegengesetzte Positionen zu verstehen sind, dass sie sich in Wirklichkeit *überschneiden*.

Auf der praktischen Ebene schließlich folgt aus meinem Argument, dass Institutionen, die nach einem Verständnis relationaler Gleichheit geformt und

gestaltet sind, zur Befürwortung egalitärer Richtlinien zur Regulierung des Zugangs Einzelner zu sozialen Gütern angehalten sind.

Meine Arbeit adressiert auf der Grundlage dieser Implikationen allem voran Vertreter von RE als auch solche, die von dem Wert relationaler Gleichheit als moralisches wie politisches Ideal überzeugt sind. Schlussendlich leistet meine Dissertationsschrift einen wesentlichen Beitrag zur *Versöhnung* zwischen den beiden Ansätzen von RE und DE, welche in einigen der jüngsten Beiträgen zur Debatte innerhalb des Egalitarismus befürwortet wird (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018; Elford 2017; Moles und Parr 2019), wobei ich argumentiere, dass die normative Bedeutung der Verteilungsgleichheit teilweise aus der der Beziehungsgleichheit herrührt. Damit lassen sich die Prinzipien von RE und DE als zwar eigenständige aber dennoch miteinander kompatible Elemente ein und derselben egalitären Vision darstellen.

Mein Argument entfaltet sich wie folgt. Das erste Kapitel setzt sich genauer mit der gegenwärtigen Debatte des Egalitarismus auseinander und gibt einen genaueren Überblick über die einzelnen Positionen innerhalb der egalitären Theorie als Ganze. Die aktuelle Debatte entzündet sich allem voran an der Spannung zweier rivalisierender Positionen: RE und DE, insbesondere in der Form des luck egalitarianism. Ich argumentiere, dass der Disput zwischen diesen Theorien ganz entscheidend auf die von Elizabeth Anderson vertretene Spielart von RE zurückgeht, welche das Prinzip der Verteilungsgleichheit zugunsten des Verteilungsprinzips der Suffizienz aufgibt. Das Projekt einer Versöhnung zwischen den beiden Positionen RE und DE innerhalb der Gerechtigkeitsdebatte muss – so meine These – zuallererst genau diese von Anderson vertretene Spielart einer Kritik unterziehen, um auf ihr aufbauend zu einer erneuten Bekräftigung des Wertes der Gleichheit der Verteilung innerhalb der egalitären Perspektive zu gelangen.

Genau eine solche kritische Beleuchtung der Suffizienz-Theorie im Hinblick auf ihre Kompatibilität mit dem theoretischen Rahmen relationaler Gleichheit nehme ich im zweiten Kapitel vor. Im Verlauf meiner kritischen Begutachtung vertrete ich die These, dass die Prinzipien der Suffizienz (verstanden als den Grundsätzen des Egalitarismus entgegengesetzt) nicht ausreichen für die angemessene Güterverteilung innerhalb einer Gesellschaft von *Gleichen*. Im Gegenteil: Solange Prinzipien der Suffizienz willkürliche Verteilungsungleichheiten oberhalb des Suffizienz-Schwellenwertes erlauben, und weil willkürliche Verteilungsungleichheiten das egalitäre Wesen der Beziehung zwischen Individuen *notwendigerweise* verletzt, zeigen sich Suffizienz-Prinzipien als grundsätzlich ungenügend und aus diesem Grunde nicht dafür geeignet, relationale Gleichheit herzustellen bzw. zu sichern.

Das dritte Kapitel zielt auf eine Untermauerung der in meiner Arbeit vertretenen Grundthese mittels Analyse einer spezifischen Instanziierung von distributiver Ungleichheit oberhalb des Suffizienz-Schwellenwertes, nämlich Ungleichheit im Bereich der *Bildung*. Dabei bewege ich mich innerhalb der aktuellen Debatte über Bildungsgerechtigkeit mit dem Fokus auf zwei einander entgegengesetzter Theorien: educational adequacy und Bildungsgleichheit, wobei nach erster jedem Kind ein ausreichendes – nicht aber gleiches – Maß an Bildung zugesichert werden müsse. Dabei vertrete ich die Auffassung, dass Befürworter von RE reine educational adequacy zugunsten der Bildungsgleichheit zurückweisen sollten: Demnach sollte jedem Kind zwar eine angemessene Bildung zugesichert werden, jedoch ist Gerechtigkeit noch nicht gesichert, solange verbleibende Bildungsungleichheiten zwischen ihnen bestehen bleiben. Denn auch hier – wie bereits in rein theoretischer Hinsicht in den vorangegangenen Kapiteln aufgezeigt – gilt, dass die von den Grundsätzen von educational adequacy erlaubten Bildungsungleichheiten eine notwendige Bedingung für die Schaffung und Sicherung relationaler Gleichheit verletzen: dass die gleich wichtigen Bildungsinteressen aller Kinder in gleicher Weise die sozialen

Entscheidungen bedingen, die die Verteilung von Bildungsgütern zwischen ihnen regulieren.¹

Während sich das dritte Kapitel mit praktischen Implikationen meines Kernargumentes beschäftigt, schließt das vierte und letzte Kapitel mein Dissertationsvorhaben mit einer theoretischen Implikation ab. Ich zeige, dass dadurch, dass sowohl RE als auch DE distributive Gleichheit implizieren, ihre Beziehung nicht im Sinne der im ersten Kapitel untersuchten Entweder-Oder-Beziehung verstanden werden kann, sondern eher im Sinne einer Kompatibilitätsbeziehung verstanden werden muss. RE und DE sind demnach miteinander kompatible Theorien, deren normative Implikationen sich signifikanterweise überschneiden. Im Rahmen dieses Vorhabens entwickle ich eine ihrem Anspruch nach *hinreichende* Systematisierung der konzeptionell möglichen Überschneidungen zwischen den beiden Ansätzen RE und DE. Damit erhoffe ich mir, Klarheit in eine noch immer oftmals undurchsichtige und schwierige Debatte zu bringen.

¹ Mein Argument kann damit auch als unabhängiger Beitrag zu der allgemeineren Debatte der Bildungsgerechtigkeit verstanden werden.

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Abstract

In this thesis, I attempt to reconcile two alternative approaches to justice: distributive and relational egalitarianism. When examining the two accounts, I claim that relational egalitarianism has distributive egalitarian implications. This implies an extensional overlap between the two accounts, namely a correspondence between the normative outcomes of relational and distributive egalitarianism.

This work is addressed primarily to relational egalitarian scholars, as well as others who are convinced by the value of relational equality as a worthy moral and political ideal. My aim is to prove that their goal implies embracing equality of distribution *beyond* relational equality. When making the case that relational egalitarians should take equality seriously, I claim that they should refrain from embracing distributive principles other than – or incompatible with – principles of distributive equality.

This statement entails both a negative and a positive thesis. On the negative side, we should be critical toward the prominent tendency within the relational egalitarian debate, as influenced by the work of Elizabeth Anderson (1999), to reject claims of distributive egalitarian justice in favour of sufficientarian claims of distribution. On the positive side, distributive equality is required by the logic of relational egalitarianism, although its normative significance exists independently of it.

While presenting my statements, I provide support for the *externalist* understanding of relational equality as most recently advanced by Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (2018), through which the egalitarian character of someone's relation depends on features *external* to their relation, such as on

the distribution of the relevant currency among them. Whether or not individuals relate to one another as equals – I maintain – depends not merely on the internal feature of their relation, that is, on how they perceive or regard one another, but also, significantly, on how goods such as resources, welfare or opportunities are distributed among them. On my account, individuals are only equals when they recognize each other as equal in status *and* grant one another an equal share of the justice-relevant good.

In defending my thesis, I critically engage with the literature on both distributive egalitarianism and relational egalitarianism. In particular, in the first part, I reconstruct the egalitarian debate and its approach to equality as *either* a relational *or* a distributive ideal. In the second part, I question such either/or relation by arguing that relational equality *implies* distributive equality, because arbitrary distributive inequality violates the deliberative constraint of relating as equals. I strengthen this claim by looking at the particular instantiation of distributive inequality in the field of education, and unveil its theoretical implications while supporting the project of reconciling distributive egalitarian and relational egalitarian approaches to justice. In my view, relational and distributive egalitarianism are compatible theories within one and the same egalitarian framework. Their normative outcomes are – at least in part – equivalent.

Introduction

My dissertation is a theoretical project in the field of political philosophy. Its objective is to better understand the distributive implications of relational egalitarianism. I argue that, if taken seriously, relational egalitarianism has egalitarian distributive implications. The reason is that arbitrary distributive inequalities violate one of the necessary conditions of relating as equals: that the equally important interests of individuals equally shape the social decisions conducive to distribution (Scheffler 2015, 35–36).

The relationship between distributive and relational egalitarianism lies at the centre of an ongoing debate. While relational egalitarians, on the one hand, claim that it is the primal aim of justice to secure egalitarian relations among individuals, distributive egalitarians, on the other, stress the urgency of securing individuals an equal share of relevant goods (be they resources, capabilities, welfare or opportunities), the distribution of which is required by justice. Although relational approaches to egalitarian justice have become increasingly prominent among political theorists in recent years, little has been written about their implications for distribution (Schemmel 2011; Moles and Parr 2019). This thesis is my attempt to answer the question of what I believe relational egalitarianism *should* say about distributive justice: that distributive equality has to be secured in order for relational equality to be achieved.

My account goes against the growing tendency, within relational egalitarianism, to reject distributive egalitarian principles in favour of sufficientarian principles of distribution. Specifically, I refute the claim that egalitarian justice requires securing everyone *enough*, rather than *the same amount*, of relevant goods. I primarily address Elizabeth Anderson's

egalitarian approach, as well as relational egalitarian accounts that have built upon her work. I argue that endorsing sufficientarianism while rejecting distributive egalitarian principles from within a relational egalitarian perspective is mistaken. Indeed, taking relational equality seriously means acknowledging arbitrary distributive inequality as a threat to the egalitarian character of individuals' relations. As such, arbitrary inequality is to be neutralised, on relational egalitarian grounds, above and beyond any conceivable standard of sufficiency.

Anderson's critical statement against the egalitarian concern for distribution has significantly shaped the egalitarian debate as being about *either* relational equality *or* distributive equality. Therefore, my defence of distributive equality from a relational perspective is also (and significantly) a rejection of the *either/or* relation between the two approaches, and marks a step toward reconciling them within one and the same egalitarian framework.

Within such a framework, I support an externalist definition of relational equality, whereby "externalist" signals the fact that: whether two or more individuals relate to one another as equals is defined not solely in terms of how they *perceive* or *regard* each other, but also in terms of how goods are distributed among them, that is, by virtue of the distributive policy – external to their relation – from which they benefit or by which they are disadvantaged (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 216).

If my argument is correct, then both theoretical and practical implications follow. On the theoretical level, the claim implies that there is a direct connection between relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism. Indeed, contrary to the prominent assumption that regards the two views as mutually exclusive, I want to demonstrate how they extensionally overlap. On the practical side, one of the key results is that institutions supported by

relational egalitarians should endorse *egalitarian* policies for regulating individuals' share of justice-relevant goods.

In light of what has been said so far, my dissertation contributes to the project of reconciling luck egalitarianism and relational egalitarianism, as favoured by recent contributions (Elford 2017; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018; Moles and Parr 2019), while arguing that the normative significance of distributive equality derives partly from that of relational equality. Therefore, distributive egalitarian and relational egalitarian principles of justice are compatible albeit distinct elements within one and the same comprehensive egalitarian vision.

The scope of my inquiry

My dissertation is within the field of political philosophy. Its main aim is to unveil the distributive implications of relational egalitarianism. To avoid any misunderstandings about the overall goal of my project, it will be useful to clarify from the very outset what I will not be focusing on.

Firstly: I accept the ideal of individuals' moral basic equality, but do not take such ideal to be a presupposition of the argument I provide. More concretely, the idea that individuals are equal in status is a compelling ideal researched in political philosophy. It implies that everyone counts equally, regardless of differences in race, gender, provenience, faith, etc. (Scanlon 2018, 4). The claim I make in this thesis is robust across accounts that deny individuals' moral equality. Indeed, it is conceptually possible for those who deny the moral equality of all human beings to subscribe to the claim that relational egalitarianism has egalitarian distributive implications: the correctness of such a claim depends not on the correctness of relational egalitarianism itself, but rather on the logical implications of its core assumptions.

Similarly, in this work, I do not look at the reasons *why individuals come to value relational equality* in the first place. That is to say, the scope of my analysis does not include a critical engagement with the various and divergent arguments explaining why human beings have come to value their equal status.² Rather, I assume that – as a matter of fact – diverse individuals have been attaching value to the idea of their status equality, most prominently when condemning the asymmetrical, oppressive, discriminatory, exclusionist, and dominative character of their relation, and I ask what their evaluative statement implies in terms of distribution. That is, by engaging with egalitarian literature, I prove that being egalitarian when it comes to the quality of individuals’ relations *necessarily is*, at least in part, committing to an egalitarian distribution of justice-relevant goods among them.

Finally, when focusing on equality, one might be interested in finding out *what it is that makes human beings equal in status* – be it human dignity, human rights, principles of rationality, or autonomy – or properly grasping *what it means that human beings should treat each other as equals*. Let us call these respectively the question of equal standing and the question of equal treatment (Lippert-Rasmussen 2015, 48–49). Answering any of the two questions implies independent analysis, and my work only addresses the latter question.

² Among others, Philip Kitcher claims that equality was already important for our human ancestors, as directed toward issues such as sharing goods and avoiding violence (Kitcher 2011, 11). David Rondel places emphasis on egalitarianism being, at least from a long-term perspective, “strikingly novel and revolutionarily radical” within the human consortium (Rondel 2018, 22), as the belief that something is valuable about equality that might be at odds with evolutionary theory (Ibid, 23).

The ideal approach

The last assumption I make, but do not argue for, is that there is space within political philosophy for ideal theorising. Throughout the dissertation, I adopt an ideal perspective on the requirement of justice without committing to the claim that non-ideal theorising is in any way undesirable. Rather, I understand ideal theorising as unveiling fact-insensitive *pro tanto* reasons of justice, which are to be weighed up within non-ideal, *all things considered*, scenarios. As there is no univocal understanding of what an “ideal” conception of justice is, allow me to briefly specify my understanding with reference to standard terminology.

Perfectionist/Meliorative: An approach to egalitarian justice can be either perfectionist or meliorative (Rondel 2018). It is perfectionist when it aims at answering the question of what a perfectly just society looks like, irrespective of how feasible it is for it to be realised (Ibid). It is meliorative when it focuses on which behavioural or institutional change is to be undertaken for a better, that is, more just, society to be realised (Ibid). I endorse a perfectionist, rather than meliorative, approach to egalitarian justice when understanding political philosophy as enjoying “a certain fact-free purity and timelessness” (Ibid, 32). I do so insofar as I assume that the meaning of justice is specified by fact-independent principles (Miller 2013, 38), and that an accurate understanding of the “perfectly just” is necessary for finding out the kind of improvement(s) a society needs to be more just.

End-state/Transitional: An egalitarian approach to justice might endorse an end-state or a transitional perspective. From an end-state perspective, a normative political theory “should aim at identifying an ideal of societal perfection” (Valentini 2012, 654). From a transitional perspective, rather, it should focus on the transitional improvements which are needed for the ideal of societal perfection to be achieved (Ibid). In accordance with what has

already been said, I endorse an end-state, rather than a transitional, approach to egalitarian justice.

Ideal, end-state approaches to egalitarian justice, as traditionally embraced by distributive egalitarians, have been subjected to some strong critiques. Most vividly, they have been criticised by relational egalitarian scholars, who tend to position their theories on the meliorative, transitional side. Relational egalitarians have argued that distributive egalitarian theories are, qua ideal theories, unsuitable for grasping the point of equality, as they are too far from considerations about the inequality permeating societies in the here and now. Political theorising on what justice requires, critics have argued, needs to consider non-ideal circumstances, as only considerations of the requirements of justice under non-ideal circumstances can offer political guidance. Considered outside of ideal circumstances, ideal theories “are highly implausible, being either too harsh or too soft in their consequences” (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007, 78).

I believe that this critique is mistaken in its understanding of how ideal theorising would take us away from theorising about justice. As I see it, nothing speaks against affirming that political philosophy should provide political guidance under non-ideal circumstances, without refuting that it should have strong circumstances-independent principles at its core.

To visualise, consider how: on a perfectionist/end-point understanding, justice can require securing both individuals A and B a certain good x, even if it is – as a matter of fact – here and now unfeasible for x to be secured to both A and B. Anna and Benjamin might be equally entitled to life-saving drugs, love, or effective chances to become surgeons, for instance, yet it might be unfeasible for the society they live in to provide them both with such goods. Indeed, under current circumstances, life-saving drugs might not be able to save them both, it might be impossible to motivate people around them to

love both Anna and Benjamin, or the poor knowledge of at least one of them might threaten the health conditions of their future patients. In the cases I have mentioned, (1) the social good x is too scarce for both A and B to have it secured (reasons of scarcity); (2) individuals cannot be psychologically motivated to secure both A and B the good x (psychological constraint); or (3) securing both A and B a certain good x might require depriving individuals from a good y as valuable as, or more valuable than, x (reasons of efficiency).

Although reasons of scarcity, individuals' psychological constraints, and efficiency should legitimately shape all-things-considered reasons under non-ideal circumstances, it seems plausible that pro tanto reasons of justice of the most general kind are needed to see why it might be required to change those circumstances (produce as much life-saving drugs as to make it feasible to provide them to both Anne and Benjamin; promoting sentimental education; securing an education system which puts each individual in the condition to be the professional she aspires to be; etc.), if morally permissible ways to do so are available. Accordingly, the kind of ideal theorising I endorse in this thesis is not meant to be an *alternative* to non-ideal theorising, but rather a necessary perspective to take when theorising about justice.

An outline of the manuscript

The presented line of reasoning develops through the thesis as follows. The first chapter aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the current debate on egalitarianism. This debate is defined by the tension between two rival positions: distributive egalitarianism and relational egalitarianism. I claim that the roots of such dispute lie in the relational egalitarian account of Elizabeth Anderson (1999), which rejects distributive equality – particularly luck egalitarianism – in favour of a sufficientarian pattern of distribution. A

project of reconciliation of the luck egalitarian and relational egalitarian approaches to social justice, I state, needs to refute Anderson's sufficientarian move by re-affirming the value of distributive equality from within a relational egalitarian perspective.

Chapter 2 provides a critical examination of the doctrine of sufficiency in light of its compatibility with the framework of relational equality. I claim that the implementation of sufficientarian principles (whereby these are understood as opponents, not complementary, to egalitarian principles) does not suffice to regulate distribution within a society of equals. Indeed, as long as sufficientarian principles allow arbitrary distributive inequality above the sufficientarian threshold, and because arbitrary distributive inequality necessarily corrupts the egalitarian character of individuals' relations, sufficientarian policies are insufficient for securing relational equality.

The third chapter aims at strengthening the main claim of the thesis by looking at one specific instantiation of distributive inequality above sufficiency, namely educational inequality. I engage with the ongoing debate about educational justice, particularly with the two juxtaposed views of educational adequacy and educational equality. My claim is that, as a matter of principle, relational egalitarians should reject mere educational adequacy in favour of educational equality, because the arbitrary educational inequalities allowed by principles of educational adequacy violate the deliberative constraint for relating as equals.

The fourth and final chapter reveals a theoretical implication of the core claim of the thesis: that relational and distributive egalitarianism are compatible, extensionally overlapping views. I provide an exhaustive list of all the conceptually possible overlaps between relational and distributive egalitarianism and clarify their interrelation. With such a list at hand, relational egalitarians should be able to see what binds their theories to

theories of distributive equality, rather than what divides them. This is a change of perspective I wish to initiate with my thinking.

Chapter 1: Egalitarianism between relations and distribution

Roots of the dispute

*S'ode ... passa la Fiumana dell'umanità
genti correte ad ingrossarla. Il restarsi è delitto
filosofo lascia i libri tuoi a metterti alla sua
testa, la guida coi tuoi studi.
Artista con essa ti reca ad alleviarle i dolori colla
bellezza che saprai presentarle
operaio lascia la bottega in cui per lungo lavoro ti
consumi
e con essa ti reca
e tu chi fai? La moglie il pargoletto teco conduci
ad ingrossare
la fiumana dell'Umanità assetata di
giustizia – di quella giustizia conculcata fin qui
e che ora miraggio lontano splende.³*

Poem by Giuseppe Pellizza Da Volpedo

³ While painting what would become one of the most powerful paintings on egalitarian social movements, *The Fourth Estate*, Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo writes a poem of social commitment in the canvas. This is dedicated “to the emergence of ‘ordinary folk who swell the rising tide of Humanity’ (in Italian, *genti corrette ad ingrossar [la Fiumana dell’umanità]*) where refusal to get involved is a crime. In a clear nod to Karl Marx, Pellizza’s poem (...) urges philosophers to leave their books behind and lead a movement that has been long in coming and now heads steadfastly and unwaveringly toward the blazing sun of righteousness and justice” (Mayayo i Artal 2018, 79–80).

Introduction

It is my overall aim to show that relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism are *compatible*, though distinct, theories of egalitarian justice, where “compatible” means that they have (at least in part) equivalent prescriptions, although for different ultimate reasons. Why, however, should there be doubts about the compatibility of distributive and relational egalitarian approaches in the first place? And why, indeed, is reaffirming that compatibility of normative relevance?

My aim in this first chapter is to reconstruct the debate on social equality as a debate about an imperative to side with *either* distributive *or* relational equality. The *either/or* framing assumes the mutual exclusivity of the two approaches: “distributive” egalitarianism on the one side, according to which individuals’ equality confers on them certain *distributive* entitlements, and “relational” egalitarianism on the other side, according to which those distributive entitlements are not of primary concern. When it comes to distributive equality, I consider only one variety of distributive egalitarianism, that is “luck egalitarianism”. I do so mainly for two reasons. The first is that relational egalitarians prominently take luck egalitarianism as their target of criticism (Anderson 1999, 2004, 2014; Scheffler 2003, 2015), and indeed relational egalitarianism itself has been introduced in reaction to luck egalitarian positions (Gheaus 2018b, 55). The second reason is that its competitor distributive account, that is Rawlsianism, is often – and in my eyes legitimately – interpreted as a form of relational egalitarianism itself. And indeed prominent relational egalitarians themselves have interpreted their own theory as inspired by, and compatible with, Rawls’ work (Scheffler 2003).

My approach in this chapter is primarily descriptive when it comes to delineating the core claims of luck egalitarian and relational egalitarian

justice, as well as when reconstructing how egalitarian theorists came to think about the two positions as mutually exclusive approaches to egalitarian justice. My line of argumentation is normative, however, when it comes to (i) affirming my own understanding of luck egalitarianism, and (ii) stating that the deep rupture between luck- and relational egalitarianism is rooted in the relational egalitarian rejection of egalitarian principles of distribution in favour of distributive principles other than principles of equality.

The descriptive approach consists of a chronological reconstruction of distributive and relational egalitarian theories of justice as challenging and answering one another over time. Although it might be desirable to have a conceptually more rigorous distinction between the two approaches, I share David Rondel's doubts about how much precision in such a distinction is tenable (Rondel 2018, 24). Concretely, strong reservations regarding the tenability of the distinction point at the vastness of the philosophical terrain distributive and relational egalitarianism cover (Ibid, 25). As very diverse theories count as relational or distributive egalitarian, disagreement emerges among the theorists supporting them, on what a relational or distributive egalitarian position should look like. Convergence on a definition is hardly achievable, therefore, and any attempt to provide one is necessarily accompanied by a certain degree of "indeterminacy, vagueness, and imprecision" (Ibid). Despite this, thanks to the descriptive approach we can emphasise a significant shift of interest, within the egalitarian philosophical tradition, from issues of distribution *only* to issues *beyond* distribution, particularly social domination and oppression, as adumbrated in the writings of Iris Marion Young (Young 1990) and Jonathan Wolff (Wolff 1998, 2010).

My normative claim states that the expansion of the egalitarian horizon *beyond* issues of distribution is in no sense *a rejection* of the egalitarian distributive concern, but only a revision of it. Indeed, there is no logical inconsistency between defending distributive equality *and* at the same time

supporting individuals' status equality. That said, the deep rupture between distributive and relational egalitarian attitudes to justice is to be found somewhere other than in the urge to acknowledge their equal entitlements beyond distribution. In particular, I claim that the roots of such dispute lie in the *rejection* of distributive egalitarianism in favour of principles other than equality from a relational egalitarian perspective.

Identifying the roots of the dispute between relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism is indispensable for engaging in the project of reconciling the two views. It is so, because – to succeed – such project needs to question the reasons why relational and distributive egalitarian approaches to justice are conceived as mutually exclusive positions.

In seeking to shed light on such reasons, I proceed in this chapter as follows. Firstly, I define the ideal of equality as a political ideal to be realised in society, and emphasise how, in the history of egalitarian struggles, this has entailed a commitment both in favour of an egalitarian redistribution of resources and wealth, and against the oppressive and dominating relations entailed in the hierarchical structures of society. In the second and third section, I undertake a deeper analysis of what are commonly acknowledged as rival interpretations of the egalitarian ideal: distributive egalitarianism on the one side (section 2), relational egalitarianism on the other (section 3) in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the nature of the debate. Besides reconstructing the two views, I articulate my own understanding of them, particularly when it comes to the currency of distributive egalitarian justice (section 2.1), and the project of a critical revision of luck egalitarianism from a relational perspective (section 3.2). Finally, I challenge Elizabeth Anderson's relational account, which is egalitarian in the sphere of individuals' relations, but sufficientarian when it comes to individuals' distributive entitlements. I state that the mutual exclusivity of distributive and relational equality depends on the hypothetical soundness of embracing equality in the relational

sphere, while rejecting it in the distributive one as in Anderson's view. Some concluding remarks follow.

1. Equality as a political ideal

I open this chapter with a brief overview on equality as a political idea. I am not an historian, and I am aware the analysis I can offer is far from complete. Yet I believe (i) that academic egalitarian theorising should re-establish connections with the social egalitarian movements struggling for egalitarian justice, as Elizabeth Anderson powerfully states (Anderson 1999, 337), and (ii) that the re-connection of egalitarian theory and egalitarian history might be promising – contrarily to Anderson's assumptions – for unveiling the extensional overlap between relational and distributive egalitarians' claims of justice. A conceptual analysis of *what* individuals have been demanding, when struggling for egalitarian justice, begins with section 2.

It is impossible to date when human beings started to develop a genuine aspiration⁴ for social equality. It is reasonable to ask whether such aspiration actually belongs to their nature (Bohem 2011), emerged as an answer to certain historical circumstances, or inherently belongs to the human project of living together (Kitcher 2011). What is peculiar, in the recent history, is that starting from the 17th century, more and more powerful groups of citizens have been challenging their political institutions in the name of equality (Anderson 2014). In particular, consider the struggle for liberties and equality of the Levellers' movement during the English Civil War: The English

⁴ I hereby use the term "aspiration for social equality" when referring to a complex entity comprising both psychological attitudes and sophisticated ideals. These, admittedly, could have appeared in different forms at different times and in different places in history. I thank Lorenzo del Savio for pointing me to this.

Levellers, who found representatives in John Lilburn, Richard Overton, William Wallwyn, Gerard Winstanley and others, challenged the control of the English Parliament, demanding the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords. Representing the aspirations of working people and of those who suffered the persecutions of kings, landowners, and the priestly class⁵, the Levellers spoke against poverty and deprivation, struggling for a political settlement that would embody principles of equality:

We, the free People of England, to whom God hath given hearts, means and opportunity to effect the same, do with submission to his wisdom, in his name, and desiring the equity thereof may be to his praise and glory, agree to ascertain our Government to abolish all arbitrary Power, and to set bounds and limits both to our Supreme, and all Subordinate Authority, and remove all known Grievances. (Preamble to the third draft of the Agreement of the People, published on 1 May 1649)

Not only the Levellers, but also many other social movements over time have shared the understanding of equality as a political ideal. Consider, for instance, how the egalitarian spirit found its voice during the American and French revolutions, in the abolitionist campaigns, the struggles for gender equality and equal civic rights for LGBTQIA communities, the recognition of marginalised groups within different past and present societies, etc.

Besides finding a voice in the social struggles, equality as a political ideal has gained significant attention among political scholars and philosophers. Different philosophical traditions have endorsed equality in specific domains: Kantians and utilitarians, anarchists and Marxists, liberals and libertarians, communitarians, feminists, and cosmopolitans are just some of the

⁵ See BBC History, by Tony Benn (2011, 02, 07): https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/civil_war_revolution/benn_levellers_01.shtml

prominent philosophical currents, which endorse equality at least in certain domains (Rondel 2018, 22). Still, “being in favour of equality” has been interpreted in such a broad variety of ways that “being egalitarian” has come to be compatible with very distinct moral and political principles (Rondel 2018, 21).

In this manuscript, I focus on two interpretations of equality: equality as a distributive ideal; and equality as a relational ideal. These two interpretations, supported by – respectively – distributive egalitarians and relational egalitarians, can be briefly summarised as follows: Relational egalitarianism (particularly in the liberal thinking of some of its most prominent defenders such as John Rawls, Samuel Scheffler, and Elizabeth Anderson) reads equality from a “vertical” perspective (Rondel 2018, 28–29). Accordingly, equality concerns how individuals are treated by their institutions, and individuals’ struggle for equality is a fight against hierarchical institutional structures oppressing and dominating their citizens (Ibid). Distributive egalitarianism, on the other hand, approaches social equality by embracing a “horizontal” understanding (Ibid) with its roots in readings of Marx and Engels. According to the distributive understanding, it is the pre-institutional relations between individuals that are at the core of a proper egalitarian concern, and their ability to justify to one another the distribution of advantages and disadvantages among them (Ibid; Cohen 2008). Henceforth, the egalitarian society is one in which individuals are able to justify to one another the principles on which they regulate the distribution of goods relevant to justice (Cohen 2008).

To better visualise the differences between distributive and relational ideals of equality, we may employ the example of interpreting the struggles of the Third Estate during the French Revolution. From a relational perspective, we might affirm that individuals struggling for equality primarily were in opposition to the dominant hierarchical structure of the French monarchy,

claiming the right for equal standing in society (vertical approach). From a distributive egalitarian perspective, however, we might want to emphasise that the Third Estate was struggling for a redistribution of wealth and a fairer system of taxation, which would not arbitrarily disadvantage one social class for the benefit of the others (horizontal approach).

The intuition inspiring and permeating the whole of this manuscript is that the two interpretations of the egalitarian struggles, as in the case of the French Revolution, are intimately interrelated. Indeed, on my reading, egalitarian struggles have *necessarily* been struggles in favour of full equality, where “necessarily” specifies a logical dependence of the struggles for distributive equality upon those for relational equality. This is because the fight against social hierarchies *always and indispensably implies* a fight against the unfair distribution of privileges attached to these. Indeed, an unequal distribution of the relevant good, when unjustified, would display the existence of an unequal status among individuals, and make them privileged and unprivileged, rather than equals.

Accordingly, the agenda of egalitarianism in its political dimension is significantly pluralist, as it is indeed broader than matters of distributive justice alone (Anderson 2014), but – as I aim to show in this manuscript – it is also broader than matters of relational justice too.

2. Equality as a distributive ideal

In the previous section, I introduced the historical dimension of equality as a political value to be realised in society. As my approach is normative, however, from now on I shall shift from the understanding of equality as a political ideal that social movements such as the Levellers or the Abolitionists

were struggling for, to a conceptual analysis of *what* egalitarianism demands. A first attempt to answer such question is: *equal distribution*.

The human community primarily is a distributive community: one in which individuals share, divide, and exchange goods with one another (Walzer 1983, ch.1). Individuals' claims to an equal share of these goods has most commonly been justified in their equal moral worth, that is in the belief that distributive equality is the best way to realise individuals' basic moral equality (Lamont and Favor 2017). Theories of distributive egalitarian justice, however, vary from one another. In particular, they offer different answers to the questions of how to define the scope of egalitarian distributive justice, the value attached to it, and the justice relevant good – that is whether resources, welfare and/or opportunities are what need to be equally distributed according to justice.

In this section, I focus on one specific theory of distributive egalitarian justice, that is luck egalitarianism. I do so, because the egalitarian debate identifies in luck egalitarianism *the opponent* of relational egalitarianism: a view which has been validated by the claims of diverse relational egalitarian scholars (Anderson 1999; Scheffler 2003, 2015; Satz 2007; Scanlon 2018). While presenting luck egalitarianism (LE), I proceed as follows: firstly, I provide a definition of LE by focusing on the concept of luck (section 2.1); secondly, I present one of the most pressing objections against LE, that is the harshness objection (section 2.2); and finally, I deal with this objection (section 2.3).

2.1 Luck Egalitarianism and its focus on luck

Luck egalitarianism is a theory of distributive justice, whose core claim is that it is unjust for one person to be worse off than another through no fault of her own (Temkin 2009, 157; Cohen 2008, 7, 300). The concern for relative

fairness lies at the core of LE: luck egalitarians, indeed, object to arbitrary inequality, because they believe that it is bad, and therefore unfair (Temkin 2009, 157), when someone suffers a relative disadvantage through no fault, or choice, of their own (Ibid).

The term “luck egalitarianism”, firstly coined by Elizabeth Anderson (1999), emphasises LE’s supposed aim “to eliminate the impact of brute luck from human affairs” (Ibid, 288–89). Although the term originally had a pejorative connotation – insofar as it should have revealed the excessive attention paid to luck by distributive egalitarians – it is currently used to identify the theories of many contemporary distributive egalitarians including Cohen, Dworkin, and Arneson. I will use the term from now on in this neutral manner.

The luck egalitarian focus on *luck* relates to its commitment against individuals’ lives being unequally shaped by luck, rather than choice. That is, LE objects to one particular form of bad luck, that is one which is not reducible to individuals’ choices or efforts. Bad brute luck – as it is called – distinguishes itself from bad option luck in the following terms: while the latter is “a matter of deliberate and calculated gambles” (Dworkin 2000, 73), the former is the luck resulting from non-voluntarily run risks. From a luck egalitarian perspective, only the impact of bad brute luck on individuals’ lives is to be neutralised: if a person’s relative disadvantage is the result of her safe choices, then her being worse off than another is not unfair. Only if such disadvantage is something she could not have predicted, nor insured against, is it unjust for her to bear it (Ibid).

To visualise, suppose that I have received a worse grade than Anna in Monday’s maths exam. All other things being equal, Anna has been studying for the exam over the weekend, while I have been partying with friends; this is the reason behind our unequal marks. Matthew also received a worse grade

than Anna in Monday's maths exam. All other things being equal, our maths teacher likes Anna much more than Matthew; this is the reason behind their unequal marks. Now, both my grade and Matthew's are worse than Anna's. In my case, however, I had the option to prepare for the exam, which I chose not to use. That is, my relative disadvantage is an outcome of my bad choice. Yet, in Matthew's case, his being worse off than Anna in no way relates to his wrongful choices or reckless behaviour. On the contrary, it reflects the impact of bad brute luck in his life. As such – and differently than my relative disadvantage to Anna – Matthew's inequality to Anna is unfair, and should be neutralised.

The example I have just provided displays one among a variety of ways in which bad brute luck might impact individuals' lives. In the next lines, I shall differentiate – following Lippert-Rasmussen (2015, 56–57) – four forms of bad brute luck, that is *resultant*, *circumstantial*, *constitutive*, and *antecedent causal* bad brute luck.

- We define *resultant* bad brute luck when the outcomes of individuals' actions are impacted by circumstances outside of their control. This might be the case of a virologist who ends up in miserable conditions after investing all of her resources in finding the cure to an epidemic disease, which – against everyone's expectations – never expands.
- We identify *circumstantial* bad brute luck when the differentially favourable conditions in which two individuals act prevent one from ending up as well off as the other. This might be the case of two individuals signing up for different contracts: one for an advantageous contract, the other for a disadvantageous one; while the only reason for signing the disadvantageous contract is a condition of severe economic need.

- We identify *constitutive* bad brute luck when luck defines the kind of persons we are. This might be the case of an individual being worse off than another due to the genetic patrimony he inherited at birth.
- We identify *antecedent causal* bad brute luck when luck shapes the antecedent circumstances which determine individuals' actions. This might be the case of two individuals being, respectively, a smoker and a non-smoker, whereby it is the different social conditions in which the two have been raised which have significantly shaped their attitudes toward smoking.

When referring to luck egalitarianism in this thesis, I refer to the family of those theories of distributive justice, which hold that justice requires neutralising the impact of any of the four aforementioned forms of bad brute luck on individuals' lives.

For reasons of completeness, I shall mention that, on a more radical luck egalitarian view, not only differential brute luck matters, but also differential option luck. As defended by Carl Knight (2013), for instance, all-luck egalitarianism allows only a few cases of inequalities, namely those which result from individuals' direct choices. Also, the strong normative commitment to the neutralisation of the impact of luck on individuals' lives is not shared by other luck egalitarian theories. In particular, luck egalitarian scholars such as Peter Vallentyne claim that justice is about *securing equal starting conditions to all*. That is, justice requires that inequalities in brute outcome luck are equalised, but only to the extent that they impact individuals' starting conditions. Proving the superiority – or inferiority – of equality of brute luck over equality of initial opportunities would require an independent work. And it is not the aim of my thesis to provide this. When referring to luck egalitarianism, however, I do not refer to principles of equal

initial conditions. Indeed, I assume that they bring significant problems that alternative luck egalitarian views do not face⁶.

2.2 The harshness objection

Luck egalitarianism has been strongly criticised by supporters of rival egalitarian positions. In this and the following section, I focus on one specific objection against LE: the harshness objection. I do so, because this is considered to be the most compelling reason to reject luck egalitarianism in favour of alternative positions, particularly relational egalitarianism.⁷

According to the harshness objection, luck egalitarianism is insensitive to the suffering of “bad option luck’s victims”, where “bad option luck’s victims” are those individuals who end up worse off than others due to their poor choices or reckless behaviours. In the following paragraphs, I reconstruct the objection as it is presented in the literature. Furthermore, I defend LE from the harshness objection by advancing the claim that LE is a view about justice, and not one about all-things-considered moral goodness, or permissibility (Lippert-Rasmussen 2015, 3). Adopting luck egalitarianism, I claim, does not require abandoning the victims of bad option luck to their miserable fate.

⁶ For further references, see Barry 1989, 224n and Lippert-Rasmussen 2015, 70.

⁷ I engage with the harshness objection, prior to the question of the currency of luck egalitarian justice (section 2.3), because the objection is independent of such question. Indeed, it rejects the luck egalitarian attitude toward bad option luck victims, that is the luck egalitarian concern for relative fairness as reconstructed in the previous section of this chapter. For an analysis of the currency of distributive egalitarian justice, please go to the third section of this chapter.

2.2.1 Reconstructing the objection

According to the harshness objection, luck egalitarianism is insensitive to the suffering of the worse off when their relative disadvantage is an outcome of their poor choices, rather than their bad brute luck (Fleurbaey 1995; Anderson 1999):

Luck egalitarians tell the victims of very bad option luck that, having chosen to run their risks, they deserve their misfortune, so society need not secure them against destitution and exploitation. (Anderson 1999, 301)

In the literature, the objection is accompanied by examples, such as that of hikers in flip-flops, who need to be rescued in the Bavarian Alps (Gheaus 2018a), or that of motorbike riders, who love to drive without a helmet, and end up in need of healthcare provision (Voigt 2007). For those advancing the objection, it holds that: even if the rescue of the hikers, or the healthcare provision for the drivers, were minimally costly for society, luck egalitarians should deny those forms of help, because the condition of need of both the hikers and the drivers is a result of their choice (Ibid, 390; Anderson 1999, 296), and not the impact of bad brute luck on their lives. If, however, it is unjust to abandon individuals in need to their fates, as a largely shared understanding of justice suggests, and luck egalitarianism requires us not to do so, then luck egalitarianism should be rejected, as it is not in accordance with our intuitions about justice-based demands.

2.2.2 The harshness objection misplaced

The expressive power of the harshness objection often depends on the examples that accompany its presentation. Yet these do not always make a

proper case against luck egalitarianism on harshness grounds, as they do not always display individuals' lives as being shaped by option luck. Consider, for instance, the dependent caretaker's example offered by Elizabeth Anderson:

[D]ependent caretakers, who are almost all women, tend to be either financially dependent on a wage earner, dependent on welfare payments, or extremely poor. (...) [Luck egalitarianism] implies that this poverty and resulting subordination is by choice and therefore generates no claims of justice on others. (...) If women don't want to be subject to such poverty and vulnerability, they shouldn't choose to have children. (Anderson 1999, 297)

Why – however – should the caretakers' relative disadvantage display an instance of bad option luck? The fact that most dependent caretakers are women, and vulnerable individuals in society, strengthens the opposite claim that the relative disadvantage they suffer follows from circumstances outside of their control – for instance, their gender and social vulnerability, among others. For dependent caretakers to be bad option luck victims, indeed, it needs to hold that dependent caretakers have a safe (or genuine) chance – that is, a chance whose costs are reasonable to bear (Wolff and de-Shalit 2007, 80) – to be entrepreneurs rather than caretakers, to go to work instead of taking care of their babies, disabled children or elderly parents. If this – as I believe – is rarely the case, that is, if taking care of a disabled child, or an ill parent, is not “a” choice, but – in many cases – the only reasonable choice for one to take, then the relative disadvantage resulting from that choice cannot be – on a luck egalitarian view – fair to bear. And it cannot be so, since it is the result of luck on the dependent caretakers' lives, not of their choice. Therefore, dependent caretakers have, on LE, a redistributive claim of justice toward others. This denies any harshness toward the independent caretakers.

2.2.3 Different interpretations of the harshness objection⁸

When the harshness objection truly addresses cases of bad option luck, it does so out of different concerns. In their recent paper “What is the Point of the Harshness Objection?”, Andreas Albertsen and Lasse Nielsen point to four different attacks moved to luck egalitarianism on the ground of harshness:

First, that it involves a mismatch with commonly shared intuitions about distributive justice. Second, that it allows outcomes with too bad consequences. Third, that it leads to situations in which the relationship between people’s exercise of responsibility and the outcome thereof is disproportional. Fourth, that the conclusions of luck egalitarianism are inconsistent with showing everyone equal concern and respect, the moral foundation on which any plausible egalitarian theory should rely. (Albertsen and Nielsen 2020, 2)

To distinguish between the four attacks, consider the following thought experiment:

Bert has received a normal and balanced upbringing, but he has freely adopted a negligent and reckless character. In particular, he enjoys having his hair blown by the wind when he rides his motorbike on the highway, and he seldom wears a helmet even though he has one and it is compulsory to wear it. One morning he takes out his motorbike to pay a visit to his parents, and, on leaving them, spurns his mother’s warnings about the helmet, saying: “I prefer to take the risk and enjoy the wind!” But on this particular morning, Bert’s careless driving causes an accident, in which he

⁸ This section follows the argumentation of Andreas Albertsen and Lasse Nielsen in their recent paper “What is the Point of the Harshness Objection?”. I thank both authors for making their draft available to me.

suffers serious head injuries. The hospital diagnoses a trauma which requires a costly operation Bert cannot afford because he has no health insurance. He will die if nothing is done. In this case, the equal opportunity principle would not endorse any transfer of resources to help Bert. He is fully responsible for his injury. (Fleurbaey 1995, 40)

The first attack against luck egalitarianism on the ground of harshness is on a mere intuitive level. It states that luck egalitarianism is unable to capture the largely shared intuition on which we should grant Bert assistance, independently of the fact that he is responsible for his miserable conditions (Albertsen and Nielsen, manuscript). The second attack goes in a similar direction: it states that luck egalitarianism is too harsh, because it allows for Bert's suffering (Ibid). Accordingly, it is the fact that luck egalitarianism allows for individuals' deprivation or suffering which makes an implausible distributive view out of it. On a third understanding, the harshness objection objects to luck egalitarianism because of the disproportion between the suffering it allows and individuals' mistaken choices (Ibid). Accordingly, luck egalitarianism is to be refuted not because it does not require compensating for Bert's suffering, but because it allows for the latter, although it is disproportional to the mistake Bert made. Finally, on a fourth and last interpretation, the harshness objection holds that luck egalitarianism is inconsistent with the core egalitarian assumption, according to which everyone should be treated with equal respect and concern (Ibid; Anderson 1999). Accordingly, by not providing Bert with assistance, luck egalitarianism treats him with disrespect. This is inconsistent with the core assumption of any egalitarian theory, on which equal respect is owed to all. Therefore, luck egalitarianism should be rejected as a theory of egalitarian distributive justice.

2.2.4 Dealing with the harshness objection

Defending luck egalitarianism from the harshness objection implies engaging with the different attacks the objection covers. This requires an independent work, which lies outside of the scope of this thesis. In the end, it is not my aim to show that luck egalitarianism per se is a defensible theory of distributive justice. But rather that relational egalitarianism has distributive implications which are egalitarian, and possibly luck egalitarian.

In this last section on the harshness objection, however, allow me to look at some plausible ways in which luck egalitarian scholars have defended their views, to show how a defence of luck egalitarianism from the harshness objection is conceptually possible.

Recent luck egalitarian literature has confronted the harshness objection by questioning whether luck egalitarianism indeed commits one to harshness in any of the four aforementioned ways (Kaufman 2004; Knight 2005; Gheaus 2018b). Consider, again, the miserable condition of Bert, who finds himself in need of medical assistance after voluntarily running the risk of driving his motorcycle without a helmet (Fleurbaey 1995, 40). The harshness objection holds if and only if luck egalitarianism requires not compensating Bert for his relative disadvantage to others; or not providing him with medical assistance. Indeed, luck egalitarianism states that, given that the hardship of Bert's condition is an outcome of his choices, Bert is not in the position to make any claims of distributive justice to his fellows. That is, it may be just, by luck egalitarian lights, to invest resources in purposes other than providing medical assistance to Bert.

A more accurate understanding of the luck egalitarian commitment, however, can allow the refutation of such a conclusion. Indeed, luck egalitarianism is a theory with a narrow scope. It deals with questions of distributive justice only. As such, it is not the proper context for answering questions of assistance and

rescue. These might be as strong as, maybe even stronger than, reasons of distributive justice. Yet they are distinct from questions of distribution.⁹

If this is correct, then it can be argued that luck egalitarianism can reject the harshness objection by embracing pluralism: by acknowledging that, as a partial theory of justice, luck egalitarianism does not (nor does it wish to) cover the whole of justice, but rather is to be situated among a plural set of theories in that field.

Furthermore, it seems misleading to claim that a commitment to luck egalitarian justice excludes further justice-based commitments. Most relevantly, a justice-based concern for securing everyone enough would require rescuing Bert, and all victims of bad option luck, and bringing them up to a sufficientarian threshold. This is not logically incompatible with the justice-based concern for relative fairness which – for instance – might require that, once the imprudent has enough, she has to cover the expenses for her rescue or medical assistance. And, indeed, more than one luck egalitarian scholar has endorsed the positive sufficientarian view, on which everyone should be granted enough, without abandoning a concern for luck egalitarian justice above the sufficiency threshold. Among others, Kok-Chor Tan suggests that luck egalitarianism – as a theory of social justice – provides reasons to fight distributive inequalities between individuals who already meet a minimal threshold at which their basic needs are met, that is, fighting inequalities “over and above those [goods] that persons need for basic subsistence” (Tan 2008, 670); Shlomi Segall suggests that a justice-based requirement to securing individuals’ basic needs follows from their equal moral worth, and as such it necessarily is to be coupled with the commitments of luck egalitarianism:

⁹ This is my own reconstruction of a standard answer provided by luck egalitarians to reject the harshness objection (cf. Tan 2008).

This is a moral requirement that is external, and prior (in the sense of being more fundamental), to the one of egalitarian distributive justice. The moral requirement to meet basic needs coupled with luck egalitarian distributive justice thus requires us to treat imprudent patients who are needy. (Segall 2009, 69)

In sum, it seems plausible to deal with the harshness objection by endorsing pluralism. Accordingly, adopting luck egalitarianism does not commit one to abandoning the victims of bad option luck to their fate. Although it might require making them pay for their rescue once they are safe.

In a pluralist understanding of justice, furthermore, the responsibility-tracking character of the luck egalitarian principles gives them a particular strength. The principles provide practical guidance in circumstances in which (a) individuals are in need of rescue, but (b) rescue cannot be secured to everyone, and (c) issues of responsibility are pertinent to the case. Consider a peculiar case study provided by Richard Arneson in his “Luck Egalitarianism and Prioritarianism”:

Suppose that a national park service rescue team can choose just one of three lifesaving missions. Each involves significant risk of severe harm to rescue workers but promises a significant net saving of lives. Suppose these risks and benefits are the same for each of the three rival missions. The park rescue team must choose either to assist (a) a party of stranded schoolchildren caught in an unanticipated blizzard while on a school outing, (b) a party of experienced climbers who carefully chose to pursue a difficult route under hazardous conditions which then suddenly turned desperate, or (c) a party of tourists who ignored warning signs and the stern advice of park rangers to venture on a foolhardy hike across a

treacherous steep slope, rendered more treacherous by their mid-hike alcohol consumption. (Arneson 2000, 348)

On Arneson's view, we need principles of distributive justice, which can provide guidance concerning how to distribute resources in scenarios where choices need to be made. The responsibility-catering commitment in the luck egalitarian theory, according to Arneson, *does succeed in providing such guidance* by suggesting that:¹⁰

the fully voluntary choice of the climbers to shoulder the risk they take and the grossly reckless conduct of the hikers reduce their moral claims to be aided by comparison with the claim of the stranded schoolchildren. (Ibid)

That is, the luck egalitarian critical standing toward remediating for the sufferings of bad option luck's victims is a necessary feature that any principles of distributive justice should have for providing guidance in circumstances of scarce resources. Indeed, principles of fair distribution need to state that the choices that result in some individuals ending up worse off than others are relevant for defining the strength of their all-things-considered entitlement to distributive justice.

To conclude: I have reconstructed in the previous paragraphs luck egalitarianism as a *distributive egalitarian* approach to justice. After delineating the position and its focus on luck, I have dealt with the most prominent objection that rival egalitarian positions have moved against luck egalitarianism, namely the harshness objection. Finally, I have defended the

¹⁰ To avoid unnecessary objections, I shall add that Arneson is purposely putting aside considerations on how to (dis)incentivise the behaviours of future park visitors.

responsibility-sensitiveness¹¹ of luck egalitarianism in light of its potential to guide decisions when it comes to pursuing distributive justice under circumstances of serious scarcity.

2.3 The currency of distribution: equality of what?

All distributive theories of justice need to answer one pressing question: if justice requires securing each her due, what is “her due” about? In this section, I pay attention to the most prominent debate within luck egalitarianism: the one concerning the *currency* of egalitarian distribution.

I proceed as follows: I enumerate five alternative answers to the question of what it is that should be equally distributed amongst individuals, that is, resources (Dworkin 1981; 2000), well-being (Synowich 2014), opportunities for welfare (Arneson 1989), capabilities (Nussbaum 2000), and access to advantage (Cohen 1989). In the end, I commit to a pluralist understanding of the metric.

2.3.1 Resources

There is considerable disagreement among political philosophers on what it is that we should look at when evaluating whether one state of affairs is more or less just than another (Brighouse and Robeyns 2010, 1). Particularly, luck egalitarians have been facing the question of *what* it is that justice requires

¹¹ A theory’s responsibility-sensitiveness clarifies its degree of tolerance toward inequalities for which individuals are responsible: the more responsibility-sensitive a theory, the less committed it is to neutralising inequalities resulting from individuals’ choices and risks they take voluntarily.

the equal distribution of, assuming that a just distribution is one which secures each individual her fair share (Cohen 2008, 8). They have offered different accounts of what is called the *currency*, or *metric*, of egalitarian justice.

In *Sovereign Virtue*, Dworkin argues that the ideal of equality requires the equal division of resources among individuals. To test whether or not individuals enjoy equality of resources, Dworkin introduces what he calls the envy test:

Suppose a number of shipwreck survivors are washed up on a desert island which has abundant resources and no native population, and any likely rescue is many years away. These immigrants accept the principle that no one is antecedently entitled to any of these resources, but that they shall instead be divided equally among them ... They also accept (at least provisionally) the following test of an equal division of resources, which I shall call the envy test. No division of resources is an equal division if, once the division is complete, any immigrant would prefer someone else's bundle of resources to his own bundle. (Dworkin 2000, 66–67)

Accordingly, equality of resources is secured if and only if, once everyone has their bundle of resources, no one would envy his or her neighbour for his or her bundle.

Resourcist approaches have been criticised for not giving proper consideration to what individuals need resources for, or how much of them individuals have a genuine interest in obtaining. To see this, consider how, if justice required to secure the same bundle of resources to two individuals, one of which suffered a severe disability, the implementation of principles of justice would disadvantage the disabled and advantage his fellow. As it would

be unfair, however, for the disabled to be arbitrarily disadvantaged as in the spirit of luck egalitarian justice, the statement according to which the latter requires securing equal amounts of resources is to be questioned.

A deeper reading of Dworkin's envy test offers answers to the critiques. In particular, Dworkin believes the envy test to be a necessary, yet not sufficient, condition for distributive equality to be secured among individuals (Lippert-Rasmussen 2015, 14). Therefore, he combines the envy test with a market mechanism in the form of an auction (Dworkin 2000, 68). According to such mechanism, individuals are granted the opportunity to acquire the bundle of resources they have an interest in obtaining (Ibid). That is, the envy test is applied – on a counterfactual example – after the hypothetical auction is completed (Lippert-Rasmussen 2015, 14). Also, the envy test is to be combined, according to Dworkin, with an insurance scheme, which ensures that differences in internal endowments do not force individuals to have smaller bundles of resources than others through no fault of their own:

If (contrary to fact) everyone had at the appropriate age the same risk of developing physical or mental handicaps in the future (which assumes that no one has developed these yet) but that the total number of handicaps remained what it is, how much insurance coverage against these handicaps would the average member of the community purchase? We might then say that but for (uninsurable) brute luck that has altered these equal odds, the average person would have purchased insurance at that level, and compensate those who do develop handicaps accordingly, out of some fund collected by taxation or other compulsory process but designed to match the fund that would have been provided through premiums if the odds had been equal. Those who develop handicaps will then have more resources at their command than others, but the extent of their extra resources will be fixed by the

market decisions that people would supposedly have made if circumstances had been more equal than they are. Of course, this argument does involve the fictitious assumption that everyone who suffers handicaps would have bought the average amount of insurance, and we may wish to refine the argument and the strategy so that that no longer holds. But it does not seem an unreasonable assumption for this purpose as it stands. (Dworkin 2000, 77–78)

Assuming that the market mechanism, together with the insurance scheme, succeed in preventing equality of resources from being insensitive to individuals' needs and preferences, we can identify the following strengths of the principle. Firstly, equality of resources endorses a metric of justice, resources, which is objectively measurable, that is, a metric which is possible to measure according to an objective scale. This makes the metric particularly attractive for those interested in policymaking and the implementation of justice in society. Secondly, the ideal of equality of resources remains neutral toward individuals' conception of the good. That is, due to the choice of metric, the principle requires equalising the means through which individuals aspire to realise their own conception of the good.¹²

2.3.2 Well-being

What seems to be one of the main strengths of resources as a metric of justice also risks being a weakness. Particularly, it might seem troublesome for an understanding of distributive egalitarian justice not to tackle human well-being as the ultimate end, but only the means through which individuals would achieve it. Shifting from resources to well-being in a luck egalitarian

¹² I thank Anca Gheaus for pointing me to this.

tradition is affirming that distributive inequality is to be neutralised because of how it damages human flourishing:

Ultimately, the answer to our question, “equality of what?” is flourishing, since whatever policies or principles we adopt, it is flourishing, or wellbeing, that we hope will be more equal as a result of our endeavours. (Synowich 2014, 178)

Defining the currency of distributive justice as one of flourishing is in line with the welfarist understanding, according to which our interest in equality exists *because* arbitrary inequality unfairly impacts the quality of individuals’ lives, making some, out of no fault of their own, worse off than others.

There are at least two rival ways of understanding welfare: one material and the other wish-based (Hansson and Grüne-Yanoff 2018). In the former:

a person’s welfare is a matter of her material conditions, such as access to food, shelter, healthcare and, generally speaking, the necessities and perhaps luxuries of life. (Ibid)

As such, the conception has been criticised for overemphasising the importance of material goods over other values which give meaning to individuals’ lives, such as their freedom, moral integrity, etc. (Ibid). On the wish-based understanding, rather, welfare is dependent on the agent’s mental state:

A person is considered to have more welfare, the more her wishes are satisfied. (Ibid)

As such, the welfarist understanding of the currency presents epistemic difficulties as it relies not on an objective basis – as the material one does –

but rather on the subjective evaluations of individuals by virtue of their happiness and preferences (Ibid).

Strictly related to this is the expensive taste problem (Cohen 1989). Consider how, in a society in which all individuals enjoy the same level of welfare, some of them might deliberately start cultivating goals that are more expensive to pursue than those of others (Dworkin 2000, 48–59). Suppose, for instance, that Louis deliberately develops a preference for expensive food, so that he is only happy when eating caviar and drinking champagne. Would a distributive policy that takes away (part of) Louis' fellows' savings to ensure the satisfaction of Louis' expensive tastes be enforced in light of what distributive egalitarian justice requires? Compensating Louis for his expensive taste would put a significant burden on his fellows. According to Dworkin, equality of welfare is implausible, because it conflicts with the justice-based desideratum of a metric which remains neutral toward individuals' ambitions (Dworkin 2000, 56). This, however, does not apply to cases where the cultivation of expensive tastes might be a matter of luck (Lippert-Rasmussen 2015, 14–15). Supposing that, in a society in which all individuals enjoy the same level of welfare, some develop – through no choice or fault of their own – goals that are more expensive to pursue than those of others. Do they have a claim of redistribution toward their fellows?

2.3.3 Opportunities for welfare

The implausibility attached to welfarism in light of the expensive taste problem has led scholars to abandon welfare and individual preferences' satisfaction as a metric of egalitarian justice. Richard Arneson (Arneson 1989, 84), for instance, has argued that justice does not require redistribution in light of individuals' cultivated preferences. This is because justice is not about

equalising welfare, but rather equalising opportunities of welfare (Lippert-Rasmussen 2015, 19).

Arneson stresses the necessity for a proper account of distributive equality to focus on *welfare* rather than resources, yet on *opportunities* rather than on outcomes (Arneson 1989, 77). Opportunities are, in his view, chances of “getting a good if one seeks it” (Arneson 1989, 85) and this good is meant in terms of what he calls “second best” preferences, that is:

those [one] would have if [she] were to engage in thoroughgoing deliberation about [her] preferences with full pertinent information, in a calm mood, while thinking clearly and making no reasoning errors. (Arneson 1989, 83)

that is, *ideally considered* preferences, and at the same time *reasonable* ones, namely preferred under consideration of:

(a) one’s actual resistance to advice regarding the rationality of one’s preferences, (b) the costs of an educational program that would break down this resistance, and (c) the likelihood that anything approaching this educational program will actually be implemented in one’s lifetime. (Ibid)

By defining one’s preferences in terms of ideally considered and reasonable ones, Arneson dismisses one possibly strong objection against equality of opportunities to welfare, namely the offensive preferences objection (Lippert-Rasmussen 2015, 22). According to this objection, justice might require compensating for individuals’ impossibility to fulfil their preferences, when these are offensive to others, such as racist or sexist preferences. Yet it seems indeed plausible to argue that offensive preferences do not count as second best rational ones.

To see further limitations of equality of opportunities for welfare, however, consider the case of Tiny Tim (Cohen 2011). Blessed with abundant opportunity for welfare, Tiny Tim is actually the happiest person on earth, although forced to live his whole life in a wheelchair. Would institutions be legitimate in not covering the costs of Tim's wheelchair or physiotherapy if it were the case that even without them he would enjoy abundant happiness?

[E]galitarians would not on that account strike him off the list of free wheelchair receivers (...) The essential point is that his abundant happiness is not as such a decisive reason against compensating him for his disability. (Ibid, 15)

By providing the example of Tiny Tim, Cohen illustrates why the metric of egalitarian distribution should be wider than opportunity for welfare.

2.3.4 Capabilities

One available proposal for defining such a broader and sensitive definition of the metric is that of capabilities. According to the capabilities approach as defended in the work of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, instead of addressing individuals' holdings or prospect for holdings, egalitarian scholars should look at individuals' capacities to achieve some valuable functionings (Brighouse and Robeyns 2010, 2).

To explain, functionings are the actual fulfilment of a certain action's exercise, such as eating, studying, voting, etc. Capabilities, instead, are the opportunities to function, such as *being capable of* eating, studying, voting, etc. Differentiating between functionings and capabilities confers on capabilities a high degree of flexibility. To visualise, consider how it might be that both A and B have not eaten since Monday last week. A, however, has

chosen not to eat – let us say she is fasting out of religious beliefs – while B has had no food available. That is, while A and B’s functioning is equal, A and B’s capacity to do so is unequal, and indeed possibly problematic from the viewpoint of egalitarian justice. Capabilities as a metric of justice allow us to acknowledge such difference.

Prominent defenders of the capability approach are sufficientarian (Nussbaum 2000; Anderson 1999; Heilinger 2020). They believe that justice requires securing individuals with a sufficient set of basic capabilities such as being able to eat, to have good health, to relate with other human beings and the surrounding environment; and that this holds independently of any consideration about their relative standing in society (Nussbaum 2000, 76–78). If – to go back to the previous example – B’s capacity to eat is endangered, it is a requirement of justice for it to be secured.

A list of basic capabilities is offered by Nussbaum (Nussbaum 2000). And indeed, such a list seems required for capabilities to be a plausible metric to endorse. To explain, it might be that I am not capable of cooking. Yet, since being able to cook does not seem to be a capability I need in order to have a flourishing life, my lack of it does not seem to be a matter of justice. This, however, brings with it a limit of the metric:

in order not to be seriously incomplete the capability theory must supply an account of which capabilities matter and the worry is that the only plausible way of determining which capabilities matter is to fall back on a theory of welfare (...). (Lippert-Rasmussen 2015, 110–11)

As the quoted passage shows, to endorse capabilities, we might need to buy into a theory of welfare, that is, into a definition of what it is for a human being to flourish. If this were the case, then capabilities would not be an

alternative to welfarist egalitarian accounts, but rather a companion to them (Ibid).

2.3.5 Access to advantage

One last available answer to the question of what it is that justice requires people to have equal amounts of is *equal access to advantage* (Cohen 1989, 907). Equal access to advantage – or socialist equality of opportunities¹³ – embraces a currency of well-being wider than either the currencies of opportunities to flourish or resources alone (Kaufman 2014, 4). That is, it points to both inequality of resources and inequality of opportunities for welfare, while defining both as “advantages”.

Equality of access to advantage significantly differs from rival forms of understanding the equality of opportunities principle. In particular, it is to be distinguished from an understanding of the metric in terms of *formal equality of opportunities* (EO) as well as in terms of *fair equality of opportunities* (FEO). To clarify, EO is a minimalist definition of the demands of egalitarian justice, which requires that job positions are open to all. This excludes discrimination on the grounds of cultural or religious beliefs, sexual orientation, provenience, etc. However, it does not aim at compensating for individuals’ social inequalities (Rawls 2001, 43) in the sense that *fair equality of opportunities* does.

In its most prominent definition, FEO secures not merely that “public offices and social positions [are] open in the formal sense, but that all should have a fair chance to attain them” (Ibid), i.e., that social goods such as education, healthcare provision, etc. are to be distributed in a way that secures

¹³ I use these terms interchangeably.

everyone's effective chance to compete for them. FEO, on the Rawlsian account, is then a *competitive* ideal, in the sense that it is an argument for how to distribute certain social goods in society, namely public offices, which are, as a matter of fact, "scarce", that is, of limited number (Green 1989).

FEO is more ambitious than EO. However, it does not acknowledge native disadvantage to be an instance of injustice. That is, it does not consider it unjust for two unequally talented individuals to end up unequally well off. An allocation of opportunities which systematically favours the talented over the untalented, however, might not be what *justice* requires on a luck egalitarian understanding. Indeed, it would allow individuals' lives to be shaped by luck.

Equal access to advantage is a more ambitious egalitarian account on distributive justice. It demands that both social and inborn disadvantage be treated as sources of injustice, acknowledging that social differences and native differences are equally unchosen, and that it would therefore be unjust for them to shape individuals' lives (Cohen 2009).

What justice objects to, in the Cohenian spirit, is that whether or not an individual has access to advantages – be these resources or opportunities – depends on his luck rather than on his choice (Ibid, 130). In this thesis, I adopt a similar approach. That is, I remain agnostic about the definition of the currency and embrace a broad understanding of it, which embraces both resources and opportunities as relevant to justice. An alternative understanding of the currency, however, does not affect the claim I offer in the thesis. That is, that relational equality implies distributive equality.

3. Equality as a relational ideal

In the previous sections, I introduced the concept of equality as a distributive ideal and adopted a pluralist understanding of its currency in the tradition of Cohen. In this section, I look at one alternative interpretation of the ideal of equality, according to which not distribution, but the quality of individuals' relations should be the priority of the egalitarian agenda.

Appealing to the ideal of equality as a relational ideal is appealing to the value of individuals' relations when these are not marked by hierarchical features (Ibid). Multiple definitions of "egalitarian relations" are available in the literature. Most prominently, relations are considered egalitarian when:

- a) they are "unstructured by differences of rank, power, or status" (Scheffler 2005, 17);
- b) individuals in them display equal respect and concern toward one another (Anderson 1999, 289);
- c) they occur "between moral equals with mutually respectful interactions" (Heilinger 2020, 79).

While relational egalitarians offer different definitions of relational equality, they all agree on identifying relational inequality as occurring when individuals perceive themselves as superior or inferior to others, oppress one another through using their differential power, dominate or get dominated, isolate or get isolated, exclude or get excluded (Young 1990).

Relational inequality occurs within frameworks of interactions (Heilinger 2020, 79, 111). These entail both face-to-face and collective interaction (Ibid). The expansion of the relational egalitarian horizon from face-to-face to collective interactions is consistent with the relational egalitarian ideal of a *society of equals*. The term, often used in the relational debate, conveys how

caring about equality is, necessarily, caring about the societal contexts in which this occurs. Among them, institutional communities.

When looking at the subject of egalitarian justice, relational egalitarians primarily include major social institutions such as political institutions and economic structures (Fourie, Schuppert, and Wallimann-Helmer 2015, 3). By doing so, they express a justice-based concern for the neutralisation of social hierarchies resulting from individuals' unequal status within their institutional communities.

The primary aim of egalitarian justice is that of reforming those laws and institutions that promote the unequal standing of their citizens. It has nothing to do with societal homogenisation, but rather with respecting individuals' diversities:

Social justice [...] requires not the melting away of differences, but institutions that promote reproduction of and respect for group differences without oppression. (Young 1990, 47)

The principal focus on institutional contexts is not in contrast with an understanding of relational inequality as occurring within face-to-face relations. Indeed, reasons of a relational egalitarian nature to object to social inequalities are available even when significant institutional frameworks do not exist (Scanlon 2018, 9). The structure of our globalised world, in which individuals are connected to one another by transnational economic relations, is – for example – a sufficiently strong institutional framework for expanding the scope of relational egalitarian justice from the local to the global dimension (Ibid; Heilingner 2020).

I will come back to this in the second chapter. For now, it suffices to claim that, on a relational egalitarian perspective, it is not enough for institutions to show equal concern for their citizens, but it is necessary that individuals

themselves display equal respect and concern toward one another (Garrau and Laborde 2015, 49; Heilinger 2020, 223). The subjects of relational egalitarian justice, accordingly, are both institutions and individuals, whenever these relate to one another. Finally, relations between individuals are more or less *egalitarian*, to the extent to which they are more or less hierarchically structured (Fourie, Schuppert, and Wallimann-Helmer 2015, 1).

Yet how does an understanding of equality as a relational ideal impact our understanding of just distribution? Relational egalitarians claim that it is not the primary concern of egalitarian justice to remedy arbitrary distributive inequality. Rather, distributive inequality per se lacks normative relevance, and it is to be neutralised only if this is instrumentally valuable, that is, necessary for securing relational equality:

a relational theory of equality (...) views equality as a social relationship. [It] regards two people as equal when each accepts the obligation to justify their actions by principles acceptable to the other, and in which they take mutual consultation, reciprocation and recognition for granted. Certain patterns in the distribution of goods may be instrumental to securing such relationships. (Anderson 1999, 313–14);

the ideal of equality, understood as an ideal that governs the relations among the members of society, will have important distributive implications. But, according to this view, equality is a more general, relational ideal, and its bearing on questions of distribution is indirect. (Scheffler 2015, 21–22)

In the following sections, I shall look at the ideal of relational equality as a challenge to luck egalitarian ideals of distributive equality. Concretely, I start by introducing the project of a critical examination of luck egalitarianism as

developed by relational egalitarians such as Iris Marion Young and Jonathan Wolff. Secondly, I turn to Anderson's rejection of luck egalitarianism. I claim that Anderson's sufficientarian move in the distributive domain makes it look as if relational and distributive egalitarianism were distinct, non-compatible views about egalitarian justice.

3.1 The relational egalitarians' criticism of the luck egalitarian approach

In the previous section, I introduced the relational egalitarian understanding of equality as a property of individuals' relations. In this section, I reconstruct the relational egalitarian critique of luck egalitarianism as urging egalitarian theorists to expand their horizon *beyond* issues of distribution. The aim is to emphasise that the relational egalitarians' examination of the luck egalitarian approach constitutes a project of *revising*, not rejecting, the egalitarian commitment to fair distribution. As such, it cannot ground a stark contrast between luck and relational egalitarian approaches to justice.

Luck egalitarianism has been the object of much critical thinking and examination. Contributions of a relational egalitarian nature¹⁴ have been focused on outlining how luck egalitarianism has failed to pay sufficient attention to relevant egalitarian issues beyond distribution. In particular, prominent criticisms of the luck egalitarian approach to social justice have been:

¹⁴ See, among others, Iris Young's "Justice and the Politics of Difference" (1990), Samuel Scheffler's "What is Egalitarianism?" (2003), and Jonathan Wolff's "Fairness, Respect and the Egalitarian Ethos" (1998, last revised 2010).

1. that the realisation of the distributive principles it offers might undermine further desirable egalitarian values such as respect and self-respect (Wolff 2010, 336); and
2. that the horizon it considers is too narrow for acknowledging how injustice within societies does not primarily derive from economic inequality, but rather from institutional structures that allow some social classes to dominate others (Young 1990, 23; Wolff 2010, 339).

To explore the first criticism, consider how a practical realisation of distributive egalitarian principles in society might end up requiring an invasive system of data collection, in order to gather detailed information about everyone's income, talents, choices, and gambles. If distributive justice requires that individuals' lives do not reflect the outcomes of bad brute luck, then in order to implement justice we might need to keep track of individuals' choices and gambles in order to properly assess when their claims for compensation or redistribution are legitimate and when they are not. We might need to constantly spy on them in order for their behaviour to be correctly assessed as prudent or reckless, their sufferings foreseeable or unpredictable. In this scenario, people would be encouraged to mistrust one another and suspicious attitudes would permeate society, strongly undermining any communitarian value of reciprocal trust and respect (Wolff 1998). The first critical revision of luck egalitarianism then makes luck egalitarians aware of the limits of its principles' desirable application; it states that "distributive justice should be limited in its application by other egalitarian concerns" (Ibid, 122); and that among these further egalitarian concerns are the relational concerns for individuals' mutual respect and communal bond.

The second critical examination of luck egalitarianism attends to one risk that luck egalitarians encounter when focusing on the narrow domain of distributions-only: the one of not acknowledging the structural dimension of distributional patterns. This criticism finds its roots in the critique that Karl Marx presented in the *Kritik des Gothaer Programms* (1875) of all the bourgeois economists who considered and treated distribution as something that is independent from the mode of production, not acknowledging that it is the latter that causes and promotes the unequal outcomes with which economists are so concerned:

it was in general a mistake to make a fuss about so-called distribution and put the principal stress on it. Any distribution whatever of the means of consumption is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves. The latter distribution, however, is a feature of the mode of production itself.
(Marx 1875, I)

Iris Marion Young shifts her critique of luck egalitarians by referring to this passage from Marx's work. However, her understanding of the "mode of production" is broader than what Marx had in mind (Young 1990, ch. 1) and, indeed, entails any structure, norm, law, and practice that guides production as well as the language and symbols that mediate it within interactions and society (Ibid, 22). Young's general criticism of the mainstream egalitarian focus on distributive justice is, hence, that:

such a focus ignores and tends to obscure the institutional context within which those distributions take place, and which is often at least partly the cause of patterns of distribution of jobs or wealth.
(Ibid)

Egalitarians therefore *should* integrate, within their horizon, considerations that go *beyond distribution*. They should look at the necessary institutional

conditions – broadly conceived – for assuring that individuals are treated equally and avoid, by challenging injustice, the situation in which they end up experiencing inequality in dimensions that are not limited to the distributive sphere. In other words, egalitarians *should care*, by struggling for equality, about fighting the oppressive character of oppressive relations that permeate culture, the division of labour, and decision-making procedures (Ibid, 39).

The relational egalitarian model as offered by Young and Wolff embraces a “vertical” perspective (Rondel 2018). It assumes it to be possible for a society to have a just distribution secured, but still be in the egalitarian sense *unjust*, when individuals in it are alienated from and subjected to one another. That is, even if we could achieve distributive equality in society by remedying (through compensation, redistribution, etc.) distributive inequality, we might still have principled reasons to change the structures that produce the injustices in the first instance. Not acknowledging this is a risk that egalitarians should not run, as egalitarian justice is not limited to policies of redistribution in favour of distributive justice, but also encompasses the beliefs and behaviours that inform the processes conducive to such policies.

However, does *going beyond distributive equality* entail *refuting distributive equality* as a normative source? While fully embracing the critical observations of Wolff and Young, I am confident that their expansion of the egalitarian scope beyond distributive issues does not presuppose a rejection of luck egalitarianism, that is, of the ideal of egalitarian distribution. Rather, such an expansion is compatible with the ideal of distributive equality as understood by pluralist luck egalitarians such as Richard Arneson and G. A. Cohen. Indeed, Arneson makes this compatibility explicit when, by targeting the addressees of his distributive accounts, he claims that they are egalitarians (Arneson 1989, 77). Accordingly, the debate on distribution is to be understood *within* a broader egalitarian horizon and the interest in distribution does not imply a reduction of egalitarianism to egalitarian

distribution. On the contrary, the question of distribution is a question that arises *within* the egalitarian debate itself. As such, it does not exclude the moral importance of issues beyond distribution. A compatible statement can also be found in Cohen's introduction to his *Rescuing Justice and Equality* when declaring his "conviction in political philosophy with respect to justice" (Cohen 2008, 7). In Cohen's view, the focus on distributive justice is *one* relevant aspect among further aspects that egalitarians have significant reasons to consider. Moreover, the distributive principles that follow from an egalitarian distribution of goods might, despite being *pro tanto* just, not be *all-things-considered* desirable in light of further egalitarian values or non-distributive considerations. In this sense, Cohen not only validates Arneson's acknowledgement, but also takes into account – as Wolff does – that further egalitarian values might, in all-things-considered scenarios, outweigh principles of egalitarian distribution. If my reconstruction is correct, then Arneson's and Cohen's considerations support the claim that relational egalitarianism, as promoted by Young and Wolff, is not properly conceived as an alternative to, or a refusal of, luck egalitarianism. Rather, it is to be understood as a project of critical revision and expansion of the egalitarian horizon.

3.2 Elizabeth Anderson and her rejection of luck egalitarianism

So far, I have argued that the roots of the dispute between luck egalitarianism and relational egalitarianism are not to be found in the critical examination of luck egalitarianism as conducted by relational egalitarian scholars like Young and Wolff. In this section, I claim that such dispute originates in Elizabeth Anderson's rejection of luck egalitarianism and defence of relational egalitarianism in the form of Democratic Equality. Democratic Equality is

presented as a competitive – not complementary – account of egalitarian justice to luck egalitarianism.

In 1999, with her prominent article “What is the Point of Equality?”, Elizabeth Anderson put an end to the luck egalitarian hegemony in political philosophy (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 38). Anderson’s aim is twofold: on the one hand, to reject luck egalitarianism, and on the other, to offer her version of relational equality, that is, an ideal of justice that she calls “democratic equality” (Ibid, 29). Anderson’s work had a positive impact on the egalitarian debate, drawing attention to issues beyond distribution, and giving the concepts of oppression, domination, exploitation, and marginalisation the central role that they should have in any egalitarian approach to justice. As crucial as her insights have been, however, I wish to critically engage with her attempted rejection of distributive equality from a relational egalitarian viewpoint. Such rejection is (i) inconsistent with the egalitarian spirit and (ii) disconnected from the social and political dimension of equality as a political goal.

Anderson criticises luck egalitarianism for focusing on brute luck, rather than on actual instances of social injustice, such as individuals’ oppressive and dominating relations. By doing so, luck egalitarianism has lost sight of the proper role of equality as a normative ideal:

I shall argue that in focusing on correcting a supposed cosmic injustice, recent egalitarian writing has lost sight of the distinctively political aims of egalitarianism. The proper negative aim of egalitarian justice is not to eliminate the impact of brute luck from human affairs, but to end oppression, which by definition is socially imposed. Its proper positive aim is not to ensure that everyone gets what they morally deserve, but to create

a community in which people stand in relations of equality to others. (Anderson 1999, 288–89)

In particular, Anderson's charge is that luck egalitarianism displaces the proper egalitarian commitment – that of ending oppression and domination in society – in the formulation of principles of compensation. The formulation of those principles itself, also, shows disrespect to a society's citizens. Indeed, it shows disrespect both to the victims of bad option luck and to the victims of bad brute luck. By affirming that individuals cannot make claims to compensation to one another when it comes to the outcomes of their own choices and voluntarily run risks, luck egalitarians indeed abandon the victims of bad option luck to their own miserable fate. When demanding that the victims of bad brute luck display evidence of their lives being shaped by bad fate, they disrespectfully demand that individuals provide evidence of personal inferiority, that is, to make themselves subject to invasive state judgements based on pity.

As I have previously dealt with the harshness objection (see Chapter 1, section 2.2), I shall here focus only on the second objection brought by Anderson against luck egalitarianism, i.e., that of being disrespectful towards the victims of bad brute luck. To visualise the objection, consider how, according to Anderson, luck egalitarianism fails to acknowledge the injustice entailed in gays and lesbians feeling shame and fear when publicly revealing their identities:

Gays and lesbians seek the ability to publicly reveal their identities without shame or fear, which requires significant changes in social relations of contempt and hostility, and changes in norms of gender and sexuality. The disabled aim to reconfigure public spaces to make them accessible and adapt work situations to their needs, so that they can participate in productive activity. No mere

redistribution of divisible resources can secure the freedoms these groups seek. (Anderson 1999, 320)

They do so because what is at stake is not an instance of an unfairly distributed good, but rather a matter of unjust relations between individuals who do not express equal concern and respect for one another (Ibid). As Lippert-Rasmussen claims, however, such an objection can be directed at certain versions of luck egalitarianism, namely those not counting opportunities within the currency of egalitarian justice. If “the opportunity to reveal one’s identity publicly without shame and fear” is acknowledged to be “an important good in the sense that it is very desirable to have it and very undesirable not to”, and we count opportunities as goods to be fairly distributed in society, then it is not clear how luck egalitarians would not see an injustice entailed in the unfair distribution of that good between individuals (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 29).

Assuming that luck egalitarianism (or at least a certain version of it) can reject Anderson’s objections, what is left in Anderson’s version of relational equality that is inimical – rather than complementary – to distributive equality? I believe that the roots of the debate between the two positions are to be found in the claim that relational equality *does not require distributive equality*, i.e., that, when it comes to distribution, individuals’ claims of justice differ depending on the egalitarian approach that one favours: they are claims of equal distribution according to luck egalitarianism, but only claims of sufficientarian distribution according to relational egalitarianism. Therefore, as Lippert-Rasmussen notes:

The upshot of this disagreement is that luck egalitarians are more likely than social relations theorists to regard rising socioeconomic inequality, and particularly rising socioeconomic inequality of opportunity, as a trend toward greater injustice. The luck

egalitarian will not hesitate to deplore increases in inequality of opportunity. The social relations egalitarians will stress that people can relate to one another as equals even if they are unequally well off in whatever luck egalitarians think individuals should have equal amounts of. (Lippert-Rasmussen 2012, 121)

The central core of the democratic equality approach can be summarised by stating (a) that we should aim at achieving a society in which individuals participate as equals (Anderson 1999, 313), and (b) that a democratic society is one which guarantees to individuals a *sufficient*, not equal, level of those capabilities that equal participation implies. In Anderson's words:

democratic equality guarantees not effective access to equal levels of functioning but effective access to levels of functioning sufficient to stand as an equal in society. (...) To be capable of standing as an equal in civil society requires literacy. But in the U.S. context, it does not require literacy in any language other than English, nor the ability to interpret obscure works of literary theory. Democratic equality does not object if not everyone knows a foreign language, and only a few have a Ph.D.-level training in literature. (Ibid, 318–19)

Democratic equality is egalitarian in its conception of just relationships among citizens, but sufficientarian in its conception of justice in the distribution of resources and opportunities. What is important is not that everyone has equal opportunities to acquire resources and fulfilling jobs, but that everyone has “enough”. (...) On this view, as long as everyone has enough to function as an equal, inequalities beyond this threshold are not of particular concern. (Anderson 2004, 106)

In Anderson's view, then, the capabilities required to avoid domination and oppression, and those required to participate as an equal in society, are capabilities to which individuals must "have access over the course of their whole lives" (Ibid, 314; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 57). This is the "time-relative sufficiency requirement" of democratic equality, which:

does not imply that citizens should enjoy comprehensive equality in the space of capabilities, e.g., in the capability for welfare, but (...) is incompatible with any group of people being excluded from equal participation within society. (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 57)

Admittedly, the sufficiency requirement does not state that there is any independent value attached to individuals' *having enough*, but rather that individuals' having enough is instrumentally valuable, as it ensures that individuals can relate to one another as equals:

Certain patterns in the distribution of goods may be instrumental to securing such relationships (...) or even be constitutive of them. But democratic egalitarians are fundamentally concerned with the relationships within which goods are distributed, not only with the distribution of goods themselves. (Anderson 1999, 313–14)

However, the requirement also suggests that there can be distributive inequalities – namely those above the sufficientarian threshold – that are compatible with everyone relating to each other as equals (Ibid, 326), and that this can be the case also for opportunities. This, on my view, is what signals a deep rupture between relational egalitarianism (as understood by Anderson, that is, as "democratic equality") and luck egalitarianism. What makes the two accounts incompatible is that the former permits that individuals have different levels of the currency of justice through no fault or choice of their own, while the latter rejects such inequalities as unjust.

This, therefore, is where a project of reconciling the two views needs to start: by showing how, contrary to what Anderson and other relational egalitarians think, achieving and securing a society in which individuals relate to one another as equals *is*, to a significant extent, securing a fair – not merely sufficient – distribution of the justice-relevant good among them. Indeed, defining the egalitarian agenda as presented in the writings of Anderson, and of those scholars who embrace her sufficientarian move, is to illegitimately neglect part of what the egalitarian commitment entails: that is, securing for everyone equal chances to live flourishing lives, independently of their socio-economic background. To quote Anderson, it might be that not everyone needs a PhD-level training in literature to be capable of standing as an equal in civil society. Nevertheless, I would say, it would be deeply incoherent for anyone professing herself as an egalitarian not to acknowledge the injustice entailed in a social system which grants access to that level of education only to some, and not to all, through no fault of their own.

Conclusion

In this first chapter, I have aimed to provide some insights into the philosophical debate on egalitarian justice. After looking at the most prominent debates concerning distributive and relational egalitarian approaches, I have identified the source of dispute between luck egalitarianism and relational equality in Elizabeth Anderson's democratic equality theory and its sufficientarian implications in the field of distribution.

I have shown that, while relational egalitarian scholars such as Young and Wolff think of relational equality as supplementing, rather than replacing, distributive equality (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 11–12), Anderson advances her relational egalitarian account as a competitor to it. I will return to

Anderson's understanding of the distributive implications of relational egalitarianism in the next chapter. The reason is that Anderson is the main addressee of my work. However, my engagement with Anderson is a critical engagement with the contemporary reading of the egalitarian debate, which has been significantly shaped by her writings.¹⁵

The analysis I have provided so far, which has tackled the origins of the dispute between relational and distributive approaches to egalitarian justice, will be useful insofar as it shows that, for a project of reconciliation between the two views to succeed, one has to explain why distributive inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold matter for relational egalitarianism. Indeed, if it is Anderson's rejection of the egalitarian pattern of distribution in favour of the sufficientarian one which has grounded the alleged mutual exclusivity of relational- and luck egalitarian approaches, then it is by refuting that sufficientarian move that the attempt to reconcile them has to start.

¹⁵ The first relational egalitarian I have in mind, whose work I will carefully engage with in the third chapter of this thesis, is Debra Satz. Like Anderson, Satz endorses relational equality as an understanding of egalitarian justice competitor to that of equal distribution. When embracing the ideal in the field of educational justice, in particular, she claims that relational equality involves providing children with adequate education, whereby adequacy (i) sets the threshold at which children are sufficiently educated to participate as full members of their society, and (ii) is a pattern alternative to educational equality (Satz 2007).

Chapter 2: Why “enough” is not enough for relational equality

About the insufficiency of sufficientarian distributions

To relate to others in a way that really shows equal respect and concern, we would have to recognize that each one of us has reason (...) to seek opportunities to live flourishing lives, and to resent having fewer such chances than others though no choice or fault of our own.

(Gilbert 2012b, 113)

Introduction

In the first chapter, I reconstructed the debate on egalitarian justice as assuming that the nature of justice is *either* distributive *or* relational. More precisely, I identified the roots of dispute between relational and distributive egalitarian approaches to justice in the rejection, on relational egalitarian grounds, of egalitarian in favour of sufficientarian distributions.¹⁶

¹⁶ My focus is on relational egalitarian accounts in the tradition of Elizabeth Anderson (Anderson 1999; Satz 2007; Heilinger 2020). I acknowledge the existence of relational egalitarian theories endorsing egalitarian distributions also (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018), yet I do not engage with them in this chapter.

Sufficientarianism is a theory of distributive justice¹⁷ that requires that everyone has *enough* of the proper metric, say well-being, resources or opportunities, and not that all individuals have *equal amounts* of it (Frankfurt 1987). In its mainstream understanding, the doctrine entails both a positive thesis, according to which justice requires providing individuals with enough of the proper metric of justice, and a negative thesis stating that distributive inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold are of no justice-based concern (Casal 2007). In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that the relational egalitarian move in favour of sufficientarianism¹⁸ is mistaken: relational egalitarians should reject sufficientarian principles of distribution, when these entail the negative thesis, according to which distributive inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold are irrelevant to justice. And they only can do so by rejecting sufficientarianism and embracing egalitarian principles of distribution.

Relational egalitarian scholars who follow Elizabeth Anderson embrace sufficientarian distributions due to their conviction that the goal of enabling egalitarian relations merely requires that everyone has *enough* of the proper

¹⁷ In this thesis, I consider sufficientarianism as a theory of just distributions only. However, I acknowledge the possibility of sufficientarianism as a relational view of justice also, according to which we should relate to one another as individuals with sufficient – but not necessarily equal – standing. For further references on this, see Lippert-Rasmussen’s *Relational Sufficientarianism* (manuscript). I thank the author for making his manuscript at my disposal.

¹⁸ When claiming that relational egalitarians endorse sufficientarianism, I do not claim that relational egalitarians commit to sufficientarianism as a theory of distributive justice. Rather, that they commit to the distributions sufficientarianism as a theory of justice requires.

metric of justice¹⁹; having the same amount of it is unnecessary for relational equality (Anderson 1999, 2004, 2010; Satz 2017; Heilinger 2020). I reject this thesis. That is, I claim that sufficientarian distributions are not enough for a society of equals, because the residual inequalities above sufficiency prevent individuals from relating to one on the foot of equality. Therefore, as they have a powerful interest in egalitarian relationships – indeed, according to relational egalitarians, justice itself requires such relationships – relational egalitarians must reject sufficientarian distributions.

I argue, further, that there are two available ways for relational egalitarians to maintain sufficientarianism¹⁸. The first is to embrace a hybrid version of sufficientarianism, which includes the positive thesis according to which individuals should be granted enough, while rejecting the negative thesis according to which there are distributive inequalities, which lack moral significance (Shields 2012, 2016). The other is to deny the possibility of the existence of distributive inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold, that is define the threshold of sufficiency as the level on which all justice-relevant goods are sated (Nielsen, 2019). I engage with the literature in support of these views. Concretely, I argue that, when embracing sufficientarianism while rejecting the negative thesis, or denying the existence of distributive inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold, relational egalitarians necessarily commit to distributive principles extensionally identical to egalitarian principles. That is, I claim that relational egalitarians can only

¹⁹ If, as relational egalitarians have been recently arguing, relational egalitarianism also implies that no one should have too much, then the distributive implications of their theories might be other than sufficientarian only. For further reference, see Satz 2007; Axelsen and Nielsen 2015; Heilinger 2020.

embrace a form of sufficientarianism that is extensionally identical with distributive egalitarianism²⁰.

The argumentative structure of the chapter is as follows. In the first section, I introduce sufficientarianism in its classical understanding as an upper-limit theory, that is one according to which distributive inequalities matter only up to the sufficiency threshold, while supra-threshold inequalities are irrelevant to justice (Nielsen 2018, 557). In the second section, I argue in support of the view that supra-threshold distributive inequalities are inconsistent with the egalitarian character of individuals' private relations due to their arbitrary nature. I conclude that relational egalitarians should reject the negative thesis entailed in the sufficientarian doctrine, and embrace a distributive egalitarian commitment to neutralizing distributive inequalities below as well as above the sufficientarian threshold. In the third section, I acknowledge two possible ways in which relational egalitarians can preserve a commitment to sufficientarianism. I argue that, by endorsing any of the two sufficientarian moves available to them, relational egalitarians necessarily commit themselves to distributive policies extensionally identical to policies of distributive equality²¹.

²⁰ Claiming that a sufficientarian theory is “extensional identical” to a distributive egalitarian one means acknowledging that, although the two theories might offer different justifications in their favor, their normative outcomes are the same.

²¹ I will deepen into the theoretical implications of this claim in the fourth chapter of this thesis.

1. *Sufficientarianism*

In this first section, I offer an overview of sufficientarianism as a theory of distributive justice¹⁷. Concretely, I stress how traditional sufficientarianism acknowledges the arbitrariness entailed in distributive inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold, and yet permits them.

According to its classical understanding, sufficientarian justice requires securing that individuals have *enough*, rather than *the same* (Frankfurt 1987) of the metric of justice²², where *enough* is defined in terms of an absolute threshold above of which distributive inequalities are irrelevant to justice (Nielsen 2018, 557). Sufficientarian claims have been prominently advanced in the 1987 “Equality as a Moral Ideal” by Harry Frankfurt. The special importance attached to securing *enough* for all individuals, however, has been more precisely specified since then, resulting in several sufficientarian views, which are very different from each other (Shields 2016, 18). Among the most prominent accounts, for instances, Roger Crisp identifies *sufficiency* with the limit at which compassion for individuals no longer applies (Crisp 2003; Nielsen 2018, 555). Alternatively, Robert Huseby restates sufficiency as the threshold of welfare at which individuals are reasonably *content*, that is satisfied with the overall quality of their lives (Huseby 2010, 181). Finally, Lasse Nielsen and David Axelsen define the sufficientarian threshold as *freedom from duress*, that is as the limit at which individuals are not impaired by a lack of resources from achieving success in central aspects of their lives (Axelsen and Nielsen 2015).

²² Different sufficientarian accounts have been endorsing different metrics. For a more exhaustive engagement with different metrics of justice, please see Chapter 1, section 2.3.

Although the aforementioned sufficientarian accounts differ in defining what it is for individuals to have enough, they all agree on the claim that *there is a limit* above of which distributive inequalities are not relevant to justice:

The ecumenical sufficiency view (...) implies that there must exist, at least theoretically, some absolute threshold representing the relevant point of elimination of deficiency such that justice is immediately disturbed by people being located below that level, whereas inequalities above that level are irrelevant to justice. (Nielsen 2018a, 557)

Because of their focus on an absolute threshold, mainstream¹ sufficientarian views are referred to as *upper-limit* accounts (Shields 2016, 18-22), that is accounts according to which the scope of distributive justice has an upper-limit, a threshold, at which individuals' justice-based entitlements are satiated (Nielsen 2019) or beyond of which their claims for (re)distribution are irrelevant (Raz 1986; Frankfurt 1989; Crisp 2003; Benbaji 2005; Nussbaum 2000; Huseby 2010; Axelsen and Nielsen 2015).

Upper-limit sufficientarian accounts have in common the core assumption that it is irrelevant to justice whether individuals have *less than others* of the proper metric when they are above the upper-limit. What is relevant, rather, is that they suffer non-comparative deficiencies (Nielsen 2019, 556), that is that they have *less than what they actually need* (Ibid). This has been powerfully illustrated by Crisp through the Beverly Hills' example (Crisp 2003), in which there is a choice to be made between offering fine wine to the group of the rich or to that of the super-rich. As this seems to be a trivial choice, Crisp suggests that what counts in terms of justice is not whether some have less than others, but rather whether all have enough of what matters. In a similar vein, Raz notes that justice is concerned with "the hunger of the hungry, the need of the needy, the suffering of the ill" (Raz 1986, 240),

and not with individuals' relative conditions. Indeed, as there seems to be “something absurd about claiming that equality or justice requires that the Rich be benefitted instead of the Super-rich” (Crisp 2003, 120), it may seem that, as long as everyone has enough, comparative differences in individuals' welfare, resources or opportunities are – despite being arbitrary – irrelevant to justice (Nielsen 2018, 557).

Upper-limit sufficientarianism has attracted particular attention within the debate between distributive and relational approaches to egalitarian justice. Prominent relational egalitarians such as Elizabeth Anderson and Debra Satz argue non solely that it is not the primal desideratum of egalitarian justice to secure an equal distribution of the metric between individuals, but also that such an aim is to be rejected in favour of upper-limit sufficientarian principles²³. Specifically, they have claimed that how much is owed to individuals by virtue of relational egalitarian justice is an amount *sufficient* to enable them to participate in the life of their societies as equals (Anderson 1999, 2004, 2010; Satz 2017; Heilinger 2020, 108). Upper-limit sufficientarianism, therefore, has been welcomed as a valid alternative to distributive egalitarianism for regulating distributions within relational egalitarian societies.

1.1 In favour of Upper-Limit Sufficientarianism

Relational egalitarians endorse sufficientarianism for various reasons. In “Why Sufficiency is not enough” (2007), Casal examines the strength of arguments in favour of sufficiency, which I briefly reconstruct in this section.

²³ Most recent contributions to the project of relational egalitarianism as in the writings of Heilinger (2020) have followed Anderson and Satz in their sufficientarian move.

Casal acknowledges four strong arguments supporting the positive sufficientarian thesis according to which individuals should be granted enough: the deprivation argument, the allegiance argument, the scarcity argument and the abundance argument.

Most significantly, she argues, sufficientarian principles are supported by the deep and common intuition that it is unfair – and hence *pro tanto* unjust – for human beings to starve, to be isolated from the rest of society, excluded from political participation, with no or little access to systems of education and health care, prevented from any form of recreation etc. (Ibid). The case of human deprivation as an instance of injustice shows that, in order to have a claim of distributive justice, no comparative statement between the unequal conditions of individuals needs to be provided. What is unjust in the examples above is not that individuals have differential amounts of goods, but that some of them have *not enough*, whereby “enough” defines a threshold below which it is unjust for individuals to be situated.

At the same time, reasons in favour of sufficientarianism are grounded in the reasonable burdens it imposes on those who are required, as a matter of justice, to provide aid. Unlike egalitarian distributive theories, sufficientarianism demands individuals to grant one another enough, which might be less demanding than securing each other the same. Therefore, one reason to support sufficientarian theories is missing in the case of egalitarian theories: sufficientarianism allows that advantaged individuals can enjoy their abundance without guilt or blame, once everyone has been secured enough (Ibid). This is the allegiance argument.

Finally, two additional arguments support sufficientarian distributive principles in Casal’s view. The *scarcity argument* favours sufficientarianism over egalitarianism in situations in which resources are scarce. The argument is that is implausible to maintain, as distributive egalitarians apparently do,

that no one should have more than others when all are below the threshold of minimal sufficiency (Frankfurt 1987, 31; Casal 2007): if there were not enough medicine to save all five inhabitants of the earth, yet only three of them, and dividing the medicine among the five would prevent any of them to be rescued, we cannot maintain that the medicine should be equally distributed among the five. The *abundance argument*, on the other hand, refers to cases of extreme abundance, rather than cases of extreme scarcity. The question here is “that we should attach any priority to benefitting millionaires before billionaires?” (Casal 2007, 310). The assumption is that it would be counterintuitive to claim – as distributive egalitarians apparently do – that justice is about securing an equal distribution of luxuries.

Relational egalitarians have endorsed sufficientarianism for reasons similar to those enumerated by Casal. They have claimed that sufficientarian – rather than egalitarian – principles should regulate distribution within a society of equals, because a concern for distributive issues beyond sufficiency would misconceive what relational egalitarian justice is about: the elimination of oppressive relations between individuals in society (Young 1990). Most prominently, relational scholars have invoked the deprivation argument (Heilinger 2020), and stressed the moral urgency of allowing individuals – through securing them an unconditioned set of sufficient resources, opportunities, or capabilities (Anderson 1999) – to escape the threats of domination and oppression. Accordingly, from the perspective of relational egalitarian justice, distributive inequalities are to be rejected if and only if they force individuals beneath the sufficientarian threshold. That is, the only distributive inequalities that are relevant to justice are those which involve what sufficientarians call a relevant non-comparative deficiency (Nielsen 2018, 557), that is a deficiency which involves that someone (difference of insufficiency) – or all (difference within insufficiency) – is/are below the absolute threshold (Ibid).

To expand: on a relational egalitarian reading, sufficiency²⁴ is valued instrumentally, that is as a valuable means to achieve egalitarian relations within societies. As Anderson (1999) argues, a sufficientarian distribution matters to relational equality, because it grants individuals those capabilities which are necessary for them to live as human beings, workers and citizens (Ibid). Similar thoughts guide the relational egalitarian commitment toward implementing certain patterns of distribution. It is the thought that these are a means to valuable ends, that is in light of their contribution to relational egalitarian relations (Tawney 1931, 291; Wolff and De Shalit 2007, 5). If caring about equality is reducible to caring about individuals' relations, then we are to care about distributive equality, sufficiency or any other distributive pattern, to the extent to which this allows individuals to interact with one another as equals.

Distributive egalitarians have attempted to show why reasons in favour of sufficiency (that is the commitment toward securing everyone enough) cannot prove the validity of the negative thesis, according to which inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold lack normative relevance (Arneson 2005; Casal 2007; Knight 2015; Temkin 2003; Shields 2016). But – with the exception of Christian Schemmel's "Why relational egalitarianism should care about distribution" – little has been written about why relational egalitarians in particular should avoid endorsing sufficiency in the distributive domain. That is, although distinctive *distributive* egalitarian reasons have been advanced against denying the normative significance of distributive equality above the sufficientarian threshold, *relational* egalitarian reasons to neutralize distributive inequality above the threshold need to be found. It is my aim in

²⁴ More precisely, I mean that relational egalitarians value sufficientarian distributions (not sufficientarianism as a theory of distributive justice) instrumentally, when assuming that securing these is required to allow individuals to relate as equals.

the following section to prove that distinctively relational egalitarian reasons speak against sufficientarianism. And that relational egalitarians are wrong when rejecting distributive egalitarian principles in favour of sufficientarian ones.

2. Why Sufficiency is not enough

So far, I enumerated some of the most prominent reasons that have been advanced in favour of sufficientarian principles of distribution. Prior to this, I have offered an overview of the doctrine of sufficiency as classically understood, that is as an upper-limit theory of distributive justice, according to which distributive inequalities matter up to the sufficiency threshold, and lack normative force above it. In this section, I argue that relational egalitarians are wrong to embrace the sufficientarian negative thesis on which distributive inequalities above the threshold are, even when arbitrary, irrelevant to justice. Accordingly, relational egalitarians are also wrong when rejecting principles of distributive equality in favour of sufficientarian²⁵ principles of distributions. The reason is that egalitarian theories are better equipped than upper-limit sufficientarianism to make sense of individuals' reasonable complaint about their relative disadvantage.

To avoid misunderstandings: I hereby understand individuals' *disadvantage* in distributive terms – that is by referring to the currency of distributive justice. *Relative* disadvantage, then, is the disadvantage individuals

²⁵ In this section, when referring to sufficientarianism and sufficientarian principles, I refer to the classical understanding of the sufficientarian doctrine, which entails the negative thesis on which supra-threshold inequalities are irrelevant to justice. In the last section of the chapter, I will consider alternative sufficientarian theories, that is neo-sufficientarian positions.

experience in comparative terms, that is when their individual conditions are compared with one another. Finally, *arbitrary* relative disadvantage is a comparative distributive disadvantage which lacks all things considered justification. My claim is that, within their private relations, it is reasonable for individuals who commit to relational equality to complain about their arbitrary relative disadvantage, even when inequalities occur above the sufficiency threshold. The reason is that: individuals who believe in relational equality commit to securing that their equally important interests affect collective decisions equally (Scheffler 2015, 35-36). When they are subject to inequalities above the threshold, however, they experience a condition in which their equal interests unequally affect the social decisions that govern distributions.

Sufficientarianism, however, states that relative disadvantage above sufficiency is irrelevant to justice. That is, it is not in need of justification. Therefore, relational egalitarianism should reject sufficientarianism in favour of egalitarian theories of distributive justice – where “egalitarian” means, generally, theories that acknowledge arbitrary distributive inequality as relevant to justice²⁶. One such theory is luck egalitarianism. To clarify: I do not claim that luck egalitarianism is the only distributive theory better than sufficientarianism for the aims of relational equality²⁷. Independent work needs to be done for proving whether – for instance – Rawlsian or prioritarian principles might serve relational equality better than luck egalitarian ones do. More modestly, I aim to show that relational egalitarians

²⁶ As I will show in the following of the chapter, also neo-sufficientarian theories such as those endorsed by Shields (2012), and Nielsen (2019) count as egalitarian in this sense.

²⁷ However, I show in section 2.3 that the responsibility-sensitiveness of luck egalitarianism makes it an attractive distributive theory for regulating distribution within a society of equals.

are wrong when rejecting luck egalitarianism in favour of sufficientarianism. My emphasis on luck egalitarianism, then, is due to the fact that luck egalitarianism is the target of the relational egalitarian critique I discuss in this thesis.

To support my claim, I proceed as follows. Firstly, I define the site of relational egalitarian justice in terms of relations broadly conceived, that is both private and institutional relations among individuals (section 2.1). Secondly, I introduce two examples of private relations in which individuals have enough, yet do not have the same (section 2.1). The examples are meant to trigger the intuition that it is reasonable for individuals to complain about their relative arbitrary disadvantage, when they commit to relating to one another as equals. In a further section, I offer an argument to prove that relational egalitarians should reject sufficientarianism, because sufficientarianism is incompatible with the requirements of relational egalitarianism. Finally, I show that egalitarian theories of distribution – among them luck egalitarianism – are better equipped than sufficientarianism to regulate distribution in a relational egalitarian society (section 2.3). Particularly, the distinctive luck egalitarian distinction between arbitrary and non-arbitrary relative disadvantage, where arbitrary disadvantage is the result of bad brute luck, rather than individuals' choices and efforts, is suitable to explain why, as our intuitions suggest, some, rather than all, forms of relative disadvantage above the sufficientarian threshold are incompatible with the egalitarian character of individuals' private relations.

2.1 Private relations as frameworks of interaction²⁸

From a relational egalitarian perspective, individuals relate to one another as equals when they share a reciprocal commitment to treat their respective interests as “exerting equal influence on social decisions” (Scheffler 2015, 35-36). When is it, however, that individuals *relate* to one another? In this section, I introduce – following Lippert Rasmussen (2018) – two different ways of defining individuals’ relations: the institutionalist and the individualist way. These are different approaches to the site of relational egalitarian justice.

To start, consider the institutionalist understanding of relational equality. It states that equality occurs only within individuals’ *institutional* relations: individuals relate to one another as equals when they participate in their political institutions as equals, and are equally respected and represented by them. Anderson emphasises the institutionalist component of her account when defining the proper aim of egalitarian justice in terms of political participation in a democratic system (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 144):

Positively, egalitarians seek a social order in which persons stand in relations of equality. They seek to live together in a democratic community, as opposed to a hierarchical one. (...) To stand as an equal before others in discussion means that one is entitled to participate, that others recognize an obligation to listen respectfully and respond to one’s arguments, that no one need bow and scrape before others or represent themselves as inferior to others as a condition of having their claim heard. (Anderson 1999, 313)

²⁸ In this section, I rely mostly on Lippert-Rasmussen’s review of Anderson’s and Scheffler’s position in Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 144-145.

The quotation shows that, on Anderson's account, the site of egalitarian justice is the democratic community (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 144). Her understanding of individuals' relations is an understanding of relations between *citizens* (Ibid.).

According to an individualist approach to relational equality, individuals' relations are relations between *persons*. Individuals relate to one another as equals, in this sense, when they consider each other's life as equally important, and treat one another – in private actual or hypothetical interactions – with equal respect and concern (Scheffler 2003; Dworkin 1977, 370; Vlastos 1962; Heilinger 2020). Scheffler emphasises the individualist component of his account when defining relational equality as a moral ideal:

As a moral ideal, [relational equality] asserts that all people are of equal worth and that there are some claims that people are entitled to make on one another simply by virtue of their status as persons. (Scheffler 2003, 22)

On his understanding, the site of egalitarian justice are interactions – or hypothetical interactions – between individual persons, that is individuals' face-to-face, or private, relationships. As Lippert-Rasmussen acknowledges, such understanding is “hard to square with a purely institutionalist view” (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 145). It is so, because it does not seem like an institutional framework is necessary for individuals to either conform or non-conform to relational equality as a moral ideal (Ibid).

Both Scheffler and Anderson acknowledge the institutional as well as the individualist dimension of relational equality (Lippert Rasmussen 2018, 144). On the one hand side, Scheffler expresses a concern for egalitarian relations among citizens when defining relational equality as a political ideal (Scheffler 2003). And indeed, nothing seems objectionable about endorsing the individualist approach, while maintaining that, when institutional

frameworks are available, relations occurring within them either conform or fail to conform to the ideal of relational equality. More controversial, however, is to maintain, from an institutionalist perspective, that human relationships matter to relational egalitarian justice, even when they occur in absence of such institutional framework. Anderson states in one footnote to her “What is the point of equality” (1999), that a concern for relations other than those occurring within democratic states is relevant to relational equality. Yet she does not spell out why this is the case:

We also have global humanitarian obligations to everyone, considered simply as human beings—to relieve famine and disease, avoid fomenting or facilitating aggressive warfare, and the like. Alas, I do not have the space to consider the international implications of democratic equality. (Ibid 321, n. 78)

In a different paper, she points at justice while defining it as a virtue of agents which include, but are not limited to, institutions:

Relational egalitarians identify justice with a virtue of agents (including institutions). It is a disposition to treat individuals in accordance with principles that express, embody, and sustain relations of social equality. Distributions of socially allocated goods are just if they are the result of everyone acting in accord with such principles (Anderson 2010, 2, 22).

As Lippert-Rasmussen acknowledges, the fact that Anderson adds “(including institutions)” to her claim suggests that the site of justice, from her perspective, expands beyond institutions (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 144). Following Lippert-Rasmussen’s interpretation of Anderson’s writings, it is arguable that the institutionalist approach as endorsed by Anderson also is compatible with an individualist perspective, as it indeed enumerates private relations beyond institutions in the site of relational egalitarian justice. This

seems validated by the most recent contribution of Jan-Christoph Heilinger (2020) to relational egalitarianism.

Heilinger clarifies the international implications of democratic equality Anderson mentions – but does not explore – in the eleventh footnote of her 1999 paper. He stresses the compatibility of the institutionalist and the individualist approaches by defining the site of justice broadly, that is in terms of *frameworks of interaction* (Ibid, 98), while expanding on Anderson’s positions. According to his perspective, individuals’ relationships are relevant to justice whenever such relationships make it possible for individuals to engage in oppression or domination. This holds whether or not the relationships are mediated by an institution, that is, it holds “in both institutional settings and individual interactions” (Ibid). On Heilinger’s account, relations can be actual or hypothetical. They are actual when the individuals relating to one another share some interaction. They are hypothetical, when an actual interaction is missing, and yet individuals’ actions significantly shape the respective conditions:

Pointing to the fact that there are no interactions with those in dire need far away, or with those in the future who will have to suffer from the negative effects of climate change, is hypocritical and must not serve as an excuse for inaction. The effects on these peoples’ lives are multiple and significant, and must not be ignored. (Ibid, 114)

Accordingly, individuals are related not merely to those near them, but also to those far both locally and temporally. Inhabitants of the Global North and those of the Global South are in relation to one another, even when they willingly avoid interactions. And the present generation relates to the future ones, as its actions and behaviour has a significant impact on their life chances (Ibid).

Throughout this thesis, I adopt Heilinger’s broad understanding of individuals’ relations. In the following paragraphs, however, I set a particular focus on individuals’ *private* relations, that is hypothetical face-to-face interactions between persons. I do so, as I wish to trigger the intuition that, within their private relations, individuals’ complaint about their arbitrary relative disadvantage is reasonable. And that it is reasonable, because individuals’ arbitrary disadvantage clashes with their commitment to relational equality.

2.1.1 Two examples

To make my case, I offer two examples of closely related individuals who experience a relative disadvantage in terms of opportunities to health care and education. I assume that: whatever the choice of the metric, the distribution of educational and health care opportunities matters to justice.

Just enough access to health care?²⁹

Sufficientarian principles state that justice requires providing individuals with enough access to health care and – in their upper-limit version – that justice does not require individuals to be provided with equal access to health care above the sufficientarian threshold. By contrast, inequalities in the distribution of access to health care above sufficiency are irrelevant to justice.

²⁹ In this subsection I elaborate on Casal’s case: “suppose that having provided every patient with enough medicine, food, comfort, and so forth, a hospital receives a fantastic donation, which includes spare rooms for visitors, delicious meals, and the best in world cinema. If its administrators then arbitrarily decide to devote all those luxuries to just a few fortunate beneficiaries, their decision would be unfair.” (Casal 2007, 307).

Consider the case of Anne and Rose, two middle-aged housewives, whose choices of lifestyle are identical throughout of their lives. Suppose that both Anne and Rose contract breast cancer and that they both equally want to recover. By securing both patients the treatment they need for curing them, sufficientarian principles aim at ensuring that both Anne and Rose have access to what allows them to function as human beings, prominently enjoying bodily integrity, independently on their income or social class. Having provided both Rose and Anne with enough medicine, the hospital receives a fantastic donation. The direction, then, devotes it to provide extra goods – say delicious meals and entertainment – to few fortunate patients. Among them, Anne.

Suppose, now, that Anne and Rose had some kind of personal interaction. Let us assume that they ended up in the same cancer support group and started sharing personal information, hopes and fears. Given that Anne and Rose acknowledged the equal strength of their respective interests to enjoying delicious meals and entertainment, and that that option has been arbitrarily denied to Rose – indeed, the reasons explaining why Anne has access to more goods than Rose lies outside of Anne and Rose’s control – would it be unreasonable for them to complain about Rose’s relative disadvantage?

*Just enough educational opportunities?*³⁰

Sufficientarians argue that justice in education requires individuals to be provided with enough educational opportunities and – in their upper-limit version – that justice does not require individuals to have equal educational opportunities secured (Anderson 2004; Satz 2007).

³⁰ This challenge has been inspired by the true story of Andrew Granato, a senior student of Economics and contributing editor of Stanford Politics. His autobiographical article “The Aristocracy that let me in” has been published in Stanfordpolitics.org and republished by Vox.com.

Consider the case of Lisa and Andrew. Lisa and Andrew are young scholars with equal underlying potential. They equally value their potential to flourish. However, although their wealth is enough, they have different economic backgrounds. While Lisa can choose which college to attend, Andrew can afford colleges providing need-based financial aid. Thanks to an elite campus policy, which cares about meritocracy, Andrew wins a scholarship to attend the prestigious University of Stanford³¹, where “the median family income of a student is \$167,500 (over three times the national average) and 52 percent of the undergraduate student body comes from families with incomes that place them in the top 10 percent of the American income spectrum” (Granato 2017). Lisa is also enrolled at Stanford, the University her mother attended and her grandfather before her. Despite the inequality of their respective financial background, hence, both Andrew and Lisa get encultured in elite spaces and receive the same top quality education. Yet their opportunities to do so are unequally secure.

Suppose that Andrew and Lisa start relating to one another personally. Let us say that they become members of the same theatre group, share interests, exchange personal information. Given that Lisa and Andrew both acknowledge the equal strength of their respective interests to attending the prestigious university of Stanford, would it be unreasonable for them to complain about their differently safe opportunities?

My intuition is that, in the aforementioned examples, it is reasonable for individuals to complain about their relative disadvantage. And that it is

³¹ I am far from suggesting that egalitarians should attach any priority to equalizing access to elite Universities such as Stanford, rather than to granting good educational opportunities to all. Rather, I take access to elite Universities as a paradigmatic advantage above the sufficientarian threshold, at which everyone has enough education granted. My suggestion is that individuals’ arbitrarily unequal educational opportunities do matter to justice even at such an ambition level.

reasonable, because of the arbitrary nature of individuals' relative disadvantage. Sufficientarian theories of distributive justice deny that arbitrary relative disadvantage above sufficiency matters to justice. That is, sufficientarians claim that it is unreasonable for individuals who already have enough to complain about the arbitrary relative disadvantages they experience above the threshold. This, I aim to show, is not in line with the egalitarian commitment to relational equality.

2.2 Why relational egalitarians should reject upper-limit sufficientarianism

Through the two examples provided in 2.1.1, I have triggered the intuition that it is not unreasonable for individuals who are committed to relating to one another as equals, to also complain about their arbitrary relative disadvantage above sufficiency. In this section, I offer an argument in support of this intuition.

My claim is that, when it comes to distribution, relating as equals requires:

1. that individuals are brought up to the threshold of sufficiency which allows them not to be dominated and oppressed by others; and
2. that there are no arbitrary inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold.

The first requirement (1) is the positive thesis of sufficientarianism. Like many relational egalitarians, and distributive egalitarians, I embrace this thesis. The second requirement (2) denies the negative thesis of sufficientarianism. It states that arbitrary inequality above sufficiency is relevant to justice. The two requirements (1) and (2) are logically compatible:

a commitment against individuals' arbitrary disadvantage, indeed, does not exclude the commitment toward securing everyone enough. I have addressed this issue already in the first chapter of this thesis, when dealing with the harshness objection. Yet I wish to repeat my conclusions here. That relational equality has egalitarian distributive implications (requirement 2) does not exclude that it also entails a requirement to securing individuals whatever they need for escaping the threats of oppression and domination. What the egalitarian commitment adds to such requirement, is that: once everyone has secured enough, it still matters from the point of view of justice whether individuals have arbitrarily more – or less – than others of the justice relevant good.

If both (1) and (2) hold, then the following is the case:

1. relational egalitarians should reject upper-limit sufficientarianism in favour of egalitarian theories of distribution, where “egalitarian” defines, broadly, those distributive theories which acknowledge arbitrary inequalities as relevant to justice. Among them, luck egalitarianism, prioritarianism and neo-sufficientarianism³².

To clarify: I understand arbitrary inequality, or individuals' arbitrary disadvantage, as a comparative disadvantage which lacks justification. A reference to principles of distributive justice is necessary for defining when a relative disadvantage is arbitrary. On a luck egalitarian perspective, for instance, relative disadvantage is arbitrary when it occurs out of bad brute luck, rather than out of individuals' choices and efforts. I engage with the luck egalitarian definition of arbitrariness in the next section. For now, I remain

³² Under “neo-sufficientarianism” I understand “shift-sufficientarianism” and “upper limit objectivist sufficientarianism” as developed respectively by Liam Shields (2016) and Lasse Nielsen (2019). I will go back to these theories in the third section of this chapter.

neutral on this: the second distributive requirement of relational equality as mentioned above states that, whatever definition of arbitrariness one might endorse, relating as equals requires objecting against arbitrary inequality above sufficiency.

To contend my argument on the distributive implications of relational egalitarianism, consider Scheffler's characterization of the relational egalitarian society as a society regulated by the following "deliberative constraint":

each member accepts that every other member's equally important interests should play an equally significant role in influencing the decisions made on behalf of the society as a whole. Moreover, each member has a normally effective disposition to treat the interests of others accordingly (Scheffler 2015, 35).

The deliberative constraint of relational equality, as described by Scheffler, secures that collective decisions, and among them those conducive to distribution, are equally shaped by individuals' equally strong interests³³. In a society in which this constraint holds, the equally strong interests to be educated of both men and women – for instance – should equally shape the distribution of education among them; similarly, the equally strong interests to marry of homosexual and heterosexual couples should equally shape marriage law (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 56). If the relational egalitarian deliberative constraint is infringed, individuals are prevented from relating to one another as equals.

³³ When referring to individuals' interests, I refer to their legitimate, morally acceptable interests. This excludes the possibility that the deliberative constraint of relational equality requires collective decisions to be shaped by individuals' illegitimate interests, such as their sexist, racist, xenophobic etc. interests.

When it comes to individuals' interests to justice-relevant goods, I assume that these are not satisfied, when individuals have been granted enough of such goods³⁴. If the relevant good were education, for instance, why should individuals not have a legitimate interest in having more education than sufficient education? To visualize: I might not need a PhD in Philosophy for having enough education granted. And indeed having a PhD in Philosophy is unlikely to play any role in improving my chances to be less vulnerable to domination and oppression than I am, while having obtained a Master's degree.

Supposing, now, that I indeed have a strong interest in achieving a PhD in Philosophy, which is an interest in having more education than sufficient education. And that my interest to obtaining a PhD in Philosophy is as strong as yours. How, then, should the educational opportunity in obtaining a PhD in Philosophy be distributed among us? If upper-limit sufficientarianism were in charge of regulating distribution within a society of equals, this question would not be relevant to justice. If I were arbitrarily excluded from enjoying the opportunity to achieve a PhD in Philosophy, while you were not, say because you are richer than I am, this would not be problematic. Indeed, once individuals have enough of the relevant good, as we have enough education granted, then they would have no claims to having as much as others.

I believe that, in light of the deliberative constraint of relational equality, relating as equals requires that my chances of achieving a PhD in Philosophy are, without a principled reason against this, as much as yours. This is to say that the deliberative constraint of relational equalities binds us to an

³⁴ In the last section of the chapter, I consider neo-sufficientarian accounts which set the threshold exactly at the level, at which all justice-relevant goods are sated. For now, I focus on traditional sufficientarian views.

egalitarian distribution of the justice-relevant good above sufficiency³⁵. The reason, finally, is that only an egalitarian distribution of the justice-relevant good above sufficiency secures that individuals' equally strong interests to having more than enough have an equal impact on the social decisions shaping supra-threshold distributions³⁶.

If my argument is correct, the following is the case: relational egalitarians should reject upper-limit sufficientarianism, because upper-limit sufficientarianism does not meet the requirements of relational equality. To better understand the argument I propose, consider the case of two high school students Alex and Jake. In a world composed by Alex, Jake and their school director only, the school director offers Alex and Jake two weeks of intensive study in preparation of their final exam. All things are equal, including the boys' talent, efforts, life choices, and their very strong motivation in attending the preparatory class. Also, both Alex and Jake already have an excellent preparation, so that neither of them is likely to fail the final exam even without attending the preparatory class. Finally, the cost of the class is affordable for Alex only. That is, Jake cannot attend it. Now, we are presented with two different scenarios. In the first, Alex and Jake go to the

³⁵ To clarify, I believe this holds for the distribution of justice-relevant goods not only above sufficiency. But indeed above and below sufficiency. Still, as I am arguing against upper-limit sufficientarianism, my focus is particularly on inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold.

³⁶ This is consistent with the definition of relational equality as provided by Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen, according to whom facts which individuals do not need to be aware of may determine whether they relate to one another as equals (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018); and it is in line with the commonsensical understanding according to which, for instance, for men and women to relate as equals it is not sufficient for them to believe that they are so, or perceive themselves as such, but rather that they must, as a matter of fact, enjoy equality of employment opportunities or retribution.

school director and complain about Jake's relative disadvantage. They tell the director that she should reconsider her decision, and grant attendance to both Jake and Alex. Also, Alex is ready to give up attendance in case this is not granted to Jake also. Doing otherwise – he believes – would be benefitting from a privilege arbitrarily granted to him and denied to his peer. In the second scenario, differently, Alex and Jake do not complain about Jake's relative disadvantage. Although they agree that what happens to Jake lacks a proper justification, they remain indifferent.

I argue that only the first of the two available scenarios shows individuals' commitment to relational equality³⁷. And that such commitment, indeed, requires Alex and Jake to object against Jake's arbitrary relative disadvantage, because Alex and Jake's equally important interests did not count equally in determining the attendance policies to the preparatory class – as their commitment to relational equality requires. If this is correct, then the example shows that the requirements of relational equality exceed sufficientarianism: Given that Alex and Jake have enough educational opportunities secured, sufficientarians should deny that Alex and Jake's complaint about Jake's disadvantage is reasonable. Since the inequality experienced by the two boys occurs above the sufficientarian threshold, existing relational egalitarianism (which endorses sufficientarianism) is unable to deem their relative disadvantage as being in need of justification. My claim, to the contrary, is that relational egalitarians should acknowledge that Alex and Jake's objection to Jake's relative disadvantage is reasonable. In

³⁷ I do not intend this to be a novel version of relational egalitarianism. That is, it is not my aim to provide a version of the theory with distributive egalitarian implications. Rather, I aim to show that already existing relational egalitarian theories who would agree with Scheffler's endorsement of the deliberative constraint should acknowledge that the distributive implications of their own theories are, necessarily, egalitarian.

doing so, they should also acknowledge that the indifference that sufficientarianism shows towards inequalities above the threshold is incompatible with the boys' reciprocal commitment to relating to one another as equals.

To conclude, I have argued so far that the requirements of relational egalitarianism are incompatible with the distinctively sufficientarian indifference toward arbitrary disadvantage above the threshold. The reason is that arbitrary disadvantage above (as below) the threshold prevents equally important interests of persons from having equal influence on collective decisions, as relational equality requires. The argument I have provided supports what, in the literature, is established as the *Indifference Objection*. The objection states that sufficientarian principles should be rejected, because they are indifferent to inequalities, once everyone has secured enough (Shields 2012, 104). More precisely, however, my argument supports the indifference objection from a distinctively relational egalitarian perspective. That is: indifference is to be rejected not by reference to principles of distributive equality (only), but by reference to the requirements of relational equality (also).

2.3 Why relational egalitarians might endorse luck egalitarianism

I have argued in the previous section that relational egalitarians should reject upper-limit sufficientarianism, as it cannot account for individuals' reasonable complaint about their arbitrary relative disadvantage above sufficiency. Therefore, relational egalitarians should commit to distributive theories, which acknowledge all individuals' arbitrary relative disadvantage as

relevant to justice. That is *egalitarian* theories of distribution such as, among others, luck egalitarianism, prioritarianism and neo-sufficientarianism.

In this section, I focus specifically on luck egalitarianism. The reason is that relational egalitarians themselves have engaged with – and rejected – luck egalitarianism in particular (Anderson 1999; Scheffler 2003). It is not my intent to claim that luck egalitarianism is the only egalitarian theory relational egalitarians might endorse. More modestly, I aim to show that the responsibility-sensitiveness of luck egalitarianism makes it an attractive distributive theory for regulating distribution within a society of equals. I offer two reasons in support of this claim. Firstly, the distinctively luck egalitarian definition of arbitrariness matches out intuitions regarding which relative disadvantages infringe the requirements of relational equality. Secondly, individuals' commitment to luck egalitarian justice is compatible with their effective relational egalitarian disposition toward treating the interests of others as counting equally as their own.

To start, consider the distinctively luck egalitarian definition of arbitrary disadvantage. Luck egalitarianism differentiates between arbitrary and non-arbitrary disadvantages as follows: arbitrary disadvantages correspond to the effects of bad brute luck on individuals' fate. Non-arbitrary disadvantages are disadvantages justified by reference to individuals' options and choices. On a luck egalitarian understanding, individuals' disadvantage is unfair, and therefore pro tanto unjust, if it cannot be vindicated by individuals' choice, or fault (Cohen 2008, 7)³⁸. By endorsing luck egalitarianism, then, relational egalitarians would reformulate the second distributive requirement of relational equality as follows:

³⁸ For a more accurate perspective on the luck egalitarian core commitment, as well as on the definition of bad brute luck, please refer to Chapter 1, section 2.

2. Relating as equals requires that, above the threshold, individuals are not worse off than others through no fault of their own.

That is, relational egalitarians would also commit to the claim that, whenever individuals' disadvantage is brought about by their own responsible behavior (non-arbitrary disadvantage), it does not infringe the second distributive requirement of relational equality³⁹. To illustrate, consider a slightly different version of the previously introduced example. All other things remaining equal, Alex and Jake are offered by the school director some extra-curricular work. In exchange, the school would waive all their attendance fees. Suppose that the two boys have equally secure options to either accept or not to accept the school director's offer, and that only Alex accepts, so that only Alex can afford the preparatory class. Does Jake's relative disadvantage prevent Alex and Jake's relation to be among equals? Endorsing a luck egalitarian definition of arbitrariness allows excluding this possibility: Jake's relative disadvantage is, by reference to luck egalitarian principles, non-arbitrary. Rather, it reflects Jake's own choices, and not the inferior influence of his interests on the attendance policy.

If you find it convincing, that individuals' inequality, when brought up by individuals' choices, does not prevent individuals from relating to one another as equals, then you agree that luck egalitarianism matches some of our intuitions concerning which disadvantage infringes the requirements of relational equality.

³⁹ Admittedly, when individuals' non-arbitrary relative disadvantage forces them beneath the threshold of sufficiency, relational equality requires bringing individuals back to the threshold. It does so, by virtue of the first distributive requirement. Yet the inequality binding individuals at the sufficiency threshold to the better off, when reducible to individuals' choices and behaviors, is in no sense an infringement of the distributive requirements of relational egalitarian justice.

One legitimate worry relational egalitarians might bring forward for resisting luck egalitarian distributions at this point regards individuals' non-arbitrary inequalities above sufficiency⁴⁰. Non-arbitrary inequalities above sufficiency might constitute a threat to individuals' egalitarian relations. Therefore, they should be neutralized to secure relational equality. Luck egalitarianism does not require neutralizing non-arbitrary inequalities. Therefore, luck egalitarianism is not the appropriate theory to promote relational equality. The worry can be better visualized by thinking at individuals who choose to borrow money on exploitative terms, and therefore end up in miserable conditions. Suppose that they are responsible for their misery, and that, due to the first distributive requirement of relational equality, they are brought up to the threshold of sufficiency. Given that, at the sufficiency threshold, they are still significantly worse off than the better off in society, and that such distributive inequality has a negative impact on the egalitarian character of their relations, should such inequality be neutralized? If yes, it seems that luck egalitarianism is unable to do match the distributive requirements of relational equality, because luck egalitarianism does not require neutralizing non-arbitrary inequalities. I believe that the worry about non-distributive inequalities does not commit one to this claim. Rather, it is the case that, if certain non-arbitrary inequalities constitute a threat to the egalitarian character of individuals' relations, then the worse off in distribution are not yet at the sufficiency threshold "which allows them not to be dominated and oppressed by others". Rather, they are necessarily below of it. That is, it is the first distributive requirement of relating as equals which grants that individuals being worse off than others because of their own choices and behaviours are not as worse off as it is impossible for them to relate to other

⁴⁰ I thank Andreas Albertsen for pointing me to this.

as equals. A commitment to luck egalitarian principles only applies above such threshold⁴¹.

Consider, now, how alternative egalitarian theories of justice offer different definitions of arbitrariness. By doing so, they offer different readings of the second distributive requirement of relational equality. On a Rawlsian perspective, for instance, relational equality requires that, above the sufficientarian threshold, individuals' relative disadvantage is just (only) if the distribution allows the worst off in society to be as well off as possible (Rawls 1999, 266).

To expand: according to Rawls, the principles regulating distribution within a society of equals should not object, but rather welcome, those distributive inequalities which allow the worst off in society to flourish (Ibid). These come with special incentives, which should be accorded to people with talent. Rawls' general observation is that, as a matter of genetic luck, some individuals in society are more capable than others to produce goods. By offering them incentives, these individuals produce more. By producing more, they develop production in a way which is beneficial to everyone.

In his critique to Rawls, and defence of the luck egalitarian principle, Cohen undermined one important assumption of Rawls: that is that, if the talented had to equally redistribute the product of their work between themselves and the less talented, they would stop producing further (Cohen 2008, 32). Concretely, he asks what the empirical observation lying at the core of Rawls' assumption tells about the society he is displaying: that the society is permeated by the inegalitarian attitudes of its members:

⁴¹ For further references on a possible mismatch between luck egalitarian principles and the requirement of relating as equals, see Cohen 2009; Gilabert 2012b and Albertsen 2019.

The worst off benefit from incentive inequality in particular only because the better off would, in effect, go on strike if unequalizing incentives were withdrawn. This inequality benefits the badly off only within the constraint set by the inegalitarian attitude, and the consequent behavior, of the well off, a constraint that they could remove. (Ibid, 33)

I follow Cohen when stating that: incentives inequality cannot be legitimized by the unwillingness of the better off to produce more when this benefits everyone equally, rather than themselves only. I believe, furthermore, that reasons against incentives inequalities (that is inequalities which are not vindicated by individuals' choices of fault, but rather by individuals inegalitarian attitudes) are of relational egalitarian nature also. Indeed, the relational egalitarian deliberative constraint urges individuals not only to accept that their peers' equally important interests should equally shape their collective decisions, but also that all members in society display "a normally effective disposition to treat the interests of others accordingly" (Scheffler 2015, 35). If this holds, then we have a strong reason to favour luck egalitarianism over rawlsianism from a relational egalitarian perspective: incentives inequalities infringe the deliberative constraint of relational egalitarianism; luck egalitarianism does not allow for incentives inequality; rawlsianism does; therefore, we should favour luck egalitarianism over rawlsianism from a relational egalitarian perspective.

I have argued so far that that luck egalitarianism is a valid theory of distributive justice to regulate distribution in a relational egalitarian society. To support this view, I have offered two reasons. Firstly, the luck egalitarian definition of arbitrariness matches our intuitions regarding which relative disadvantages infringe the requirements of distributive equality – that is those disadvantages individuals are not responsible for. Secondly, the luck egalitarian commitment is centred on individuals' inner disposition toward

treating the interests of others as equally important as the owns when shaping collective decisions. This is in line with the relational egalitarian deliberative constraint as endorsed by relational egalitarians.

3. Maintaining Sufficiency

In the previous sections, I have claimed that sufficientarianism in its traditional understanding is not enough for regulating distribution within a society of equals. The reason is that sufficientarianism permits arbitrary relative disadvantages above the sufficientarian threshold, although these are incompatible with individuals' commitment to relational equality. It follows that, when defining the distributive implications of their own theory, relational egalitarians should reject upper-limit sufficientarianism in favour of an egalitarian pattern of distribution, that is a pattern which only permits non-arbitrary supra-threshold distributive inequalities.

In this section, I acknowledge and explore the possibility for relational egalitarianism to maintain sufficientarianism as the proper pattern of distribution. Maintaining sufficientarianism – I claim – succeeds either (a) by endorsing a hybrid version of sufficientarianism, which maintains the positive thesis according to which individuals ought to be granted enough, while rejecting the negative thesis according to which there is no requirement of justice that individuals be granted the same; or (b) by endorsing an objectivist sufficientarian account which denies the conceptual possibility of distributive inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold.

After engaging with both (a) and (b), I argue that supporting any of the two sufficientarian accounts is extensionally identical with endorsing egalitarian principles of distribution. That is, I claim that: to avoid the indifference objection while maintaining their theory to have sufficientarian implications

in the distributive realm, relational egalitarians should endorse sufficientarian principles which are extensionally equal to principles of distributive equality.

3.1 Maintaining sufficientarianism while rejecting the sufficientarian negative thesis

The first available way for relational egalitarians to maintain that relational equality has *sufficientarian* implications is to abandon upper-limit sufficientarianism in favour of shift-sufficientarianism.

To recall, upper-limit sufficientarianism is the standard sufficientarian doctrine, on which there is – at least theoretically – an upper-limit above which reasons of distributive justice do not apply, that is a limit above which these lack moral significance (Shields 2012; Nielsen 2019, 3). The alternative, more recent, understanding of sufficientarianism developed by Liam Shields, however, defines the sufficientarian threshold not in terms of an upper-limit above which claims of redistribution lack normative significance, but, rather, as the representation of *a shift* in our reasons of distributive justice (Shields 2012; 2016; 2018):

The Shift Thesis: Once people have secured enough, there is a discontinuity in the rate of change of the marginal weight of our reasons to benefit them further. (Shields 2016, 35)

Shields' account allows sufficientarianism to escape the indifference objection by embracing a significantly pluralist conception of sufficientarianism, according to which supra-threshold inequalities remain of relevance for justice. His account states that the concern for granting individuals enough – which makes sufficientarianism a distinctive theory of distributive justice – is

to be understood as only one among a number of justice-based concerns. For instance, the sufficientarian positive concern is *complementary* – rather than *adverse* – to the luck egalitarian distributive concern in favour of securing individuals' equal amounts of the proper metric of justice (Ibid, 34).

The compatibility between shift-sufficientarian and luck egalitarian distributive concerns is grounded in the assumption that, once individuals have granted enough, reasons to secure relative fairness between them shift but do not disappear (Shields 2012; 2016); that is, their strength diminishes, or is mitigated by, considerations other than fair distribution (Ibid):

[a] discontinuity in the rate of change of the marginal weight of our reasons to benefit someone means that the rate of change itself changes depending on how well off a person is. So the rate of change of the marginal weight of our reasons may be 1 until someone has secured enough, then our reasons to benefit them decline at a quicker or slower rate. (Shields 2016, 35)

The spirit of this account – I believe – is in line with the instrumental value that relational egalitarians attach to principles of distribution. Indeed, it is consistent with a distributive commitment primarily aimed at granting individuals freedom from those non-comparative disadvantages which are at the roots of their marginalization, domination and oppression in society. Still, what makes shift-sufficientarianism an attractive distributive account for relational egalitarians is that, by endorsing it, relational egalitarians would not bind themselves to the indifference claim, on which supra-threshold inequalities are irrelevant to justice.

At the same time, because shift-sufficientarianism allows, for egalitarian reasons, to object to supra-threshold inequalities (Nielsen 2019, 3), endorsing shift-sufficientarianism commits relational egalitarianism to distributive principles extensionally identical to principles of distributive equality. This is

evident when reformulating the shift thesis in terms of all things considered reasons:

The Shift Thesis: all things considered reasons to neutralize distributive inequalities are stronger when they apply to non-comparative disadvantage.

To explain: if, in scenario A, individuals experience distributive inequality and non-comparative disadvantage, at least two *pro tanto* reasons to object to distributive inequalities subsist: one egalitarian *pro tanto* reason *e* in favour of neutralizing inequality; and one sufficientarian *pro tanto* reason *s* in favour of neutralizing non-comparative disadvantage. In scenario B, where non-comparative disadvantage has been neutralized, *s* is eliminated and only *e* remains. Therefore, all things considered reasons to neutralize distributive inequality in A are necessarily stronger than all things considered reasons to neutralize distributive inequality in B.

If this is correct, then it follows that, when embracing shift-sufficientarianism for regulating distribution within a society of equals, relational egalitarians necessarily commit themselves to distributive implications which are extensionally identical to principles of distributive equality.

3.2 Maintaining sufficientarianism by denying the existence of distributive inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold

A second venue available to relational egalitarians who maintain that their theory has sufficientarian implications, but who want to avoid the

indifference objection, is to deny the conceptual possibility of justice-relevant inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold.⁴²

Denying the possibility of justice-relevant inequalities above sufficiency succeeds by setting the sufficientarian threshold at the level at which all justice-relevant values are sated. To see this, consider how, as Joseph Raz has argued, justice-relevant goods such as autonomy, happiness, capability, opportunities etc. can be satiable (Raz 1986, 242), that is capable of being fully satisfied. Here his explanation in reference to happiness:

The fact that the pursuit of happiness is a diminishing principle is in part explained by the satiability of happiness. Having had a happy childhood does not assure one of a happy adolescence. But a happy childhood, even if happy through the pleasures experienced during it only, can be perfectly happy. It can be so happy that adding pleasures to it would not make it happier. (Ibid)

If it is true that values can be perfectly fulfilled, then there needs to be – at least theoretically – a stage at which their complete satisfaction is achieved, that is a limit above of which more satisfaction of the values is impossible. If happiness could be sated, as in Raz’s understanding, then inequalities above the threshold at which happiness is sated could not exist, because no one could enjoy more happiness than as much as possible. Similarly, if the number of valuable opportunities individuals might have available were to have an objectively fixed upper limit, no one could have more valuable

⁴² This paragraphs have been mainly inspired by a presentation by Lasse Nielsen at the *Limits workshop* held at the University of Utrecht in January 2019. Particularly, the reconstruction of value-satiability sufficientarianism as explained here follows such Nielsen’s reconstruction, and is not an original contribution of mine.

opportunities than another once everyone had as much opportunities as available.

Lasse Nielsen develops a new understanding of the sufficientarian doctrine from the concept of value-foundational satiability:

Value-foundational satiability: T represents ‘enough’ for the relevant value(s) of justice to be sated. Above T, claims for redistribution are irrelevant, since justice-relevant inequalities cannot exist. (Nielsen 2019, 6).

Particularly, Nielsen applies value foundational satiability to define the upper-limit sufficientarian threshold as the threshold at which all justice-relevant goods are sated. When all individuals are at the threshold, it is impossible for them to be relevantly better- or worse-off than others in terms of justice-relevant values (Ibid, 7). We call this neo-sufficientarian account *value-satiability sufficientarianism*.

Value-satiability sufficientarianism assumes that the relevant value is (or relevant values are) satiable and that distributive justice is fulfilled if and only if the distribution is such that the everyone is sated in regard to the relevant value(s). (Ibid).

According to value-satiability sufficientarianism, and differently than in the mainstream upper-limit sufficientarian tradition of Frankfurt (1987) and Crisp (2003), sufficientarianism does not ground the negative thesis on which supra-threshold inequalities are irrelevant to justice in the fact that these inequalities are beyond its scope. Rather, it states that supra-threshold relevant inequalities cannot exist in the first place, as justice-relevant goods cannot be sated further than at the threshold level. In this way, value-satiability sufficientarianism rejects the indifference objection by making

reference to the impossibility of distributive inequalities (of justice-relevant goods) above the upper-limit sufficientarian threshold:

If the threshold is set at the point where justice-relevant values are sated, this implies that the threshold must involve the elimination of all deficiencies relevant to justice. So, at 10, there is no hunger, no destitution, no oppression, no suffering, etc. But if 10 defines such a situation of complete non-deficiency, what could possibly be the reference value of 200 or 1000? Absence of deficiency from satiation is hardly something you can multiply by 100. (Nielsen 2019, 14).

If my reconstruction of Nielsen's value satiability sufficientarianism is right, then the following is the case: when loyal to its core assumption, value-satiability sufficientarianism does not allow for arbitrary distributive inequalities of justice-relevant goods. Indeed, it provides additional support to the claim that distributive inequality is to be neutralized because it necessarily brings individuals below the sufficientarian threshold, at which relevant social goods are sated.

In sum, relational egalitarians might indeed maintain that the distributive implications of their theory are sufficientarian implications by embracing value-satiability sufficientarian principles. This, however, would commit them to embrace principles extensively equal to principles of distributive equality, that is to reject inequalities in the distribution of the correct metric of justice whenever they occur, while assuming that they can only occur below the sufficientarian threshold.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that sufficientarian principles of distribution are, in their traditional upper-limit understanding, not enough for regulating distribution within a relational egalitarian society. The reason is that they allow for supra-threshold distributive inequalities, which prevent – contrary to what relational equality requires – equally important interests of persons to have equal influence on collective decisions.

In light of their own commitment, therefore, relational egalitarians are wrong when rejecting distributive egalitarianism in favour of sufficientarianism. Indeed, because they oppose to arbitrary inequalities, egalitarian theories of distributive justice are better equipped than sufficientarianism for regulating distribution within a society of equals.

Finally, I have acknowledged two possibilities available to relational egalitarians who wish to maintain that their theory has sufficientarian implications. The first is to abandon upper-limit sufficientarianism in favour of shift sufficientarianism; the second is to abandon upper-limit subjectivist sufficientarianism in favour of value-satiability sufficientarianism. In both cases, I have claimed, endorsing sufficientarian principles of distribution would be endorsing distributive principles compatible with, rather than in competition with, principles of distributive equality.

Chapter 3 Why “adequacy” is not enough for educational justice

A relational egalitarian perspective

*Freedom for the strong is oppression for the weak; and oppression (...) is not less oppressive when its strength is derived from superior wealth, than when it relies on a preponderance of physical force. Hence, when steps to diminish inequality are denounced as infringements of freedom, the first question to be answered is one not always asked. It is: freedom for whom? There is no such thing as freedom in the abstract, divorced from the realities of a particular time and place.
(Tawney 1951, 259–60)*

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that relational egalitarians should object to arbitrary distributive inequalities above sufficiency. The reason is that arbitrary inequality violates a necessary condition for relating as equals: that individuals' equally important interests influence collective decisions equally (Scheffler 2015, 35–36). In this chapter, I look at one specific instantiation of distributive inequality above sufficiency, namely educational inequality.⁴³

⁴³ The chapter restricts its concern to children's and young adults' education.

The focus of the chapter is motivated by the significant role of education⁴⁴ in the lives of individuals: education has such a big impact on the quality of individuals' lives, their relations and future prospects, that the question regarding how much of it is owed to each deserves independent concern (Shields, Newman, and Satz 2017).

The philosophical debate often juxtaposes two competing⁴⁵ views on how to distribute education: educational equality⁴⁶ and educational adequacy. On the

⁴⁴ Admittedly, there is something such as “bad education”; when referring to “education” and “educational advantages” in this chapter, however, I refer to “good education” and its advantages only (de los Santos Menéndez 2019).

⁴⁵ Consider that this is not the only available interpretation of the debate on social justice in education. Recent contributions have suggested that adequacy and equality can be endorsed together, rather than as mutually exclusive approaches. This is the view I am going to support in this chapter also. That is, I will argue that adequacy should not be endorsed as the sole principle in the area of educational justice, but rather as a complementary tool on the way to educational equality. For further references on this, see Brighouse and Swift (2009) and de los Santos Menéndez (2019), among others.

⁴⁶ It is not unusual, in the domain of educational justice, to understand “equality” and “equity” as interchangeable terms. An accurate distinction between the two terms is offered by the Glossary of Education Reform. Accordingly, equity is the process leading to equality of educational outcomes – rather than educational resources. Reforms aimed at improving educational equity, then, seek to compensate for arbitrary inequalities of educational performance. Such compensation might imply an unequal allocation of resources, such as providing more educational services and support to students with greater needs. Hence, equity does not reflect strict equality – what is applied, allocated, or distributed equally. In the chapter, I refer to educational equality in terms of equality of educational outcomes. Therefore, I understand the two terms as indeed interchangeable and avoid, for reasons of simplicity, the term “equity”.

equality view, everyone should have equal education. This means either that individuals should have equal amounts of educational resources, or inputs, such as per student qualified teachers and spending, or that everyone should be secured equal educational achievement. On the educational adequacy view, everyone should receive an adequate education: an education sufficient for functioning in their societal economy (Tooley 1996), participating in society as an equal citizen (Gutmann 1987) or being able to function as an equal within public social interactions (Anderson 2007; Satz 2007). When endorsed as the sole distributive principle in the field of educational justice, adequacy is regarded as everything which is owed to individuals, and educational inequalities above the adequacy threshold are considered to be entirely unobjectionable (Brighouse and Swift 2008, 462).

Because granting educational equality requires costly societal reform, and at least some limitation of parental freedom to invest in the education of one's own children only, several political and legal theorists and actors have abandoned the rhetoric of educational equality in favour of that of educational adequacy⁴⁷ (Liu 2006; Anderson 2007; Satz 2007, 2008). While being itself an ambitious demand, however, educational adequacy is less demanding than educational equality, as it leaves unaddressed arbitrary inequalities above the adequacy threshold.

My main aim in this chapter is to show that, as a matter of principle, relational egalitarians should reject mere adequacy in favour of educational equality.⁴⁸ I do not deny that educational adequacy is an urgent demand that societies need to meet. On the contrary, I agree that everyone should be provided with adequate education to live as a full member of their society, and

⁴⁷ See Brighouse and Swift 2008, 445.

⁴⁸ My claim concerns the pattern – not the metric – of educational justice. Therefore, here I do not expand on the question “equality of what?”

participate in its public life. However, I claim that mere adequacy is not enough for regulating the distribution of education in a relational egalitarian society, because the educational inequalities it allows violate the deliberative constraint for relating as equals.

My argument proceeds as follows: Firstly, I expand on educational adequacy and educational equality as two normative options in the field of educational justice. I claim that educational adequacy allows for arbitrary educational inequalities above the adequacy threshold, while educational equality does not. Secondly, I claim that respecting the deliberative constraint – according to which individuals’ equally important interests should equally shape collective decisions – is a necessary condition for a relational egalitarian society (P1). Arbitrary educational inequality, however, violates the deliberative constraint of relating as equals (P2). Therefore, (C) relational egalitarians should reject educational adequacy in favour of educational equality.

The argument needs preparatory clarification. Therefore, I devote a significant part of the chapter to clarifying the concepts of educational adequacy and educational equality. In the first section, I expand on the significant role of education in the lives of children. In the second and third, I explore the adequacy and the equality views. I state here that there are different understandings of the equality view, among them the meritocratic equality conception (Brighthouse and Swift 2008) and the “all-the-way equality view” (Ben-Shahar 2015). Only according to the latter, arbitrary educational inequality is always to be neutralised. Henceforth, I take “all-the-way equality” as the normative alternative to the adequacy view. In the fourth and final section, I claim that relational egalitarians should acknowledge pro tanto reasons to favour all-the-way equality over the adequacy view. Indeed, as a matter of principle, they should reject educational outcomes which entail

arbitrary inequalities, as these necessarily violate the deliberative constraint of relating as equals.

1. The focus on education

My inquiry into the distributive implications of relational egalitarianism restricts this chapter to the distributive question in the field of education, because of both the particular value attached to education and the rising educational inequality which characterises societies nowadays. In the following paragraphs, allow me to briefly expand on both dimensions.

1.1 The value of education

The value of education is both intrinsic and instrumental. As an intrinsic good, education improves the quality of individuals' lives:⁴⁹ reading poetry, being intellectually curious, understanding mathematical assumptions, and appreciating the theatre are just some of the intrinsically valuable pursuits which make one's life worth living. No reference to what these pursuits are good for is required for their value to be proved. And indeed we can imagine scenarios in which individuals can make little to no use of their education – such as people who obtain educational degrees while serving life sentences – and still acknowledge the value these confer on their lives.

⁴⁹ I assume from here on that how much education children have available is reflected in the advantages they enjoy as future adults. Consider, however, that part of childhood education is enjoyable on its own, that is, independently of the role it plays in light of future advantages (de los Santos Menéndez 2019, 3; Brennan 2014; Gheaus 2015; Macleod 2010).

As an instrumental good, education plays a key role in shaping children's chances to occupy certain job positions as future adults, and benefit from the advantages attached to them (Ibid); it has a significant impact on individuals' physical and psychological health, as well as on the personal relations into which individuals enter over the course of their lives (Shields 2016, 84). Furthermore, education shapes individuals' capacity to contribute to their own well-being, to understand their environment, and to make autonomous choices (Ibid; Institute for Higher Education Policy 1998). It enables individuals to develop important capacities, such as self-respect, and the capacities to enjoy life, the arts, and contemplation (Ben-Shahar 2015, 86). Finally, education – and democratic education in particular – impacts the character of individuals' living together. It strengthens the democratic spirit of their societies (Ibid), as indeed educated citizens are more likely to participate in the project of shared governance than non-educated ones, they are more likely to inform themselves, and to participate in electoral processes through voting (Ibid; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995, 432–37, 445).

1.2 The unequal distribution of education

As a result of the rising socio-economic inequality in many countries, children have been experiencing rising educational inequality due to circumstances outside of their control (Lippert-Rasmussen 2012, 118; Corak 2012, 3). Educational inequality can be identified either by reference to children's unequal educational resources, or by reference to children's unequal educational achievement. Educational resources, or inputs, include the amounts of per student funding and qualified teachers, among other things. By contrast, educational achievements are the actual level of education that children attain (Brighthouse 2002; de los Santos Menéndez 2019). In this chapter, I do not argue for a specific metric of educational justice. When

comparing different positions, however, I present their demands in terms of educational achievements. I do so mainly for two reasons. The first is that I find it plausible that achieving educational equality might require allocating educational resources unequally, that is, proportionally to children's differential needs (Brighthouse and Swift 2008; Ben-Shahar 2015). The second is that the accounts I engage with in this chapter present their demands in terms of educational achievement.

In addition, I adopt a liberal egalitarian framework when assuming that social institutions such as the state are at least co-responsible for children's educational achievements. In most high-income countries, education is distributed through legal regulation, such as the introduction of compulsory schooling (Shields, Newman, and Satz 2017). However, education is significantly generated by institutions other than the state alone: the qualitative time spent by parents with their children, for instance, and the different ways in which parents sometimes treat different children, strongly influences children's values, abilities, and educational opportunities (Gheaus 2018a); whether parents take their children to museums, talk with them over dinner, read to them before bedtime, confers them significant educational advantages over others (Shied, Newman, and Satz 2017; Hutton et al. 2015). I take it as a normative assumption of the chapter that the provision of education lies in the hands of both educational institutions and individuals' families.

Children's educational achievement in contemporary Western societies has been particularly shaped by the wealth available in their families of origin (OECD 2017; PISA 2015). According to the 2017 McKinsey report on education in Germany, for instance, out of 100 children with at least one parent with a university degree, 74 go to university. 63 of them obtain a bachelor's degree. 45 achieve a master's degree and 10 acquire a PhD. By contrast, out of 100 children whose parents do not have a university degree,

only 21 children go to University, 15 achieve a bachelor's degree, and only 8 a master's degree. One single child whose parents do not have a university degree obtains a PhD. The OECD indicates similar figures, so it is not implausible to assume that educational inequality extends beyond the German borders to most OECD countries. Given that children have less, or worse, education than others due to circumstances outside of their control, how should their arbitrary inequality be evaluated by egalitarian justice?

2. The adequacy view

The egalitarian debate juxtaposes two competing views for regulating the distribution of education in society: the adequacy view and the equality view. The current section engages with the first, according to which all requirements of educational justice are met, once everyone has *adequate* education granted (Shields 2016; Shields, Newman, and Satz 2017; Anderson 2004, 2007; Satz 2007). According to the adequacy view, educational inequality in contemporary Germany is not an instance of injustice, as long as all children within the German community are sufficiently educated.⁵⁰ When all children are sufficiently educated, the fact that some are more – or less – educated than others is irrelevant to justice. That is, children who are less – or worse – educated than others, and yet sufficiently educated, have no justice-based claims to have as much education as their peers, or an education as good as theirs.

What defines an adequate education also specifies where to set the sufficientarian threshold, above which educational inequalities are irrelevant to justice. The definition of adequate education differs between various

⁵⁰ The question of whether the adequacy threshold has yet to be met in Germany, as appears to be the case, is one I will not tackle here.

accounts. Debra Satz's version of the adequacy view defines the content of adequate education by reference to the requirements of full citizenship and inclusion in an egalitarian society (Shields 2016, 114):

We can derive (...) the nature and content of educational adequacy from the requirements for full membership and inclusion in a democratic society of equal citizens. (Satz 2007, 636)

Requirements for full membership and inclusion include sufficient knowledge and competence for exercising political rights and freedoms, as well as competence in group interaction, such as the capacity to cooperate and relate with others in employment, politics, and public spaces (Ibid, 636–37). Educational inequalities above the adequacy threshold are not objectionable, under the condition that these do not undermine individuals' equal civic status:⁵¹

although an adequacy standard does not insist on strictly equal opportunities for the development of children's potentials, large inequalities regarding who has a real opportunity for important goods above citizenship's threshold relegate some members of society to second-class citizenship, where they are denied effective access to positions of power and privilege in the society. (Ibid, 637)

Satz, accordingly, refutes a great majority of educational inequalities on reasons of adequacy. She claims, for instance, that even if everyone were brought up to a certain ambitious level of educational achievement, but only white students systematically had better education than black students, so

⁵¹ This condition is difficult to meet. It rules out many arbitrary inequalities in the field of education. However, and this is what I insist on, the view does not rule out all of them. If it did, then it would be extensionally identical – rather than an alternative – to educational equality.

that only white students were effectively educated to serve as political leaders (Ibid), then the educational system would be unjust:

Care must be taken to ensure that those with fewer opportunities are not at such a relative disadvantage as to offend their dignity or self-respect, relegate them to second-class citizenship, cut them off from any realistic prospect of upward social mobility, or deprive them of the ability to form social relationships with others on a footing of equality. Thus, an educational system that simply precluded the students of poorer families from competing in the same labor market and society as their wealthier peers cannot be adequate. (Ibid, 637–38)

This passages illustrate how, in Satz’s writings, the nature of the adequacy threshold is dynamic, rather than static.⁵² This means that an improvement of the educational achievement of the most educated necessarily raises the threshold up to which everyone should be brought (de los Santos Menéndez 2019).⁵³

Although Satz restricts the width of educational inequality acceptable above the adequacy threshold, her adequacy account allows for various educational inequalities: that is, for all educational inequalities which do not endanger individuals’ equal participation in the public sphere. If, for instance,

⁵² I thank Anca Gheaus for pointing me to this.

⁵³ Heilinger (2020) endorses a similar understanding of the sufficientarian threshold when claiming that supra-threshold inequalities are permissible only to a certain degree: “Thus, my account calls for a ‘corridor’ of justifiable distributive inequality compatible with relational equality: it demands that those who have less are put in a situation in which they have enough; and that those who have more do not have too much (where ‘too much’ would be the amount of relevant advantages that would undermine relational equality)” (Ibid, 67).

individuals' arbitrary unequal chances to obtain a PhD in Philosophy has no impact on their enjoyment of full membership to society, the fact that some might obtain a PhD in Philosophy, while others might not, without any fault of their own, is irrelevant to justice. Similarly, if some are less educated than others because their parents have worse educational levels than others' parents have, and this does not impact their capacity to participate as equals in the public sphere, their educational disadvantage has no standing in front of justice.

The same conclusions follow from Elizabeth Anderson's version of the adequacy view. Anderson states that everyone should be secured with adequate – rather than equal – education, whereby the ideal of an egalitarian society defines the meaning of adequacy (Anderson 2004, 106). More precisely, Anderson calls “adequate” the education that guarantees everyone, independently of their social and economic background, the effective chances to occupy positions of responsibility and leadership in society. That is, effective chances of becoming a member of what she calls a “democratic elite”:⁵⁴

Working backward from the good we demand elites to do for everyone in society to their necessary qualifications, we arrive at a standard for the educational opportunities a democratic society must provide to its youth. A just K–12 educational system must prepare students from all sectors of society, and especially those disadvantaged along any dimensions, with sufficient skills to be able to succeed in higher education and thereby join the elite. (Anderson 2007, 597)

⁵⁴ Please note that Satz puts a similar – even if weaker – emphasis on the connection between a just distribution of educational opportunities in societies and the education of a democratic elite (Satz 2007, 637).

Accordingly, the definition of adequacy is derived directly from the function of the democratic elite (Shields 2016, 110), which is further specified as follows:

[i]n a democratic society, elites must be so constituted that they will effectively serve all sectors of society, not just themselves. They must perform in their offices so that the inequalities in power, autonomy, responsibility, and reward they enjoy in virtue of their position redound to the benefit of all, including the least advantaged. This requires that elites must be responsive to the interests and concerns of people from all walks of lives. (Anderson 2007, 596)

So understood, an adequate education is one which enables and disposes the democratic elite to be (1) responsive to the interests of all members of society, and (2) effective in promoting these. Members of the democratic elite must have knowledge of the problems and the interests of all their co-citizens, cultivate a disposition to serve them, dispose of the know-how required for effectively promoting such interests, and be competent in group interaction (Ibid; Shields 2016, 111). One necessary condition to meet all of these requirements is that the democratic elite is composed of members of all classes, including the least advantaged (Anderson 2007, 596–97).

2.1 Adequacy and sufficiency

Many legal theorists, political strategists, and activists have been arguing in favour of the adequacy view out of pragmatic reasons. They have endorsed the adequacy view with the aim of urging educational institutions to neutralise those educational deficiencies, which exclude some from participating in the political life and cooperative market of their society. So understood,

educational adequacy is not an alternative to educational equality, but rather the first of a series of steps to achieve it. In the political writings of Anderson and Satz, however, the endorsement of educational adequacy displays a more fundamental rejection of the egalitarian principle of distribution.⁵⁵ Their view is not merely that children need to have adequate education granted, but also – as in the negative thesis of sufficientarianism – that educational inequalities above the adequacy threshold are entirely unobjectionable (Brighthouse and Swift 2018, 462).

This is particularly evident in the case of Anderson, whose endorsement of educational equality reflects the endorsement of upper-limit sufficientarianism⁵⁶ in the distributive realm (Ibid). Similarly to upper-limit sufficientarianism, the mere adequacy view entails both a positive (1) and a negative (2) thesis:

1. educational justice requires distributing education so that all individuals are sufficiently educated to enjoy full membership and

⁵⁵ See Brighthouse and Swift 2018, 462: “Advocates of the adequacy principle also differ in the status they grant to the adequacy principle. Our sense from talking to activists is that for many of them adequacy is a pragmatic retreat from equality. But for others, including Tooley, Satz, and Anderson, adequacy is regarded as genuinely all that children are owed, and inequalities of education above this threshold are entirely unobjectionable. Although the relationship between principles of justice at the social level and sectoral principles, which are supposed to concern the distribution of particular resources, is complex, in some cases advocates of adequacy in education are motivated by their commitment to a principle of sufficiency at a more fundamental level – the idea being that adequacy, rather than equality or maximizing the position of the least advantaged, is what justice demands regarding the distribution of resources all told (Anderson 1999; Frankfurt 1987)”.

⁵⁶ I have clarified this term and distinguished upper-limit sufficientarianism from further sufficientarian views in Chapter 2.

inclusion in their society (Satz 2007); and join their democratic elite (Anderson 2007); and

2. educational justice does not require neutralising arbitrary educational inequalities above the adequacy threshold.

Because of (2), mere adequacy is vulnerable to the indifference objection, according to which its principles should be rejected, because they are indifferent to inequalities, once everyone has secured enough (Shields 2012, 104).⁵⁷ Looking at the concrete case of the United States' educational system⁵⁸ helps to illustrate the limits of educational adequacy in light of the indifference objection.

Children's education in the United States significantly depends on children's geographical position: because education is financed by individuals' local property taxes, how much education children have secured is proportional to the wealth of their local school district (Shields, Newman, and Satz, 2017). Since local property tax flows vary between differently affluent districts (Ibid), children living in less affluent districts have worse, or less, education available than others. Educational adequacy requires that, no matter how affluent, or poor, the school district is, every child has sufficient education secured. That is, no child should suffer educational deficiency. Efforts to advance educational adequacy, however, do not aim to neutralise educational inequality among the differently affluent school districts: once all children have adequate education, the fact that some might have more or better education than others, because of living in a more affluent district than others, deserves no concern. I call this phenomenon wealth-based disadvantage above adequacy.

⁵⁷ I have expanded on this in Chapter 2, section 2.2.

⁵⁸ Here, I rely on Shields, Newman, and Satz (2017).

I aim to show in this chapter that – given that all children have equally strong interests in having an education – relational egalitarians should object to distributions which arbitrarily advantage some over others such as wealth-based disadvantage above adequacy, among others.

3. The equality view

In the previous section, I have introduced the adequacy view and shown that educational adequacy allows for arbitrary educational inequalities above the adequacy threshold. In this section, I introduce an alternative view to the adequacy view, namely the equality view. Differently from the adequacy view, the equality view does not allow for arbitrary educational inequality above adequacy.

More precisely, I distinguish between two prominent, and yet very different, understandings of the equality view in the educational justice debate: meritocratic educational equality (Brighthouse and Swift 2008) and all-the-way educational equality (Ben-Shahar 2015). It is my intention to show that only all-the-way educational equality does not allow for arbitrary educational inequality above adequacy.

Educational equality⁵⁹ differs from educational adequacy, as it rejects arbitrary educational inequality above (as well as below)⁶⁰ the adequacy

⁵⁹ To avoid misunderstandings, the difference in meaning between “educational equality” and “formal educational equality” needs to be taken into account. While “educational equality” and educational adequacy are competing views, “formal educational equality” is endorsed both by advocates of educational equality and of educational adequacy. To explain: formal educational equality is a non-discrimination principle, which requires that education is distributed irrespective of

threshold. This has been illustrated by Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift as follows:

Suppose that all children have an adequate education, (...) and that there is some leeway such that even the least well-educated children are being educated better than adequacy demands. Suppose, now, that a bounty of unexpected resources enters the system (...). Wherever the resources are spent within the system, they will not undermine adequacy. How should they be distributed? The principle of adequacy makes no comment at all on this. (...) This seems counterintuitive. To be sure, we can think of justifications for spending those resources on the more

certain individuals' personal characteristics, such as their religion, ethnicity, gender, skin colour (Shields, Newman, and Satz 2017). The principle prevents formal obstacles – such as entrance criteria for educational institutions – that entail discriminating features (Ibid), and is usually accompanied by meritocratic considerations, whereby educational opportunities should be open to all applicants solely on the basis of their merit. Formal educational equality is less demanding than both educational adequacy and educational equality. The former requires, for instance, that students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are not excluded from schools, but it does not aim to provide them with either adequate or equal education. Also, the principle does not object against the social determinants which – together with formal discrimination – cause arbitrary educational disadvantage (Anderson 2010).

⁶⁰ My view is similar in rejecting arbitrary inequalities below and above the adequacy threshold. As I claimed in the second chapter, arbitrary inequalities indeed violate one necessary condition for relating as equals *because* they are arbitrary. My particular reference to arbitrary inequalities *above the adequacy threshold* in this chapter reflects the distinction between educational equality and educational adequacy: while the first rejects educational inequalities above the adequacy threshold, the second does not.

advantaged, or higher achieving, children, rather than for trying to make educational prospects more equal. But we think that there is a reason, albeit a defeasible reason — namely fairness — for concentrating the new educational resources on those with lower than the median prospects. The claim that the principle of adequacy is the only principle of justice for the distribution of education does not even allow equalizing prospects to enter the discussion as a reason. (Brighouse and Swift 2009, 125)

According to Brighouse and Swift, educational equality states that (i) the requirements of educational justice are not sated at the threshold where all children have adequate education granted, and (ii) there are principled reasons to distribute education equally among children, once they have been secured enough of it. So understood, the equality view does not undermine the positive thesis entailed in the adequacy view, on which everyone should have adequate education secured. Yet it does reject the also entailed negative thesis, according to which justice does not require neutralising arbitrary inequalities above adequacy.

The ideal of educational equality owes part of its strength to considerations about the positional character of education. We characterise as “positional” a good:

the absolute value of which, to their possessors, depends on those possessors’ place in the distribution of the good – on their relative standing with respect to the good in question. (Brighouse and Swift 2006, 474)

This is equivalent to saying that a good is positional:

when its value to the holder is determined by the amount others have of it – if one has more, then the other inevitably has less. (Ben-Shahar 2016, 85; Hirsch 1976; Brighouse and Swift 2006)

The instrumental value of education as a means to further goods is a positional good (Brighouse and Swift 2006; Ben-Shahar 2016, 85; Swift 2003, 12), because the value we attach to education depends, at least in part, on the amount of education we have available when compared to relevant others (Brighouse and Swift 2006, 475). For example, when you and I compete for a job position, the value we attach to having a master's degree depends, in part, on who – among us – obtained that degree. If both of us have a master's degree, the value we attach to it is minor compared to if only one of us had a master's degree.

Advocates of the equality view claim that education's positional character makes it objectionable that some individuals receive arbitrarily better – or more – education than others (Ben-Shahar 2016, 86), because an arbitrarily unequal distribution of education disadvantages individuals in the competition for the further goods that education can foster:

It is unfair, then, if some get a worse education than others because, through no fault of their own, this puts them at a disadvantage in the competition for these unequally distributed goods. (Brighouse and Swift 2008, 446).

As the passage shows, a case for educational equality rests on considerations of fairness. These hold under the assumption that the distribution of goods in society is structured in competitive terms (Ibid, 448): it rewards the better educated and penalises the less educated (Ibid). Back to the aforementioned example, what speaks in favour of educational equality is that it would be unfair for any one of us to get a job on account of being the only candidate

with a master's degree, if our competitor never had an effective chance to also acquire that degree.⁶¹

3.1 Meritocratic educational equality

There are different conceptions of the equality view. In this and the following section, I distinguish between two of them: meritocratic educational equality (Brighouse and Swift 2008) and all-the-way educational equality (Ben-Shahar 2015).

The fact that you and I have unequal educational levels is unjust, if the inequality between us results from our unequal socio-economic background, rather than our different levels of inborn talent, or efforts in education. This is the core assumption of meritocratic educational equality (Brighouse and Swift 2008):⁶²

⁶¹ Some neo-sufficientarians take positional goods into special consideration. They claim that sufficiency requires an egalitarian distribution of positional goods (Axelsen and Nielsen 2015), because being disadvantaged with regards to their distribution is suffering a non-comparative deficiency. I have gone deeper into neo-sufficientarian positions in the second chapter of this thesis. In the current chapter, I focus on more traditional conceptions of adequacy and sufficiency.

⁶² Meritocratic educational equality (Brighouse and Swift 2008) is not the same view as what Shields, Newman, and Satz (2017) call “meritocratic equality of educational opportunities”. Meritocratic equality of educational opportunities is the view that educational positions which confer superior advantages should be open to all applicants on the basis of merit. Merit – whose definition is contentious – can be measured by reference either to individuals’ grades and exams, or to their improvement, class participation, etc. (Shields, Newman, and Satz 2017). I do not engage with this view in this chapter, since it faces severe limitations and is not

An individual's prospects for educational achievement may be a function of that individual's talent and effort, but they should not be influenced by his or her social class background. (Brighthouse and Swift 2008, 447)

Brighthouse and Swift refer to the meritocratic conception as an “egalitarian” view, because it closely relates to Rawls’ principle of fair equality of opportunity (Ibid, 448), according to which social offices and positions should be open to all, and individuals with equal talent and motivation should have equal chances to achieve those positions (Rawls 2001, 42–44). However, meritocratic educational equality permits a significant degree of arbitrary inequality in education. Therefore, it can be seen as insufficiently egalitarian (Brighthouse and Swift 2008, 447). In particular, the view does not express any concern about educational inequalities which result from individuals’ different levels of inborn talent and efforts (Ibid):

standing alone, the meritocratic conception permits, although it does not require, considerable inequality of both educational resources and educational achievement, as long as those inequalities do not track social class. (Ibid, 448)

This implies that meritocratic equality does not require the investment of resources to promote the educational performance of the least talented – or those unable to make efforts (Ben-Shahar 2015, 89). Here is a practical example:

prominently defended in the literature. Among its most significant limitations, meritocratic equality of educational opportunity is unable to track class-based educational disadvantage: it (regrettably) allows for educational inequalities on the basis of merit, without tackling the distribution of those advantages which make out of some individuals the more meritorious in society.

A third grade teacher explains some simple mathematical topic. Most of the class understands the explanation the first time and is ready to move on. Three students don't and need further explanations. One belongs to a racial minority, the other is from a poor family, and the third is simply less smart. The meritocratic approach suggests that the teacher is expected to invest time and explain again for the benefit of children from racial minorities or poor children, but not for the child that is less bright, despite the fact that they would all benefit from this to the same extent. (Ibid)

For those sharing the intuition that it is arbitrary, and therefore wrong, to object against educational inequality resulting from socio-economic differences, while not objecting to those resulting from innate abilities also, the following is the case: a view more radical than meritocratic educational equality is required for the demands of equal education to be met. Interestingly, advocates of meritocratic educational equality themselves acknowledge the need for a more complete, and radical, conception of educational equality, although they do not directly engage with this (Brighthouse and Swift 2008, 448).

3.2 All-the-way educational equality

“All-the-way equality” is a radical, non-meritocratic version of the equality view. As endorsed by Tammy Harel Ben-Shahar, the view states that:

justice in education requires equality in educational outcome between all individual students. This means not merely between equally able children, or between different social groups and classes – but rather between all children, regardless of their social

background, sex, ability and the effort they invested. (Ben-Shahar 2015, 84)

The view differs from a meritocratic conception of educational equality, because it rejects both talent-based and effort-based educational inequality among children:

Meritocracy allows unequal educational outcome to persist when it is caused by differences in ability or effort. “Effort only” approaches allow inequality only when it is as a result of differential effort. All-the-way-equality rules out unequal educational outcome altogether, arguing that it is unjust even in cases when children invested differential effort in their education. (Ibid, 91)

The moral justification of all-the-way equality is grounded in considerations of fairness: it would be unfair for children’s educational achievement – and the social advantages it promotes – to be negatively affected by something children have no control over (Ben-Shahar 2016, 88). The claim that individuals’ socio-economic background and innate level of talent lie outside of their control is largely accepted. By contrast, whether pupils’ differential efforts in education are also beyond their control is a matter of dispute. Ben-Shahar rejects effort-based educational inequalities because, she claims, one’s ability to make efforts can be considered as an innate ability not available to all children (Ibid, 91), or as one which is significantly shaped by social determinants, such as the cultural environment available in children’s family of origin, and the capacity of one’s parents to foster their children’s motivation in education:

The degree of effort invested in education is influenced by culture and community, factors that shouldn’t be allowed to affect educational outcome. There are also differences in the

consequences of lack of motivation and effort between students whose parents can counter the effects of the child's lack of motivation (punishment, encouragement, private tutorship, etc.) and students whose parents cannot. (Ibid)

Accordingly, when the ability to make an effort is socially determined, we should reject the educational inequality resulting from it for the same reasons we reject educational inequalities which result from children's socio-economic background and inborn talent.

The only educational inequality which can be justified is that resulting from individuals' genuine choices. Children, however, cannot be held to the same level of responsibility for their choices as adults (Ben-Shahar 2015, 92). Therefore, in the specific field of children's education, there are principled reasons to understand choice-based educational inequality as arbitrary also – that is, non-justifiable by reference to justice-based principles. And indeed it seems plausible that, even if it were little Anna's genuine choice not to go to school, we should not hold her responsible for being worse educated than her peers, but rather her parents and institutions for being unable to provide her as much education as others. The reasons lie both in the importance of education for her and the "lapses of judgement" (Ibid) she is allowed to encounter while becoming an adult. Denying the child extra educational resources and educational support to be motivated in education and make efforts for being as educated as her peers would be sanctioning her for being a child (Ibid) rather than treating her fairly. Following Ben-Shahar, when referring to the all-the-way equality view as rejecting arbitrary educational inequality, I maintain that this requires neutralising choice-based educational inequality. When it comes to young students, I assume that we can allow for educational inequalities resulting from their genuine choices to a larger

degree than we do in the case of children.⁶³ The reason is that young students can be held responsible for their choices to a larger degree than children can.

So understood, all-the-way equality is an extremely demanding account of educational justice. It requires neutralising all biased policies and procedures which are an obstacle to individuals' equal educational performance, investing considerable resources in educating children from disadvantaged backgrounds, providing compensatory support to individuals with genetic, inborn disadvantages, and neutralising educational disadvantages of children who are less motivated to study than their peers (Ben-Shahar 2016, 83). The significant demandingness of all-the-way equality has made it subject to intense criticism. One prominent argument advanced against the view is the following: all-the-way equality regrettably requires lowering the educational achievement of the better educated children down to that of the worse educated ones, by impeding the development of the former's talents and abilities. And indeed, if it were impossible to level the educational achievement of the least advantaged, least motivated or least able up to that of the more advantaged, more motivated and better able, equalising the educational achievement of all would require making sure that the former are not better educated than the latter.⁶⁴ That would be the politics of envy, rather than justice.

When it comes to education, however, lowering the educational achievement of some improves the competitiveness of others. Indeed, the worse off in the distribution of education are worse off than the better educated not only in absolute terms, but also in competitive terms. That is, they are worse off than

⁶³ This is my interpretation of the view. Indeed, Ben-Shahar limits her scope of inquiry to children's education only.

⁶⁴ Even in such circumstances, all-the-way equality would provide only a pro tanto reason for levelling down.

others simply in virtue of their relative position (Brighouse and Swift 2011, 747). If the educational achievement of the better off were levelled down to the educational achievement of the worse off, the condition of the worse off would improve. Here is a practical example:

[h]olders of master's degrees would be absolutely better off, not just relatively so, in terms of their opportunities in the labor market, if others were deprived of the opportunity to achieve PhDs. (Brighouse and Swift 2006, 475)

Holders of master's degrees indeed would improve their position in the competition for the goods to which education is instrumental.⁶⁵ It follows that there is at least one pro tanto reason in favour of levelling down, and that this does not rest on the envious attitudes of the worse off, but on considerations of fairness. After all, the normative premise of the levelling down objection is that levelling down is in the interest of no one. Yet, as just shown, levelling down does improve the conditions of the worse off in education and therefore is in their interest. Therefore, the levelling down objection cannot hold.

Does this mean that, in all-things-considered scenarios, we should always prevent the more talented from developing their innate abilities, say by damaging their brains so that they cannot be more educated than the normally educated children? Surely not. But there might be circumstances in which justice-based reasons to level down hold, and should not be ignored (Brighouse and Swift 2006; Shields 2016).

⁶⁵ This, ultimately, not only holds for educational opportunities, but also for all goods which have a positional character. As Brighouse and Swift add: "Those with few resources to devote to their legal representation would be better off if their opponents were prevented from hiring more expensive and, let us suppose, better lawyers" (Brighouse and Swift 2006, 475).

I claim that all-the-way education should be understood as an ideal theory of educational justice. From an ideal perspective, the view guides educational reform without undermining values other than educational justice – among these values, the one attached to the development of one’s talent. As Ben-Shahar herself acknowledges, although educational justice matters, it matters among a poll of diverse valuable goals within and beyond the domain of egalitarian justice (Ben-Shahar 2016, 93–94); accordingly, its importance might be outweighed within all-things-considered scenarios (Ibid). Obstacles to realising the ideal – such as considerations of feasibility and price – should be seriously considered: “overcome when possible, and treated as unavoidable exceptions when they are not” (Ibid).

To conclude, I have distinguished so far two alternative conceptions of educational equality: meritocratic equality and all-the-way equality. I have claimed that, unlike meritocratic equality, all-the-way equality does not allow for arbitrary inequality in education. I have shown that all-the-way equality is a radical, very demanding view, which is nevertheless not vulnerable to the levelling down objection and should be understood as an ideal of educational justice. Admittedly, more work would be necessary to prove whether it also is defensible per se, namely as a distributive theory. Yet my aim is to show that it should be endorsed from a relational, rather than mere distributive, perspective; that is, that relational egalitarians have a pro tanto reason to reject educational adequacy in its favour. The findings I have reached so far are functional to this claim.

4. Why adequacy is not enough for relational equality

The preparatory work I have engaged with in the previous sections leads to two conclusions: first, that educational adequacy allows for arbitrary

educational inequality above the adequacy threshold; second, that educational equality – understood as all-the-way equality – does not. In this concluding section, I advance the claim that the ideal of relational equality aligns with the ideal of all-the-way equality. I claim that relational egalitarians should reject educational adequacy, because they should reject arbitrary inequality in education. Arbitrary inequality in education, indeed, violates one necessary condition for relating as equals: that everyone's equally important interests in education equally shape the social decisions conducive to its distribution. This – as I have already pointed out in the second chapter – is the deliberative constraint for relating as equals.

As endorsed by Scheffler (2015, 35–36), the deliberative constraint is a necessary condition for individuals to relate to one another as equals. It states that individuals relate as equals when their interests equally shape social decisions, such as those informing distribution. In the context of educational justice, the deliberative constraint requires individuals' equally important interests to education to equally shape those social decisions, which inform the distribution of education in society.

An arbitrarily unequal distribution of education necessarily violates the constraint, because it allows for the interests of some to count for more than those of others in shaping the collective decisions which regulate the distribution of education in society, despite everyone having equally strong interests in education. Indeed, a distributive policy which arbitrarily disadvantages some is a distributive policy which takes unequal count of the interests of all. It discounts the interests of, among others, the less talented, the less able to make efforts in education, the less wealthy in terms of parental

resources, the less lucky in terms of school district, than it takes of the interests of their peers.⁶⁶

Since educational adequacy allows for arbitrary educational inequality above the adequacy threshold, it discounts the interests of some. At the same time, it serves the interests of the better off in society at the expense of the interests of the worse off. Looking at Anderson's rejection of equality of educational opportunities will better explain why. According to Anderson, equality is not the appropriate pattern for distributing educational opportunities in a society of equals, because:

[Under equal educational opportunities, p]arents and children who value education much more than the median voter would not be allowed to pursue their conception of the good, through the expenditure of external resources. (Anderson 2004, 104)

Therefore, from Anderson's perspective, equality of educational opportunities is unjust, because affirming the contrary is limiting parental freedom: it requires preventing parents who are interested in better education for their children, and have the means to obtain it, from doing so through the expenditure of their private resources. And yet:

When steps to diminish inequality are denounced as infringements of freedom, the first question to be answered is one not always asked. It is: freedom for whom? (Tawney 1951, 259–60)

If it is children's educational achievement we are looking at, it is children's freedom to achieve as much education as their peers that we should consider. Since the positional advantages of education are instrumental to the full value

⁶⁶ This makes a relational egalitarian case not only against educational adequacy, but also against meritocratic equality.

of individuals' freedom to pursue their conception of the good, educational adequacy increases – above the threshold – the value of some children's freedom to pursue their conception of the good only, at the cost of lowering the value of other children's freedom to pursue *their* conception of the good as well. If this is correct, then arbitrary educational inequality violates the deliberative constraint of relating as equals, because it reflects a distributive policy unequally shaped by everyone's equal interests to education above adequacy. Instead, it protects the interests of the better off at the cost of lowering the value of the worse off's freedom to pursue their conception of the good. Since respecting the deliberative constraint is a necessary condition for a relational egalitarian society, and the adequacy view violates this constraint, I claim that relational egalitarians should reject adequacy and replace it with educational equality, understood as all-the-way equality. By not allowing for arbitrary educational inequality, indeed, only all-the-way equality matches the requirements of relating as equals.

In sum, when answering the distributive question in the field of educational justice, there are two available options: educational adequacy and educational equality. Educational adequacy allows for arbitrary educational inequalities above the adequacy threshold; educational equality, understood as all-the-way equality, does not. I have argued, in this chapter, that:

(P1) the deliberative constraint according to which individuals' equally important interests should equally shape collective decisions is a necessary condition for relating as equals (Scheffler 2015, 35–36); and that

(P2) educational inequality violates the deliberative constraint of relating as equals;

Therefore, I have concluded,

(C) relational egalitarians should reject educational adequacy in favour of all-the-way equality in education.

4.1 A brief digression

Before concluding, allow me a brief digression on what it means to take relational equality seriously, in light of early relational egalitarian writings. The digression is not necessary for the argument I have presented so far, and indeed it does not add any premise or conclusion to it. Yet it strengthens the claim I have advanced, according to which relational egalitarianism binds us to rejecting individuals' arbitrary educational inequality.

When observing a sharp contradiction between the democratic organisation of political life in their societies, and the disparities of educational opportunities among their fellow citizens, early relational egalitarians such as Richard Tawney and Matthew Arnold remarked that such inequality was incompatible with the value of humanity as a community of equals (Tawney 1931, chapter 1). The unquestioned acceptance of inequality, they believed, permeated their society, as the ghost of an obsolete tradition of class superiority and class subordination (Ibid, 24), which blinded individuals' judgements.

Arnold referred to such unquestioned acceptance in terms of a religion of inequality,⁶⁷ which disposed those who were arbitrarily privileged to be unaware of the privileges they were benefitting from, as if there were nothing in them which required justification (Ibid). At the same time, the unquestioned acceptance of educational inequality silenced the justice-based

⁶⁷ The phrase was used by Arnold in his 1879 essay "Equality". See Arnold (1964).

claims of the disadvantaged in education by calling them envious of the goods of others, rather than thirsty for educational justice.

To take relational equality seriously is, following Tawney and Arnold, to question what is often unquestioned, such as the inequality individuals experience in education, and beyond. Re-reading their thoughts in light of the arbitrary inequalities between children and young students which characterises contemporary Western societies, urges us to ask what, if anything, is justifiable about individuals being worse educated than others because of their socio-economic background, inferior inborn talent and ambition, unlucky geographical position, or wealth available in their families of origin. Advocates of educational adequacy tell us that there is a limit at which we can stop caring about their being unequally educated. I hope I have shown that relational egalitarianism commits us to a more ambitious goal: that of neutralising arbitrary inequality in education to stop being privileged and unprivileged, and start relating to one another as equals.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been focusing on the distributive implications of relational egalitarianism in the field of educational justice. I have explored two competing egalitarian views on arbitrary inequality of educational achievement: the adequacy view and the equality view. On the adequacy view, certain arbitrary inequalities of educational achievement are irrelevant to justice. On the equality view, they are not.

I have claimed that arbitrary educational inequality, even when occurring above the adequacy threshold, violates the deliberative constraint of relating as equals. The reason is that it displays individuals' equally strong interests to education unequally affecting its distribution. Indeed, the implementation of

adequacy favours the interests of the better off at the expense of the interests of the worse off above the threshold.

If my argument is correct, then the following is the case: educational adequacy is incompatible with the distributive implications of relational egalitarianism. Therefore, relational egalitarians should reject educational adequacy in favour of a distribution of education that does not allow for arbitrary inequality. This distribution – I have suggested – matches the requirements of all-the-way equality in education.

Chapter 4: Relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism

An extensional overlap

I find it difficult to conceive of the possibility that someone is superior to someone else in terms of their social relations, yet there is no good in virtue of which the former is better off than the latter. (...) The Secretary of State has a superior position in the Department of State compared to an intern. This is due to the fact that she has more of the good that we normally call authority than the latter has. The fact that some people are “above” or “below” others implies an ordering, which in turn suffices for the notion of distribution being applicable.

(Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 200)

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I argued that the dispute between distributive egalitarianism and relational egalitarianism is grounded in the misguided assumption according to which relational egalitarianism has distributive implications *other* than egalitarian ones. Relational egalitarianism, I have claimed, implies distributive equality, because arbitrary distributive inequality violates the deliberative constraint of relating as equals. This is to

say that an egalitarian division of goods is a practical requirement of relational egalitarianism.

In this concluding chapter, I present one theoretical implication of my claim: that relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism are compatible theories within the same egalitarian framework. By arguing that they are compatible, I mean that relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism require the same actions, although for different ultimate reasons.

This is particularly interesting, and therefore worth engaging with, because it contrasts with the widely shared belief, according to which equality is about *either* relations *or* distribution, and supports the project of reconciling relational and distributive egalitarianism as in the very recent tradition of Elford (2017), Lippert-Rasmussen (2018), and Moles and Parr (2019). I consider my view to be amongst these.

My line of argument proceeds as follows. By reference to the findings of my thesis, I suggest that relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism can be plausibly thought to be extensionally overlapping – rather than mutually exclusive – views. I explain the notions of extensionality and intensionality by reference to their use in the philosophy of language. My claim is that the two egalitarian views overlap in their prescriptions, or normative outcomes, or practical requirements⁶⁸, that is, they provide distinct justifications for endorsing (at least in part) the same actions.

Further, I argue that the extensional overlap between relational and distributive egalitarian theories depends on their respective characteristics, particularly on their scope, responsibility-sensitiveness, and understanding of

⁶⁸ I mean the same when using these three terms, yet in the chapter I stick to “prescriptions” only.

justice-relevant goods. I advance an exhaustive list of five conceptually possible extensional overlaps between different relational and distributive egalitarian accounts. Not all of them are plausible; some are merely logically possible. Yet reflecting on such conceptual map should lead egalitarians to see what binds their theories, rather than what divides them: the commitment to egalitarian distributions. This is a change of perspective I wish to initiate with my thinking.

1. Reconciling relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism

Relational egalitarianism (RE) and distributive egalitarianism (DE) can be conceptualised either as competitor or as compatible views (Elford 2017). Understood as competitor views, RE and DE are mutually exclusive theories: advocates of one of the two necessarily misconceive the point of equality, and should therefore abandon their view in favour of the other. Anderson's 1999 contribution, which aimed at demonstrating that luck egalitarians have been missing the point of egalitarian justice, because they have focused on distribution rather than relations, has prominently shaped the egalitarian debate in favour of the competitor conception (Ibid).

Understood as compatible views, RE and DE are coexisting dimensions of the same egalitarian framework. The compatibility conception is grounded in the absence of logical inconsistencies between the two approaches. It can be further specified by claiming either that: (1) RE and DE have independent normative significance: the truth of the one cannot be entirely captured by the other; or (2) RE and DE are indistinct views: the normative force of the one is derived from the normative significance of the other (Elford 2017). (1) and (2) are mutually exclusive conceptions of the compatibility view (Ibid).

In my thesis, I have followed Moles and Parr (2019) by looking at relational and distributive egalitarianism in terms of reasons, rather than in metaphysical terms concerning the nature of equality. That is, by overcoming verbal disagreements about the nature of equality, I have engaged with the two views as giving individuals diverse reasons to action:

distributive egalitarianism claims that we have reason to secure for each member of the community an equal share of its resources, and social egalitarianism claims that we have reasons to ensure that each member of the community stands in certain relations to other members of the community. (Moles and Parr 2019, 135)

I have shown, furthermore, that both relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism provide reasons to neutralise arbitrary inequalities in distribution. Yet I did not deny that, although their prescriptions are at least in part equivalent, the justifications they provide for embracing those reasons are different. This is equivalent to saying that, as I explain in more detail in the following section, although the intensionality of relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism is diverse, their extensionality is – at least in part – overlapping.

1.1 The extensional overlap

To grasp what it is for relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism to be extensionally overlapping, it is helpful to look at the concepts of extensionality and intensionality as they are used in the philosophy of language. Extensionality and intensionality are logical features of a word or sentence (Jacob 2019), which I here apply to theories. They can be defined by juxtaposition: intensionality pertains to the meaning of a word, extensionality the object, or set of objects, it refers to (Ibid):

For example, “creature with a heart” and “creature with a kidney” have the same extensionality because they are true of the same individuals: all the creatures with a kidney are creatures with a heart. But the two expressions have different intensions because the word “heart” does not have (...) the same meaning as the word “kidney”. (Ibid)

A distinctive characteristic of extensionality is that of co-referentiality (Ibid): co-referential terms in extensionally identical contexts can be substituted one for the other without undermining their truth-value:

if a linguistic context is extensional, two co-referential terms can be substituted one for the other *salva veritate*⁶⁹ as illustrated by (1) and (2):

(1) Hesperus shines.

(2) Phosphorus shines.

If (1) is true, so is (2).⁷⁰ (Ibid)

When applied to the interrelation between RE and DE, co-referentiality pertains to the prescriptions⁷¹ of the two theories. If RE and DE were extensionally identical, all prescriptions of RE would be co-referential to the prescriptions of DE; and vice versa. Accordingly, we could substitute them all one for the other *salva veritate*:

⁶⁹ *Salva veritate* is the logical condition for which we can substitute one term for the other without undermining its truth-value.

⁷⁰ The reason is that both Hesperus and Phosphorus refer to the same planet Venus.

⁷¹ By “prescriptions” I mean the theories’ normative outcomes, or practical requirements.

- (1) Anna and Ben relate to one another as equals;
- (2) neither Anna nor Ben are arbitrarily disadvantaged in the distribution of justice-relevant goods;

→ if RE and DE were extensionally identical, (1) and (2) could be substituted one for the other *salva veritate*.

We refute that RE and DE are extensionally identical whenever there is at least one prescription of relational egalitarianism, to which no prescription of distributive egalitarianism is co-referential, or vice versa, that is, if at least one between (4) or (5) holds:

- (3) Anna and Ben relate to one another as equals AND Anna or Ben are arbitrarily disadvantaged in the distribution of justice-relevant goods; or
- (4) Neither Anna nor Ben are arbitrarily disadvantaged in the distribution of justice-relevant goods AND Anna and Ben do not relate to one another as equals⁷².

The extensional identity of RE and DE does not exclude the distinct intensionality of the two theories. Understood as intensionally distinct and yet extensionally equivalent views, relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism provide different justifications for endorsing equivalent prescriptions: we can justify neutralising Anna and Ben's arbitrary disadvantage in the distribution of justice-relevant goods both by reference to the notion of relational equality, and by reference to the notion of fairness. The two justifications are distinct, and there is no logical necessity to establish a conceptual priority of any of the two over the other. Still, what is justified is

⁷² (1) to (4) are all prescriptions of RE and DE.

the same: neutralising the arbitrary inequality binding Anna to Ben.⁷³ In the following section, I shall expand more on the diverse cases of extensional overlaps between relational and distributive egalitarian accounts.

2. Conceptually possible overlaps

I have argued so far that relational and distributive egalitarianism are extensionally overlapping views, since they both imply neutralising arbitrary inequality in distribution. That is, distributive equality is a prescription of both relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism. In this section, I show how the extensional overlap between the two theories varies, with the particular understanding of relational and distributive equality one favours. More precisely, I argue that relational and distributive accounts, which differ from one another in (i) scope, (ii) responsibility-sensitiveness, and (iii) understanding of justice-relevant goods, are likely to combine in diverse extensional overlaps.

(i)–(iii) are distinct characteristics of any egalitarian theory of justice. The *scope* of an egalitarian theory, in particular, specifies the group of individuals – say compatriots, present generations or present and future generations – whose (in)equality the theory is concerned with. Its *responsibility-sensitiveness* clarifies the theory’s degree of tolerance toward inequalities for which individuals are responsible: the more responsibility-sensitive a theory, the less committed it is to neutralising inequalities resulting from individuals’

⁷³ This is crucial for the claim I make in the chapter, as it clarifies that the compatibility of RE and DE results from the overlap of their prescriptions, not of their justifications. That is: RE and DE are extensionally overlapping, although they are intensionally distinct. The two theories offer different justifications for endorsing (at least in part) the same actions.

choices and risks they take voluntarily. Finally, the understanding of justice-relevant goods is the answer an egalitarian theory provides to the question of which goods, be these material or social, individuals are owed in virtue of egalitarian justice. This is the question of the metric, or currency, of justice.⁷⁴

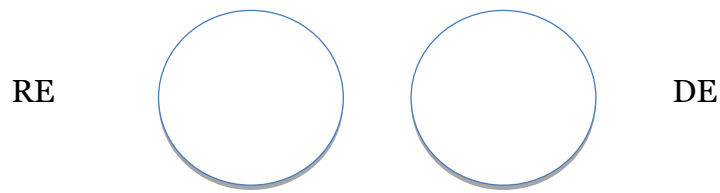
In the following paragraphs, I provide a list of five different extensional overlaps between egalitarian accounts with different scope, responsibility-sensitivity, and understanding of justice-relevant goods. The list is meant to be exhaustive: I exclude the possibility of interrelations other than those listed below. It is one thing to show that some extensional overlaps are conceptually possible; however, it is another to say that they are also plausible. I deny that all of the five possible extensional overlaps I engage with are necessarily plausible.

Why – then – engage with conceptually possible albeit implausible combinations? I aim to bring theoretical clarity to a debate about the interrelation of relational and distributive egalitarianism, which remains obscure to some, and misconceived by many. With the following list at hand, I hope that egalitarians can see how their accounts are more compatible than they often think they are. And that their disagreements do not depend on the incompatibility of distributive equality and relational equality.

A. No extensional overlap

Relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism cannot have an extensional overlap, if relational egalitarianism has no distributive implications.

⁷⁴ I have explored this in depth in Chapter 1, section 2.2.3.



For the sake of the argumentation, think of a conception of relating as equals, which has nothing to say about how individuals distribute justice-relevant goods within their relations. According to libertarian RE,⁷⁵ for instance, individuals might have equal rights to be protected from violence, yet no distribution (beyond the one required for their safety) would be legitimate. The prescriptions of libertarian RE are in no way co-referential to the prescriptions of distributive egalitarian theories such as, say, equality of resources, welfare or opportunities. Accordingly, there is no extensional overlap between libertarian RE and these distributive accounts.

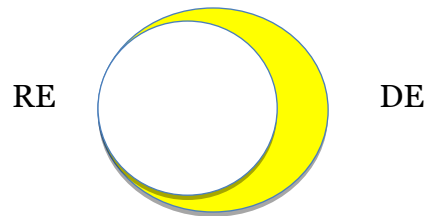
When referring to relational egalitarianism in previous chapters, I have referred to relational egalitarian theories as defended in the literature. These all have – as a matter of fact – distributive implications. And indeed a fair division of goods is, independently on how we define “fair”, an instrument for individuals to treat one another as equals.

Although it is conceptually possible for a version of relational egalitarianism not to have any distributive implications, it is in my view implausible for such a view to hold. The reason is that, to be plausible, an egalitarian account which is fundamentally concerned with the quality of individuals’ relations needs to acknowledge that these are relations “within which goods are distributed” (Anderson 1999, 314). The absence of an extensional overlap between RE and DE is, even if logically possible, as implausible as a version of RE without any distributive implications.

⁷⁵ I thank Anca Gheaus for pointing me to this.

B. The extensionality of distributive egalitarianism is broader than the extensionality of relational egalitarianism

The extensionality of distributive egalitarianism is broader than the extensionality of relational egalitarianism, if relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism endorse the same distribuenda of justice, share the same degree of responsibility-sensitiveness, and yet there is at least one prescription of distributive egalitarianism to which no prescription of relational egalitarianism is co-referential. This implies that not all prescriptions of DE are realised, once all prescriptions of RE are.



Relational egalitarian and distributive egalitarian theories interrelate in B, when – all other things being equal – the scope of the considered distributive egalitarian theory is broader than the scope of the considered relational egalitarian one. As a paradigmatic case, consider the extensional overlap between Elizabeth Anderson’s democratic equality and Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen’s luck egalitarianism. I assume, for the sake of argument, that the two accounts share an understanding of the distribuenda and similar degrees of responsibility-sensitiveness.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ This is in line both with Lippert-Rasmussen’s understanding of the distributive concern as a concern of social – further than material – distribuenda (Lippert Rasmussen 2018, 198) as well as with the findings of my dissertation, according to which (Anderson’s) relational egalitarianism implies egalitarian – rather than

Democratic equality defines the proper aim of egalitarian justice as the end of domination and oppression *among socially related individuals*, that is, among individuals who live together within self-determined communities:⁷⁷

egalitarians seek a social order in which persons stand in relations of equality. They seek to live together in a democratic community, as opposed to a hierarchical one. Democracy is here understood as collective self-determination by means of open discussion among equals, in accordance with rules acceptable to all. (Anderson 1999, 313)

By contrast, Lippert-Rasmussen's luck egalitarian account defines the requirements of distributive justice in the end of arbitrary distributive inequality between people, without characterising – or limiting – the group of individuals who are involved:

It is unjust if some people are worse off than others through their bad luck. (Lippert-Rasmussen 2015, 1)

Also, it pertains to the distribution of both relational and non-relational goods, including exploitation- and domination-standing (Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 198). That is, it refers to the lack of domination and oppression in society as to the absence of an unequal distribution of domination- and oppression-standing between individuals.

sufficientarian – distributions, such as – most plausibly – luck egalitarian ones. See Chapter 2, section 2.2.3.

⁷⁷ I am not assuming that an expansion of Anderson's democratic equality beyond democratic communities would not be in line with Anderson's core assumptions. Rather, I assume that such an expansion is not the prior focus of Anderson's theory. See Chapter 2, section 2.2.1.

By observing the extensional overlap of Lippert-Rasmussen's and Anderson's respective accounts, I suggest that not all prescriptions of the former are co-referential with the prescriptions of the latter. The reason is that some of the prescriptions of luck egalitarianism pertain to the distribution of justice-relevant goods among individuals who are socially unrelated to one another. Here is a practical example:

Suppose that Anna and Ben are members of the same democratic community and that neither Anna nor Ben are socially related to Sam, say because Sam is yet to be born.

Under the assumption that both Anderson's and Lippert-Rasmussen's theories hold, the prescriptions of relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism can be exemplified as follows:

- (1) Anna and Ben relate to one another as equals;
- (2) Neither Anna nor Ben are arbitrarily disadvantaged in the distribution of justice-relevant goods;
- (3) Sam is not arbitrarily disadvantaged in the distribution of justice-relevant goods;

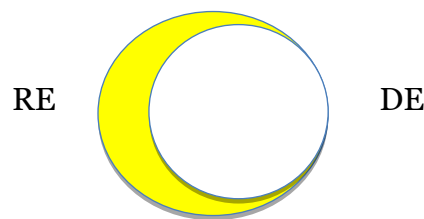
(1) and (2) are co-referential, given that (2) pertains to the distribution of relational goods as well. However, (3) is a prescription of luck egalitarianism only. Indeed, although it does not prevent individuals who are not socially related from enjoying egalitarian relations, democratic equality does not require their relation to be egalitarian. That is, democratic equality does not require not disadvantaging Sam in the distribution of justice-relevant goods, even if this is a social good such as domination- and oppression-standing.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ It might be objected that, as a member of future generations, Sam is related to Anna and Ben, as these are having an impact on his living conditions (Heilinger

This shows that the extensionality of Lippert-Rasmussen’s view is broader than the extensionality of Anderson’s democratic equality only, because it requires securing distributive equality between present and future generations, while democratic equality does not require establishing egalitarian relations between them. Accordingly, the requirements of luck egalitarianism are not exhausted once the requirements of democratic equality are.

C. The extensionality of relational egalitarianism is broader than the extensionality of distributive egalitarianism

The extensionality of relational egalitarianism is broader than the extensionality of distributive egalitarianism, if there is at least one prescription of relational egalitarianism to which no prescription of distributive egalitarianism is co-referential. This implies that the prescriptions of RE are not exhausted, once all prescriptions of DE are.



2020, 114). If this were true, then Anna and Sam, and Ben and Sam, would share a social relation which, on reasons of relational egalitarian justice, should be egalitarian as well. Such a broad definition of social relation, which includes the bonds between the present and future members of the planet, is not the same definition of social relation Anderson endorses: the present generations are not “living together” with the future ones, nor are they members of a “self-determined” democratic community, as in Anderson’s understanding of the term (Anderson 1999, 313; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 127).

Relational egalitarian and distributive egalitarian theories interrelate in C:

- i. when the scope of relational egalitarianism is broader than the scope of distributive egalitarianism; or
- ii. when distributive egalitarianism is more responsibility-sensitive than relational egalitarianism; or
- iii. when distributive egalitarianism does not pertain to the distribution of relational goods, only relational egalitarianism does.

In the following paragraphs, I engage with all three possibilities. While showing that they are all conceptually possible, I argue that there might be legitimate reasons to question the plausibility of each.

(i) Relational egalitarianism has a broader extension than distributive egalitarianism, when it also has a broader scope

As a paradigmatic case, consider the extensional overlap of Jan-Christoph Heilinger's cosmopolitan egalitarianism and Kok-Chor Tan's institutional luck egalitarianism. According to cosmopolitan egalitarianism, the ideal of relational equality applies to any social relation, be this an actual or a hypothetical interaction among individuals. The present and future generations, as well as all inhabitants of the planet, are socially related to one another, as long as they all are in the condition to know about one another;⁷⁹ and indeed knowing of each other's conditions is sufficient for a social

⁷⁹ Admittedly, members of present generations cannot know with certainty about the existence, or life quality, of members of future generations. Yet according to Heilinger, present generations have as a matter of fact enough information to believe both that there will be future generations, and that their lives will be negatively impacted by the present generation's life habits such as – paradigmatically – their contribution to climate change.

relation to exist (Heilinger 2020, 114–15). While Heilinger expands the scope of relational equality beyond the limits of time and space, Tan limits the scope of his luck egalitarian account within the context of institutional frameworks:

Institutional luck egalitarianism (...) takes distributive equality to matter whenever there are common institutional arrangements that confer differential advantages to persons on account of arbitrary facts about them. That is, distributive egalitarian commitments are activated, on the institutional luck egalitarian view, when there are effective institutions that convert natural facts about persons into disadvantages for them. It is immaterial whether or not these are institutions based on democratic ideals. (Tan 2008, 689)

Institutionalist luck egalitarianism does not necessarily exclude a case for global distributive equality. It states, however, that for global distributive equality to matter, global institutional frameworks must exist to convert the natural arbitrary conditions of the world into the arbitrary relative disadvantage of some on the planet (Ibid, 690). The existence of global markets might suffice to make such a case. It is more difficult,⁸⁰ however, to extend institutional luck egalitarianism to the intergenerational sphere. Indeed, no effective institutions exist yet, which might regulate the distribution of burdens and advantages between the present and future inhabitants of the planet. Therefore, the extensionality of Heilinger's relational egalitarian view is necessarily broader than that of Tan's

⁸⁰ For the purposes of this section, I remain agnostic about whether we could, or should, extend institutionalist luck egalitarianism to the intergenerational domain. More modestly, my claim is that, if institutionalist luck egalitarianism does not commit to implementing distributive equality between present and future generations, while cosmopolitan egalitarianism does, then the extensionality of the latter is necessarily broader than that of the former.

distributive egalitarian theory,⁸¹ because only the former's prescriptions include establishing egalitarian relations between present and future generations.

The existence of an extensional overlap C between a relational and a distributive egalitarian theory depends on how plausible it is for a distributive egalitarian account to be narrower in scope than a relational egalitarian one. Assuming that the considered distributive egalitarian theory is a luck egalitarian theory of distribution, for instance, we might raise legitimate doubts about limiting the scope of justice to groups of individuals such as friends, compatriots, or the present inhabitants of Earth. The reason is that belonging to any of those groups is – at least in part – a matter of luck, and therefore irrelevant to justice. It is not my main aim to dismiss the plausibility of Tan's theory, which is supposed to be luck egalitarian, nor of anyone's distributive egalitarian account with a limited scope. And indeed it could be objected that Tan's view is not a pure luck egalitarian theory, but rather a hybrid theory of luck egalitarianism and institutionalism. If so, my incoherency objection would be inappropriate. Rather, and indeed more modestly, I want to emphasise that the extensional overlap C between Heilinger's and Tan's accounts is only as plausible as the least plausible of them.

(ii) Relational egalitarianism has a broader extension than distributive egalitarianism, when it is also less responsibility-sensitive

As a paradigmatic case, consider the extensional overlap of Ronald Dworkin's luck egalitarianism and Gerry Cohen's principle of community – which I allow

⁸¹ I do not exclude that Tan's institutionalist luck egalitarianism might be extensionally broader than Heilinger's cosmopolitan relational egalitarianism also.

myself to read as a version of relational egalitarianism. On the one hand, Dworkin claims that justice requires remediating the impact of bad brute luck on individuals' fate. However, it does not require compensating for individuals' relative disadvantage, when this results out of their effective choices and voluntarily run risks:⁸² people should pay the price of the life they have decided to lead (Dworkin 2000, 74). Cohen, by contrast, warns that distributive inequalities resulting from individuals' choices and voluntarily run risks could endanger the egalitarian character of individuals' relations:

We cannot enjoy full community, you and I, if you make, and keep, say, ten times as much money as I do, because my life will then labour under challenges that you will never face. (Cohen 2009, 35)

This does not change if I earn ten times less than you because of a genuine choice of mine. Indeed, it is the inequality itself, not its arbitrary character, which endangers the egalitarian nature of our relation. Accordingly, the demands of the principle of community are not exhausted when the luck egalitarian demands are. Rather, distributive inequalities which are, on a Dworkinian luck egalitarian perspective, irrelevant to distributive justice, need to be neutralised in light of the principle of community only, whenever they conflict with the ideal of a community as a society of equals (Cohen 1992, 9; 1995, 259; Albertsen 2019, 378). If my reconstruction of the two views is correct, then Cohen's relational egalitarian account, whose core commitment I have identified in the principle of community, is extensionally broader than Dworkin's luck egalitarian distributive theory.⁸³

⁸² This holds also for Cohen 2008; Elford 2013; Scheffler 2003a; Lippert-Rasmussen 2015.

⁸³ It might be objected, following Pablo Gilabert's reasoning in "Cohen on Socialism, Equality and Community" (2012b), that we can, maybe even should, enumerate the demands of the community principle among the demands of

(iii) Relational egalitarianism has a broader extension than distributive egalitarianism, when only the former pertains to the distribution of social goods among individuals

As a paradigmatic overlap of this kind, consider Iris Young's relational egalitarianism and her understanding of distributive egalitarianism in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990). Young claims that distributive egalitarianism should be solely concerned with the division of non-social goods, particularly wealth and money, among individuals: "I argue that the concept of distribution should be limited to material goods" (Ibid, 8–9). The reason is that the distributive paradigm on which material goods are divided cannot, according to Young, capture the significance of relational goods such as self-respect, power, exploitation- and oppression-standing. Rather, she claims that the individualistic perspective that pertains to the distribution of material goods – that is, goods to divide among unrelated individuals – cannot capture the "process-oriented" and "relational" nature of social domination and oppression (Ibid):

Rather than attempting to stretch distribution to cover these, I argue that the concept of distribution should be limited to material goods, and that other important aspects of justice include decision-

distributive justice. The limitation Gilabert has in mind reflects the positive sufficientarian commitment toward securing everyone enough. This is endorsed from within a pluralist egalitarian perspective, which rejects as illegitimate distributive inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold. If Gilabert's claim is correct, then the extensionality of distributive egalitarianism should expand to meeting the distributive implications of the principle of community. That is, the extensionality of a distributive egalitarian should be, in light of the principle of community, at least as broad as to include the extensionality of relational egalitarianism. This would refute the plausibility of C in light of (ii).

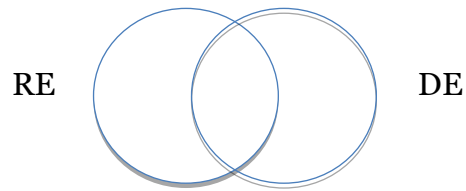
making procedures, the social division of labor, and culture. (Ibid, 8–9)

Following Young, we should distinguish between distributive egalitarianism and relational egalitarianism by acknowledging that the latter expands the horizon of the former to include a concern for social relations. This is equivalent to saying that the extension of relational egalitarianism is broader than that of distributive egalitarianism, because only relational egalitarianism includes establishing and securing egalitarian relations in the set of its prescriptions.

However, if we refute Young's normative assumption, according to which only relational egalitarianism can pertain to social processes and similar, then we could also question the existence of an extensional overlap C between relational and distributive egalitarian accounts. Again, it is not my intention here to refute, or validate, Young's claims. More modestly, I wish to emphasise that there are legitimate reasons to question the existence of an extensional overlap C between relational and distributive egalitarian accounts, as long as there are legitimate reasons to integrate the concern for social egalitarianism into the distributive concern. Again, the extensional overlap C is only as plausible as Young-like restrictions on DE are plausible.

D. There is partial extensional overlap between RE and DE, but both RE and DE have independent extensional implications

If (A) does not hold and both (B) and (C) hold only partially, then the extensionality of both relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism is broader than the extensionality of either relational egalitarianism or distributive egalitarianism alone.



A paradigmatic case of two egalitarian accounts interrelating in D might be that of Jonathan Wolff's relational egalitarianism and Richard Arneson's equality of opportunities for welfare. To recall, on Arneson's account, distributive justice requires neutralising the impact of bad brute luck on individuals' preferences satisfaction, that is, securing a condition of equal opportunities for welfare for all:

When persons enjoy equal opportunity for welfare (...) any actual inequality of welfare in the positions they reach is due to factors that lie within each individuals' control. Thus, any such inequality will be nonproblematic from the standpoint of distributive equality. (Arneson 1989, 86)

On Wolff's account, by contrast, justice requires more than distributive equality only. The egalitarian goal, he argues:

is not so much to achieve an egalitarian distribution of material goods, but to create a society in which each individual can think of themselves as valued as an equal. (Wolff 2010, 337)

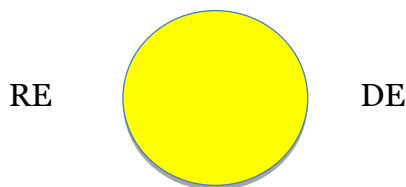
Accordingly, Wolff's relational account is meant to supplement the distributive concern of distributive egalitarian theories (Wolff 1998 and 2010; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018, 12), as it pertains not merely to the distributive domain, but also to the non-distributive domain including social relations (cf. Miller 1998, 23). If my reconstruction of their accounts is correct, then Wolff's and Arneson's theories are likely to interrelate in D: the extension of them

both is likely to be broader than the extension of any of the two theories on their own. The reasons are threefold:

- i. Arneson's luck egalitarianism has distributive implications, which apply in the absence of social relations;
- ii. Wolff's relational account has distributive implications, which regulate the distribution of goods other than opportunities for welfare;
- iii. Wolff's relational egalitarian account is less responsibility-sensitive than Arneson's distributive egalitarian position.

For reasons similar to those I have discussed in the previous sections, we might question whether the extensionality of Wolff's relational egalitarian account is indeed broader than the extensionality of Arneson's distributive egalitarian theory. Concretely, we could object against (ii) and (iii) by claiming that an egalitarian distribution of social goods is a necessary condition for equality of opportunities for welfare, or that the principle of community – or a similar principle – should be enumerated within the demands of Arneson's distributive account. Answering those questions might help with finding out how plausible it is for the two theories to interrelate in D. I shall not engage further with such analysis here. More modestly, I aim to show that there is a conceptual possibility for the two theories to interrelate in D, although it might be plausible for their extensional overlap to be closer to B than to D.

E. Perfect extensional overlap, or extensional equivalence



Finally, if neither (A), nor (B), nor (C), nor (D) hold, then relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism are extensionally identical. Extensional identity is a perfect extensional overlap. It implies that all prescriptions of relational and distributive egalitarianism are co-referential. That is, they can be substituted one for the other *salva veritate*.

It is difficult to provide a paradigmatic case of relational and distributive egalitarian accounts, which are extensionally identical. One reason might be that there are no two theories that in fact satisfy this type of overlap. Another could lie in the complexity of the different accounts, and the absence of a one-to-one correspondence between their normative commitments. It is thinkable, however, that egalitarian accounts are likely to interrelate in extensional identity, if they share the same scope, have the same degree of responsibility-sensitivity, and pertain to the distribution of the same goods. One possible combination in extensional identity might be that of democratic equality-revised and Tan's institutionalist luck egalitarianism. Democratic equality is likely to be extensionally identical to Tan's luck egalitarianism, because they both apply within institutionalist contexts, require neutralising distributive inequalities which put individuals under the threat of domination and oppression, and pertain to the distribution of social, further than material, goods only.

Another paradigmatic combination might be that of a modification of Heilinger's cosmopolitan relational egalitarianism – with egalitarian, rather than sufficientarian, distributive demands – and Lippert-Rasmussen's luck egalitarianism. Heilinger's relational account denies the limits of scope, which characterise Anderson's democratic equality. Therefore, there are no reasons to believe that its extensionality is narrower than that of a distributive egalitarian account also unlimited in scope.

3. Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I have considered one theoretical implication of the core argument of my dissertation: that relational egalitarianism (RE) and distributive egalitarianism (DE) are extensionally overlapping views.

I have explained the term “extensionally overlapping” by reference to the concepts of extensionality and intensionality as used in the philosophy of language and suggested that the extensionality of RE and DE overlaps, since their prescriptions are (at least in part) equivalent. Also, I have shown how the extensional overlap between different accounts varies with their respective characteristics – particularly scope, responsibility-sensitiveness, and understanding of justice-relevant goods. This has allowed me to advance an exhaustive list of all conceptually possible, albeit plausible, extensional overlaps between different relational and distributive egalitarian accounts.

My theoretical analysis contrasts with the widely accepted understanding of equality within the contemporary philosophical debate, according to which equality is a matter of *either* relations *or* distributions. I hope egalitarians will see, with my work at hand, what binds their theories, rather than what divides them. This is the change of perspective I hope to have initiated with my thinking and the contribution I offer to the project of reconciling the two views in one and the same egalitarian framework.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I investigated the distributive implications of relational egalitarianism and argued that these are, necessarily, egalitarian. My work has been critical toward the prominent tendency, within the relational egalitarian debate as influenced by the work of Elizabeth Anderson (1999), to reject egalitarian distributions in favour of sufficientarian ones.

As a distributive theory of justice, sufficientarianism requires that everyone has enough of the proper metric, say well-being, resources or opportunities, yet not that all individuals have equal amounts of it (Frankfurt 1989). I have claimed that relational egalitarians should reject sufficientarian distributions, as long as these leave arbitrary distributive inequalities above sufficiency unaddressed. The reason is that arbitrary distributive inequality violates one necessary condition for relating to one another as equals: that the equally important interests of all *equally* shape the collective decisions which inform distribution. Call this the deliberative constraint of relating as equals (Scheffler 2015, 35–36).

Admittedly, I have also argued, relational egalitarians might legitimately endorse sufficientarian distributions, when these are extensionally identical to egalitarian ones. This is the case of distributions which result from hybrid versions of sufficientarianism such as Liam Shields' *shift-sufficientarianism*, which includes the positive thesis according to which individuals should be granted enough, while rejecting the negative thesis according to which there are distributive inequalities, which lack moral significance (Shields 2012, 2016); and of sufficientarian distributions which follow from neo-sufficientarian accounts such as Lasse Nielsen's *value-satiability sufficientarianism*, which denies the possibility of relevant distributive

inequalities above the sufficientarian threshold by setting this at the level at which all justice-relevant goods are sated (Nielsen 2019).

I have explored both practical and theoretical implications of my claim. On the practical side, I have paid particular attention to the question of how to distribute education among children. This question has such a significant practical relevance, I have argued, that it deserves independent concern. When informing the distributive policies which conduce to the distribution of education among children, relational egalitarianism faces two normative options: either securing all children with equal amounts of education (educational equality), or securing them an education sufficient for functioning in their political and economic society (Tooley 1996, Gutmann 1987, Anderson 2007, Satz 2007), while allowing educational inequalities above that threshold (educational adequacy). My analysis has shown that educational adequacy increases – above the adequacy threshold – the value of some children’s freedom to pursue their conception of the good, at the cost of lowering the value of other children’s freedom to do the same. Henceforth, although educational adequacy is indeed an urgent demand societies need to meet, relational egalitarian justice necessarily requires more than securing educational adequacy only. It requires neutralising arbitrary inequalities in education, as these violate the relational egalitarian condition on which children’s equally weighty interests to education should equally shape its distribution among them.

On the theoretical side, I have shown how the egalitarian distributive implications of relational egalitarianism unveil its deep compatibility with accounts of distributive equality. More concretely, I have suggested that relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism can be plausibly thought to be extensionally overlapping views. Further, I have argued that the extensional overlap between different relational and distributive egalitarian theories depends on their respective characteristics, particularly on their

scope, responsibility-sensitiveness, and understanding of justice-relevant goods. My theoretical contribution contrasts with the largely shared assumption, according to which relational egalitarianism and distributive egalitarianism are mutually exclusive theories, as portrayed in the first chapter of the thesis, and rather supports the project of reconciliation between them as in the recent tradition of Elford (2017), Lippert-Rasmussen (2018), and Moles and Parr (2019). I consider my contribution to be amongst these.

My engagement with egalitarian theories of justice and their distributive commitments has unveiled the ideal character of my analysis. I have not aimed to prove that egalitarian distributions of the justice-relevant good should be achieved at any price, or that these are everything that matters. Rather, I have argued that, if taken seriously, relational equality provides us with a pro tanto reason of justice to endorse – rather than reject – egalitarian distributions. Such pro tanto reason has to be weighed up with other pro tanto reasons in an all-things-considered fashion. Yet it commits us to neutralise arbitrary inequalities, change the circumstances which make them unavoidable, and stand up for those they affect. In the end, how exactly we should balance different pro tanto reasons remains open to debate, and doubtlessly my research has not answered all questions worth considering. Yet there is one answer I indeed managed to offer. It concerns the distributive implications of relating as equals and states that, no matter how well off we are, if we commit to treat one another as equals, we should secure one another equal amounts of the justice-relevant good.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this book to the children I once saw playing on green playgrounds at Europe's borders, and to all children and adults, whose lives are negatively shaped by the unprivileged place of their birth, the parental resources they do not have available, their physical and intellectual abilities, gender, faith, and skin colour. I dedicate it to all those who have been arbitrarily denied the privilege of enjoying a life as flourishing as mine.

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Jan has been my teacher since I took my very first steps in Philosophy. He brought out my passion for the egalitarian literature and encouraged in me a curiosity to always seek out the right questions. Thank you, Jan, for empowering me to raise my voice and to ask them. I am immensely proud to be your student.

I have learned in the last year that it is not always the case that esteemed professors stand up in defence of their students' academic aspirations. For being an exception, and for his willingness to co-supervise this dissertation, I wish to most sincerely thank Prof Dr Wilhelm Vossenkuhl, whose kindness I will never forget.

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