

Power and Equality

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A number of democratic theorists have recently sought to vindicate the ideal of political equality (that is, the ideal of an equal distribution of political power) by tying it to the intrinsic value of egalitarian relationships. According to these ‘social’ or (as I will usually say) ‘relational egalitarian’ arguments for distributing political power equally, such a distribution is an essential component of certain intrinsically valuable relationships, and required for ours to be a “society of equals.”¹

The motivation for adopting such a relational egalitarian account of political equality is twofold. The first is a matter of ‘fit’. Many citizens of democratic societies accept that there is distinctive value in democratic decision-making. Similarly, many citizens accept that there is distinctive authority associated with democratic decisions. Neither this value nor this authority seems to be fully accounted for by appeal to procedure-independent outcome considerations. Instead they appear to depend on the egalitarian character of democratic procedures: making decisions as equals is intuitively of independent moral significance. Yet articulating what the significance of egalitarian procedures consists in, in a way that accommodates its (partial) independence from non-procedural considerations, has been difficult. Relational egalitarian arguments, many of their proponents think, provide a relatively straightforward explanation of why procedurally egalitarian decision-making so matters.

But relational egalitarian accounts do not merely fit existing intuitions about the

¹ (Scheffler 2015), p.21. Relational (or ‘social’) egalitarian arguments for democracy or political equality are suggested in, e.g., (Anderson 1999, Anderson 2010, Anderson 2012, Kolodny 2014, Kolodny 2014, Viehoff 2014, Scheffler 2015). Similar issues are raised, albeit from a different perspective and within a somewhat different tradition, in (Fraser and Honneth 2003). Though Thomas Christiano’s argument for democracy, in (Christiano 2008), shares some features with relational egalitarian accounts, it is sufficiently different not to be easily subsumed under this header, and so I will set it aside here.

importance of political equality. They also (and this is the second reason for adopting them) promise to provide independent support for our commitment to this ideal. One of the main challenges in defending procedural egalitarian commitments is to avoid the worry that one has simply restated, in slightly different language, the very democratic intuition that one is trying to justify. Relational egalitarian arguments avoid this worry insofar as they highlight these commitments' continuity with other values we care about outside of politics narrowly conceived. Even those who are not already committed to various democratic procedures, or who are uncertain of their democratic commitments, may recognize that equality is an ideal central to many of our relationships. If that ideal carries over – directly or indirectly – from these relationships to our political arrangements, and if it requires an egalitarian distribution of decision-making power, then this could provide independent support for democratic procedures and the demands they make on us.

I am sympathetic to the relational egalitarian approach. And yet I have come to think that vindicating the ideal of political equality on its basis is more challenging than has often been recognized. To explain what the challenge consists in is the purpose of this essay. I begin, in Section 1, by explaining what the project of vindicating the ideal of political equality amounts to. Section 2 outlines the basic structure of the relational egalitarian argument for political equality, and highlights a significant ambiguity in it. Two different paradigmatic examples of egalitarian relationships underpin these arguments for democracy: that of an egalitarian society, a society in which everyone has equal status (rather than the kind of unequal status we associate with hierarchical societies governed by, e.g., caste structures); and that of egalitarian relationships, such as friendships or marriages among equals. These two examples, though plausibly related, are not neatly aligned. And, I argue in Sections 3 to 6, they have different implications for the distribution of power, and the applicability of relational egalitarian intuitions to our political

community. While egalitarian relationships like friendship do include a positive requirement of equal power, the ideal of equal status does not. It merely demands that unequal power be socially justified in some ways (ways that are compatible with our basic moral equality) and not others (ways that are not). And while the ideal of equal status straightforwardly applies to large political communities, that the ideals associated with friendship do is open to doubt; and even if these doubts can be overcome (or at least kept in check), the resulting picture makes the value and authority of democratic institutions much more conditional on the actual attitudes of citizens (historic and contemporary) than defenders of the ideal of political equality may have hoped for.

1.

Political equality is a matter of how political power is distributed among the members of a particular group. Power is here understood as the opportunity to influence someone's behavior. To have equal power is to have an equal opportunity to exercise influence over someone's behavior.² This includes, in principle, cases where everyone's power is equally nil. Political power is a subset of power so understood: it is the opportunity to influence political decisions, which usually take the form of laws or other legally binding directives. These decisions apply to most, or all, of those who fall within the decision-maker's jurisdiction, and (normally) influence their behavior.³

What does it take to vindicate the ideal of political equality, by which I mean, vindicate

² For that, is not enough that there be an equal opportunity for some influence, if that influence is unequal.

³ Not all power is political power: As a parent, I have power over my child. As the owner of an object that you are pining for, I may have power over you by making your access to it conditional on your behaving in certain ways. A commitment to equal political power need not go hand in hand with a commitment to equal power more generally. (Certainly many of us have intuitions supporting an egalitarian constraint on political power that does not extend to other forms of power.) But our concern with equal political power is plausibly not unrelated to a broader concern with equal power. So one question that an account of political equality and its value should answer is how political power (and its distribution) relates to other forms of power (and their distribution).

that political equality is an ideal or value in its own right? To do so, it is not enough to show that egalitarian political institutions (institutions which distribute political power equally) are in fact valuable, as their value could derive from considerations that are quite independent of political equality. As Steven Wall has pointed out, “For the ideal of political equality to be vindicated, it must be shown to be more than a mere by-product of a sound justification.”⁴ This means, for instance, that a vindication of political equality cannot rest on purely instrumental defenses of democracy: even if they were to establish that an egalitarian distribution of decision-making power of some sort or another would be most likely to bring about good outcomes (suitably specified), the value of the egalitarian distribution would be derived from the value of the outcomes that is specifiable without reference to political equality.

But even among theories that treat political equality as more than a mere by-product, it is worth drawing a distinction between those that treat political equality as an ideal in its own right, and those that do not. What would it be to treat political equality as more than a mere by-product and yet not as an ideal in its own right? On some views, equality simply sets a *moral baseline* from which distributions of political power must start. If there is no (adequate) reason for distributing power differently – to move away from the baseline – then there is reason to distribute it equally. (In Isaiah Berlin’s words, “equality needs no reasons, only inequality does so...”⁵) But though equality is (on such views) special because it sets the baseline, and any move away from it requires justification, it is also *nothing but a baseline*. If there is a good reason to move away from the baseline – a good reason for an unequal distribution – then equality does not

⁴ (Wall 2007), p.417.

⁵ (Berlin 1999 [1956]), p.84. It is worth quoting Berlin more fully here: “If I believe in a hierarchical society, I may try to justify the special powers or wealth or position of persons of a certain origin, or of castes or classes or ranks, but for all this I am expected to give reasons - divine authority, a natural order, or the like. The assumption is that equality needs no reasons, only inequality does so...”

provide a countervailing reason to stick (or remain close) to an equal distribution. Putting the point slightly technically: On the baseline view, the presence of reasons for an unequal distribution does not simply outweigh the reason we would have had to distribute power equally absent considerations favoring inequality. Rather, insofar as equality is nothing but the baseline, the presence of suitable considerations favoring inequality cancels the reason we would otherwise have had to distribute power equally. Equality, in such cases, make a non-instrumental contribution to the realization of some non-derivatively valuable good; but it is not itself an essential component of that good, insofar as that good can in principle be realized even under conditions of inequality.

To make this quite abstract point more concrete, consider an influential position in democratic theory that has such a ‘baseline’ structure: David Estlund’s argument for democracy by appeal to a ‘reasonable acceptability requirement’, and particular his proposal that democracy is distinctly acceptable because its justification can avoid making ‘invidious comparisons’ among citizens.⁶ As some critics have pointed out, Estlund builds into his account of political justification a basic asymmetry between unequal and equal relations of rule.⁷ Thus, when Estlund concludes that a democratic – egalitarian – distribution of political power is acceptable where a non-egalitarian is not, the endorsement of political equality is *not a mere by-product* of a justification that is otherwise unconcerned with an equal distribution of power. Nonetheless, what Estlund is *ultimately* concerned with is not whether power is distributed equally, but whether its distribution

⁶ (Estlund 2008)

⁷ (Estlund 2008), p.37: There is “a special burden of justification” that applies to “proposed relations of authority or legitimate coercive power”, and “[i]nvidious comparisons purport to establish the authority and legitimate power of some over others in ways that universal suffrage does not, and so invidious comparisons must meet a burden of justification that universal suffrage does not. ... Under unequal suffrage, some people are formally and permanently subjected to the rule of certain others. This is a ruling relationship that is not present under majority rule, even though majority rule is also a ruling relationship of a kind.” For a critical discussion of this point, see, e.g., (Arneson 2009) and (Kolodny 2014).

can be justified to all qualified points of view. So where an unequal distribution can be justified without ‘invidious comparison’, and is acceptable to all qualified points of view, the fact that the distribution deviates from standards of equality is not regrettable, because an equal distribution of power is not a value in its own right.

By contrast, on other views, an equal distribution of political power is not simply a baseline, nor a mere by-product, but instead an ideal in its own right. On such views, there are non-instrumental reasons in favor of distributing power equally; and these reasons survive the presence of reasons against doing so. Many democratic theorists believe that these reasons in favor of political equality prevail against most competing reasons in favor of an unequal distribution of power. But for the purposes of clarifying the conceptual point at issue, this is less important than another observation: even if the reasons for distributing political power unequally prevail, they do not *cancel* the reasons in favor of political equality. They *merely outweigh* them. And so there is something to regret where we cannot realize simultaneously the value that speaks in favor of political equality and the value that speaks in favor of political inequality. (If we cannot have *both* the valuable relationship among co-citizens that, relational egalitarians believe, may exist in a democracy *and* the benefits of reliable political decision-making, for instance.) On such a view, equality is either itself a non-derivatively valuable good, or (more plausibly) an essential component of such a good. In either case we can, I think, sensibly think of it as being an ideal in its own right, insofar as whatever gives us reason to realize equality can itself not be realized without it.⁸

This distinction, between views that treat equality as a mere by-product, a mere baseline,

⁸ Another way of putting this is: To say that it is an ideal in its own right is not meant to say that it may not be in some sense derivative of some other good, as long as it is also the case that a suitable specification of that other good makes reference to the ideal of political equality. I discuss this issue in greater detail in (Viehoff 2017).

or an ideal in its own right, seems to me of general theoretical interest for thinking about political equality (and indeed equality more generally). But, more importantly for the purposes of this essay, the distinction is relevant because, as I understand them, relational egalitarian arguments for political equality generally aspire to vindicating political equality as an ideal in its own right.⁹ Indeed, it may plausibly be among the main motivations for relational egalitarian views that they promise to establish something more than a mere by-product or baseline justification of equality (political and other). I do not purport to show here that this aspiration is worth sharing. I merely mean to point out that it sets a standard against which to assess the success of relational egalitarian arguments.

2.

The relational egalitarian account of political equality centrally rests on the following line of thought:

- (1) *Relational Equality*: Certain kinds of egalitarian relationships have non-derivative value.
- (2) *Equal Power*: A (roughly) equal distribution of (some forms of) power among the parties is an essential component of such relationships.
- (3) *Political Equality*: Our political community should instantiate relationships of this sort; and therefore (some forms of) power should be distributed equally among the citizens. Where it is, the institution has distinctive value (Democracy's Value) and distinctive authority (Democracy's Authority).

As it stands, this is evidently not a complete argument. In particular, even if (1) and (2) are

⁹ I take this aspiration to be present, for instance, in both (Kolodny 2014) and (Viehoff 2014). More generally, insofar as relational egalitarians are (at least in part) concerned with establishing democracy's authority, a mere baseline-view will generally be inadequate, for reasons briefly discussed at the end of Section 4 below.

true, (3) does not yet follow because an equal distribution of power, though necessary, may not be sufficient for the instantiation of non-derivatively valuable egalitarian relationships. Under what conditions (3) does follow will depend on a more detailed account of egalitarian relationships and their instantiation conditions. I will briefly return to this towards the end of this essay. But before I can get there, I need to discuss in more detail claims (1) and (2).

Let me begin with (1). The starting point of the relational egalitarian approach is the observation that certain egalitarian relationships have non-derivative value. Thus Elizabeth Anderson has argued that egalitarians are fundamentally committed “to creat[ing] a community in which people stand in relations of equality to others.”¹⁰ According to Samuel Scheffler, “equality is an ideal governing certain kinds of interpersonal relationships,” and egalitarians should care about “the establishment of a society of equals, a society whose members relate to one another on a footing of equality.”¹¹ And the editors of a recent volume on relational (or, as they say, ‘social’) equality offer the following characterization of the position their book elucidates: “[E]quality is foremost about relationships between people. The structure of relationships can be more or less egalitarian, more or less hierarchical. When we appeal to the value of equality, we mean the value primarily of egalitarian and nonhierarchical relationships...”¹²

I am sympathetic to the thought that equality is a constitutive component of certain non-derivatively valuable relationships, and that a society in which the relevant form of equality is instantiated realizes an ideal of which other societies fall short. But these claims, even if true, are open to significantly different interpretations. To see this, consider the two quite different sets of

¹⁰ (Anderson 1999), p.289.

¹¹ (Scheffler 2015), p.21.

¹² (Fourie, Schuppert et al. 2015), p.1.

examples from which discussions of relational equality commonly start.¹³

One case to which relational egalitarians regularly appeal to illustrate the ideal of relational equality is that of a *society not governed by social hierarchies* assigning positions of inferiority or superiority to different people. Thus David Miller invokes the ideal of a society “that is not marked by status divisions such that one can place different people in hierarchically ranked categories, in different classes for instance.”¹⁴ Niko Kolodny, when introducing the idea that “in virtue of how a society is structured, some people can be ... ‘above’ and others ‘below’,” offers some paradigm cases of problematic social hierarchy: “The servant is ‘subordinate’ to the lord of the manor, the slave ‘subordinate’ to the master, and so on. ... The plebian is ‘lower than’ the patrician, the untouchable ‘lower than’ the Brahmin, and so on.”¹⁵ At their most extreme, such *caste societies* (as I will, for ease of reference, call the kind of societies that paradigmatically violate the ideal of equality Miller, Kolodny, and others are concerned with) assign a place in the hierarchy based on parentage or similar features beyond a person’s control.¹⁶ But caste societies, in the sense at issue here, may exist even where someone had control over the fate that lead them to be assigned a lower rank on the social ladder: consider societies permitting peonage, in which people essentially discharge their debts by selling themselves into temporary slavery, and are

¹³ I am setting aside here a third type of argument, familiar from Rousseau’s *Second Discourse*, according to which inequality is problematic because, together with our desire for recognition or admiration, it creates problematic forms of dependence and threatens our freedom and happiness. (For a careful articulation of this position, which is perhaps best thought of as *relational* but not distinctly *egalitarian* – concerned with relationships of independence, but not (as such) of inequality – see (Neuhouser 2014).) Though important in its own right, I doubt it provides resources to justify political equality.

¹⁴ (Miller 1997), p.224.

¹⁵ (Kolodny 2014), p.292. See also (Anderson 2012), p.40, for a more detailed list of historically significant forms of social inequality.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Anderson refers to a specific prohibition on consigning people “to inferior office on the basis of identities or statuses imputed at birth” as “the anticaste principle.” (Anderson 2012), p.106. I use the notion of a caste society in a more general fashion. (As a separate point, I doubt Anderson’s anticaste principle, as stated, is getting to the moral heart of the matter she is concerned with. Is it really morally significant that the identity or status is imputed at birth, rather than at age 5, or even 15? I would rather think that what is at stake is the lack of significant control we have over something that marks us for the rest of our lives.)

viewed as equivalent to slaves while the peonage relation lasts. The contrast to such a caste society is then a society that assigns equal social status to all citizens, and disallows inequalities that would be incompatible with it.

Another case often invoked by proponents of relational equality is a well-functioning *friendship* or similar relationship.¹⁷ Friendship and (at least more recently, and in some societies) marriage are commonly seen as quintessentially egalitarian relationships.¹⁸ We have a reasonably straightforward grasp of the ideal that friends should be one another's equals, and we can think of a variety of ways in which a friendship may fall short of this ideal. Imagine, for instance, that one friend considers herself entitled to special treatment that her friend has no claim to (the friend owes it to her to be attentive, or grateful for her friendship, but she has no reciprocal duty to him), or asserts power over her friend that her friend lacks or that she denies to him (as when she insists that she gets to decide where they go on holiday together if she pays, or that she should decide where they go because she has better taste). Such a friendship, in which one friend effectively deems herself the other's superior (or inferior), would intuitively be deficient because it falls short of an ideal of how friends should relate to each other – specifically, as equals.

I think that relational egalitarian arguments for political equality must pay attention to differences between these two examples, and the associated intuitions underpinning claim (1), because they have quite different implications for claim (2), that relational equality requires equal power. In a nutshell: If we start from the anti-caste intuition to defend relational egalitarianism, we have an easy time explaining why our findings apply to political relations in society at large.

¹⁷ Friendship, marriage, etc. are discussed in some detail by (Scheffler 2015), Sect. 1.2, (Viehoff 2014), Part IV. Even those who do not discuss it in detail tend to recognize these relationships as examples of valuable egalitarian relationships that fall within the general purview of relational equality. See, e.g., (Kolodny 2014), p.304.

¹⁸ For a thoughtful discussion of friendship's egalitarian character (that does, however, overemphasize the significance of consensus among friends, and fails to pay due attention to the question how friends, as equals, deal with disagreement), see (Mansbridge 1980), pp.8-14.

After all, caste is an essentially societal phenomenon. But we also have a hard time explaining why relational equality requires equal power: unequal distributions of political power need not amount to objectionable social hierarchy of the sort we associate with caste or class structures. On the other hand, if we start from the example of friendship, we have a relatively easy time explaining the need for equal power. But we have a hard time establishing that the relevant norms apply to political society.

3.

This section discusses the *anti-caste paradigm* of relational equality. Behind this conception of relational equality lies the following thought: Caste societies, in which some people are socially ‘above’ and others ‘below’, are intuitively morally problematic. There is something objectionable about a society that distinguishes between peasants and lords, plebeians and patricians, untouchables and Brahmins, and so on. And, relational egalitarians propose more specifically, what is objectionable about such arrangements are not merely their instrumental consequences, or the fact that those deemed ‘below’ are treated in ways that are anyway problematic quite apart from the fact that others are ‘above’, or even that those who are below act in obsequious ways that we find demeaning.¹⁹ Instead the social hierarchy is intrinsically problematic. Someone can say: ‘The social arrangements under which we live treat me as another’s social inferior, and him as my superior,’ and that is meant to be an objection in its own right to these arrangements.

Finally, for those who appeal to this conception of relational equality to defend political equality,

¹⁹ In fact, I doubt that obsequiousness is a constitutive component of unequal social relations. We can imagine objectionable social hierarchies without toadying. Consider a caste society within which each person simply does what the norms of the group require of her, without trying to curry favors with anyone above. And we can imagine toadying without objectionable social hierarchies. Imagine two people who, whenever they want something from each other, toady and beg, rather than request or negotiate. They may each do so, and so are situated equally. And they may not think that there is any social hierarchy between them. And yet they may each be demeaning themselves in toadying to the other.

inequality in power is (unless qualified in certain quite specific ways) itself constitutive of social hierarchy, rather than being merely a causal antecedent of certain hierarchical social relations.

To assess the plausibility of this position, this section discusses what precisely social hierarchy of the sort we associate with caste or class amounts to (3.A), and why such ‘social status hierarchy’ (as I will call it) may be thought distinctly problematic (3.B). Section 4 considers whether the absence of social status hierarchy require an equal distribution of political power.

A. *What is Social Status Hierarchy?*

To determine what is morally problematic about social status hierarchies, we need to first understand what they are. This is not, in the first instance, a moral inquiry but a conceptual one: an attempt to identify, and properly characterize, core features of a particular social phenomenon. Still, part of what seems to unify different instances of the phenomenon is that we view them as morally problematic; and we would expect this to matter for our analysis of the phenomenon’s central features. I treat as paradigmatic instances of the phenomenon the kinds of caste or class²⁰ societies mentioned earlier: societies in which some are peasants and others lords, some untouchables and others Brahmins, some plebian and others patrician. I focus on three characteristics of such societies: they involve *status* inequality; the inequality is not a matter of mere difference, but instead establishes a *hierarchy*; and the hierarchy structures *society as a whole*.

i. *Society as a Whole*

Let me consider the last point first. The existence of a caste structure (like the existence of a class hierarchy, a patriarchal structure, etc.) is a feature of a society as a whole, rather than of a particular relationship. When we think, for instance, of the sense in which the servant is ‘below’

²⁰ It is worth adding that class, in the sense that I care about here, is centrally about social status. There are influential alternative notions of class, indebted to Marx or Weber, which focus instead on a person’s relation to the means of production, or her employment relations. Class understood in these latter ways are evidently important in their own right. But the moral questions they raise are (at least in the first instance) distinct from relational-egalitarian concerns about inequality.

the lord of the manor, we do *not* just mean that, *within their particular relationship*, the servant is subordinate. We also mean that their positions as master and servants *generalize*, and shape all other social relationships that they have. The servant, we may say, is not just his master's servant. Even if he currently has no master, he remains *a servant*, and others will relate to him *as such*. Similarly, the master is not just his servant's master. He will be *a master* even if he currently has no servants, and others will relate to him in what they think is a manner appropriate to his status. (Contrast this with ordinary employment hierarchies in egalitarian societies: my foreman is my superior on the factory floor; but outside of it, and to the rest of society, he is my equal.)

A social hierarchy is properly attributable to the society as a whole if it structures relationships among members of the society *in general*. The relevant notion of generality bears on both the *content* of social norms and the norms' *existence conditions*. First, if you know that I am an untouchable in a caste society, you know not only how you should relate to me (in this regard), you also know the relation in which I stand to all other members of society, since that relation is itself determined by caste. It is, in Hohfeldian language, a 'multital' relation (like property), not a 'paucital' relation (like contract).²¹ (And like property, the social status associated with caste or class is insulated from certain forms of detailed attention to individual peculiarities. I will return to this point below.)

Second, for our society to be structured by a particular hierarchy, the norms governing relations among people with different status must have social reality: they must be "systematically sustained by laws, norms, or habits" that are sufficiently widespread to properly count as representative of society as a whole.²² We may call these 'societal norms' for short. A full-blown account of social status hierarchy (which is beyond the scope of this essay) would need to explain

²¹ (Hohfeld 2001)

²² (Anderson 2012), p.42.

under what conditions norms are properly attributed to society as a whole, rather than reflecting the view of just a single person or a small sub-group. It would, in particular, have to explain how disagreement among members of a society about which norms do (and should) properly govern it will affect the existence of societal norms, norms representative of society as a whole. Often the legal system will function as a mouthpiece for society's view of norms. But not all social norms will be embodied in legal norms. And sometimes legal norms are in fact in tension with social norms; and it cannot be taken for granted that in such cases, the former prevail. (Think of the long struggle about caste in India after the official legal rejection of caste structures.)

Let me add three clarificatory observations. First, we need not assume that a society is governed by a single social status hierarchy. Instead societies are usually structured by various intersecting social status hierarchies: gender, race, class, and so on. To say that a social status relation governs society as a whole is thus *not* to say that it governs it *exclusively*. It is, rather, to say that it plays *some* role in governing *all* social relations.

Second, the features just highlighted are not unique to status *hierarchies*, but apply more generally to social differentiation that is attributable to society as a whole. Thus in a society that distinguishes between the status of child and the status of adult yet does not treat one as superior to the other, the fact that I am an adult structures all of my relations to everyone else qua child or fellow adult, and the norms involved are sustained by society. (I return to the distinction between status differentiation and status hierarchy below.)

Third, a society in the relevant sense is not limited to a group the size of a modern political community. For instance, a high school may be a 'society' in the relevant sense, governed by internal norms that structure relations among all students and sustained by the students' attitudes and actions. (This matters mostly because it expands the range of examples with which we can work to get a grip on the phenomenon in question.)

That caste or class is a feature of society as a whole in turn explains why not all instances of inequality amount to status hierarchy of the sort we associate with these phenomena. For instance, that some people think of themselves as superior to others (and perhaps even that those particular others happen to think of themselves as inferior) is compatible with the absence of castes and classes if the claim to superiority is not sustained by societal norms. And even if it is recognized that one person has a special claim on another, and that claim is supported by societal norms, the asymmetry in claims need not amount to a hierarchy that mars society as a whole if the socially recognized relation is limited to the two parties, and does not structure their relations to many other people.²³

ii. Status

But even inequalities that are socially recognized, and structure relations among all members of society, need not create social hierarchies of the sort we associate with caste or class. To see this, consider the somewhat mundane, but also relatively tractable, example of a high school. The school *could* be structured by caste hierarchies: the jocks reign supreme, the geeks are somewhere near the bottom, and so on. But it need not be. And it need not be even where there are inequalities that structure relations among all students, and are socially recognized.

Imagine, for instance, that each term the school publishes a complete ranking of all students' academic performance. So everyone knows where they are vis-à-vis anyone else when it comes to

²³ Consider debt peonage. There is evidently something bad about it as such: the person who is indebted must work for the other, without (at that moment) adequate compensation, and without significant control about whether to do such work. That alone likely suffices to make peonage objectionable, and deserving of abolition. It may also follow that the relation between debtor and creditor is one that is importantly unequal, unequal in a way that undermines certain relations between them. (Friends, for instance, would have to forgive another's debt for the friendship to be sustainable.) But as long as what has changed is *only* the debtor's relation to the creditor, and not the debtor's relation to others in society, debt peonage does not introduce the kind of status hierarchy with which we are currently concerned. The fact that historically, debt peonage was associated with social hierarchy reflects in part the fact that peonage existed in societies where those working for others in various positions were generally deemed to be of lower status. It is due to this further association that debt peonage creates a distinctive problem of social hierarchy, of the sort we associate with caste or class.

academic standing. And imagine too that there is a social norm in the school that, where A is ranked below B, A must congratulate B on their performance, but not vice versa. The social life of this high school, though it sustains inequality, need nonetheless not instantiate status hierarchies. Just imagine two students, one of whom ranked close to the top of the class, the other close to the bottom. Beyond the judgment that one has performed better academically, and is thus entitled to congratulations, there need be nothing here amounting to a judgment that the higher-ranked student has *superior social status* in the school.²⁴

What distinguished positive judgments, or even rankings, in general, and judgments of social hierarchy of the sort associated with superior or inferior status in particular? It is a central feature of status, as it is understood in this context, that it attributes to us a range of rights and duties that are one step removed from the characteristics on which the attribution of that status seems to rest. Think of the legal status of ‘minor’: It attributes to someone a whole range of legal rights and liabilities that are at least partly mediated by the very idea of ‘minor’, rather than directly justifiable by appeal to the characteristic that make us a minor (viz., being below the age of 18, or whatever the local age of majority is). And this is not a feature of legal status alone. Sociologists concerned with social status also emphasize in their studies “the prestige accorded to individuals because of the abstract positions they occupy rather than because of immediately observable behavior.”²⁵ Even moral status may plausibly be thought to have this character.²⁶

²⁴ This is not to say that the judgment that is being made is normally inert or irrelevant. A lower-ranked student may envy the higher-ranked student, or resent her for her success, and yet not take the other to be her social superior.

²⁵ (Gould 2002), p.1147. See also, e.g., (Chan and Goldthorpe 2004), p.383: “By a status order we understand a set of hierarchical relations that express perceived and typically accepted social superiority, equality or inferiority of a quite generalised kind, attaching not to qualities of particular individuals but rather to social positions that they hold or to certain of their ascribed attitudes...” Note that some sociologists who take themselves to be concerned with status are ultimately interested in the micro-processes that determine how individuals evaluate particular others, and how various evaluations interact in establishing mutual (but not necessarily societal) rankings. See, e.g., (Jasso 2001).

²⁶ See, e.g., the discussion of ‘range properties’ central to moral status in (Waldron 2002), and of ‘evaluative abstinence’ and ‘opacity respect’ in (Carter 2011).

Generalizing from these observations, I propose that status involves a gap between what triggers the attribution of a particular status to someone (their particular *quality*) and what responses the bearer of superior status is thought to be entitled to because of her status (their *claim*). Status, in other words, is a non-eliminable intermediate step in the normative justification of its bearer's claim, a step that makes the claim specifically about her rather than simply about the underlying quality (behavior, performance).²⁷ This explains why we need not think of the high school as instantiating status inequality: while the norm requires responding in certain ways to the other students' academic performance, the link between that performance and the mandated response is sufficiently close that we don't think of it as involving a more general judgment about the person that exceeds the specific quality at issue. (Matters would have been different if, for instance, the higher ranked students had been entitled, not to receive warm words, but to be obeyed, or have their belongings carried around by their fellow students.)

iii. *Hierarchy*

That status attributions amount to assigning us a whole bundle of rights and duties in turn explains why it is worth distinguish clearly between status *differences* and status *hierarchy*. Adults and children do not have the same legal status. Nor do married people and single people. And yet we would not ordinarily think that with regard to these examples, one group's legal status is superior to the other's, because their status differences – the different rights and duties they have qua minors or majors, or qua married or single people – do not involve claims that we associate with one party's superiority over the other. There is a status difference here, but no status hierarchy. Or, to use terminology sometimes adopted by sociologists, there is 'differentiation' but

²⁷ Cf. also Kolodny's discussion of what he calls 'consideration', or "those responses that social superiors, as social superiors, characteristically attract." (Kolodny 2014), p.297. As Kolodny explains, "although their *basis* may be some narrow and accidental attribute of the person, the responses constitutive of consideration are *focused* on the person and his or her interests, claims, or imperatives as a whole." (Kolodny 2014), p.298.

no ‘stratification’ of status. And it is status hierarchy or stratification – or, as I will usually continue to call it, ‘status inequality’ – that really concerns us.

How do we distinguish between social status inequality and a mere difference in social status? It is tempting to think adopt a purely descriptive approach here: A is B’s social superior, and their relation thus one of status inequality, rather than merely someone whose status, though different, is on a par with B’s, if the relevant societal norms specifically assign A greater benefits than they assign to B, or grant her greater rights, or give her greater power. (Let me say, for short, that the norms assign ‘advantages’ to A over B.²⁸) On this view, I can identify someone as my social superior by identifying how our society’s norms distribute advantages as between her and me.

B. Social Status Hierarchy as Morally Objectionable

I think everything up to now is correct as far as it goes. But it falls short of an account of social status hierarchy. We want to make sense of the complaint someone has when he says, ‘The social arrangements under which we live treat me as another’s social inferior, and him as my superior,’ where this is an objection in its own right to these arrangements. The sense in which society treats another as my superior (or inferior) must, in other words, be inherently morally problematic. And yet the features highlighted up to now – that society as a whole assigns certain unequal advantages to A over B, in a way that seems justificatorily detached from underlying considerations – do not suffice to create such an inherent moral problem.

Consider the following example:

Medical Services: A society grants certain people (medical doctors on duty) a right to park their

²⁸ How do ‘advantages’ relate to Kolodny’s ‘consideration’? If ‘consideration’ is meant to pick out responses to superiors that are not inherently problematic, then ‘consideration’ and ‘advantage’ may come to the same thing; but then Kolodny still needs to explain which form of consideration is in fact morally objectionable. If ‘consideration’ is meant to pick out responses that are inherently morally problematic, then it turns out that some of the phenomena that Kolodny is interested in – especially unequal power justified on simple instrumental grounds – do not constitute ‘consideration’.

car in sports where others are not permitted to park. It also gives them flashlights that they can attach to their cars, and when they turn them on, others are expected to scramble out of the way and let the doctor pass.

In some ways – and, crucially, with regard to those features our analysis of social status inequality has focused on up to now – this case is difficult to distinguish from another.

Lord's Carriage: A society grants certain people (Lords) the right to park their carriage in places where others are not permitted to park. It also gives Lords certain insignia, and if those are attached to the Lord's carriage, others (commoners) are expected to scramble out of the way and let the Lord's carriage pass.

What these examples suggest is that the special advantages that doctors have in *Medical Services* could be signs that they are deemed our social superiors, just like the Lord is in *Lord's Carriage*. But intuitively it is quite clear that, though they could be that, they need not amount to social hierarchy (by which I mean, remember, objectionable social hierarchy). For these advantages, despite their unequal distribution, can also intuitively be compatible with mere social differentiation.

Whether the doctors' advantages amount to differentiation or hierarchy depends, I propose, on *how they are justified*. And since what matters are the norms of society as society understands them, it depends, more specifically, on how society takes the advantages to be justified. (For the sake of simplicity, I will continue to speak of justification simpliciter. It is worth keeping in mind that the issue is the justification as viewed by society, or *social justification*.) If the societal norms granting doctors such advantages are justified by appeal to the interests of everyone around here, where all of these interests are treated as equally significant, then possession of these advantages does not translate into social superiority. I would not, in that case, look at a doctor who races past me in her car with her flashlight on and think 'Society treats her as my social superior', the way

that a peasant may have looked at the Lord of the Manor as he passes by in his carriage. And when I see the doctor later at a bar, I wouldn't normally fear that she would take herself to be my social superior and decline to talk to me. (She might still do so. But if she does, this reflects her personal views rather than society's judgment of our respective status.)

If, by contrast, doctors are given such advantages, not because society believes them to be suitably instrumentally justified in light of everyone's equally relevant interests, but because doctors are deemed to have more important interests or claims – to be ultimately more important than we are – then their advantages do amount to social hierarchy rather than mere differentiation. (Similarly, if society takes them to be justified instrumentally, but the instrumental justification itself rests on assumptions about the differential moral importance of different persons, then the advantages mark, though they may not constitute, social status hierarchy.)

This example suggests a useful distinction between two different ways in which status structures, with their distinctive gap between quality and claim, may emerge. One possibility is that the claims that we have attach to us *derivatively*, most obviously via an *office* that we are holding. Because someone's personal characteristics may bear on whether she is an appropriate candidate for a particular office, but are normally neither necessary nor sufficient to ground her having the claims that attach to the office, we see here emerge the gap between quality and claim that is essential to status.²⁹ (Someone who has medical training may not be a recognized doctor in the society we are imagining, and so lacks the correlative claims. Someone who lacks medical training may be a recognized doctor, and so has the correlative claims.) At the same time, the status attaches to us only indirectly or derivatively, qua office holder, and not directly, qua person. But other instances of status may apply to us *non-derivatively*: they do not depend on our

²⁹ For further discussion of this point, see (Viehoff 2016), Section II.

holding any particular office, or on some similarly derivative justification. Status of this sort marks a fundamental, non-derivative claim that we have qua who we are. Social status hierarchy, of the sort we are interested in, arises where social norms attribute to us superior social status non-derivatively, and thus treat us as if our superior claims rested on our ultimately mattering more, being more morally important, or having greater ultimate value.

With this conceptual analysis of social status hierarchy in place, we can turn to the normative question why such hierarchy is so morally problematic. The distinctions just drawn, between status hierarchy and status differentiation, and between status that applies to us derivatively and status that is non-derivative, suggest an initial answer: If we are all moral equals, matter equally, etc., then social status hierarchy is objectionable because it treats us as if we were not. The distribution of advantages associated with social status hierarchy lacks adequate justification.

But if this were the whole of the matter, someone might reasonably worry that the analysis of social status hierarchy cannot capture the distinctiveness of the relational egalitarian complaint. For the thought that some people are given unjustifiable advantages to the detriment of others is, one might think, easily accommodated within the distributive conceptions of equality in contradistinction to which relational egalitarian positions have usually been developed.³⁰

So it is important to highlight that the moral problem of social status inequality is not simply that it involves an unjustified unequal distribution of advantages. For social status hierarchy is, we said, *a social fact*, and depends, not just on what is justified *simpliciter*, but on what is justified from the point of view of society. The issue not simply whether an unequal distribution is *objectively* justified or not, but whether it can be justified from within the normative commitments of society at large without presupposing that some people (some people's interests or claims) are

³⁰ The opposition to a distributive paradigm is central to the discussion of relational equality in (Anderson 1999, Anderson 2012) and (Scheffler 2003, Scheffler 2005).

of greater ultimate moral significance than others (their interests or claims).³¹ The attribution of social status hierarchy to a society is thus an interpretive exercise that requires judgments about the normative basis on which society endorses particular social norms, most obviously norms that distribute unequally certain benefits and burdens. Where, on the best interpretation available to those living under these norms, society's endorsement of these norms cannot rest on normative and factual premises that treat everyone's interests or claims as of fundamental equal importance, these norms embody society's implicit (and sometimes explicit) judgment that some people (and their interests and claims) matter more than others (and their interests and claims). Social status hierarchies, we may say, *embody* society's judgment that some people are *fundamentally more important* than others; and they exist – *as a social fact* – where those living in a society cannot reasonably see how the advantages assigned to some people could be offered a suitable derivative justification compatible with everyone's equal fundamental moral significance.³² This may have various instrumental effects: on our capacity to engage in egalitarian relationships across class- or caste-lines, or on our self-respect. But it is, crucially, also intrinsically objectionable: it is a morally deplorable feature of a society that its norms embody mistaken judgments of fundamental

³¹ Indeed, it is compatible, with the account I just offered, that social status inequality exists even where there a suitable egalitarian justification for the distribution of advantages is in principle available, as long as that justification is not recognized, or indeed recognizable, by the members of the society. So a concern with social status inequality, as a phenomenon that depends on people's views of how inequalities in advantage are justified, may provide some support for theories that care about whether justifications of certain social or political arrangements are accessible to, or perhaps even actually endorsed by, those who live under these arrangements.

³² There is thus what might be thought of as an expressive dimension to social inequality, if by this we just mean that the inequality matters centrally because it is taken to reflect a certain view of people's fundamental moral significance. The expressive dimension in turn affects – constitutively – the possibility of certain kinds of relationships, relationships in which people see each other as equals. For views that emphasize the expressive dimension of status inequality, see (Fourie 2012) and (Scanlon 2003). But unlike Scanlon (and perhaps Fourie), I think that what is required for problematic status inequalities is neither that certain inequalities “could only be understood as *intended* to express the view that they were inferior,” ((Scanlon 2003), p.213, my emphasis) nor that certain inequalities, though lacking “the aim of *expressing* inferiority, nonetheless had the effect of giving rise to feelings of inferiority on the part of most reasonable citizens.” (p.213, emphasis in the original) It suffices that the inequality, though not intended to express any view, in fact is reasonably taken to express such a view; and when it does, this constitutively set back certain valuable relationships, even if no one in fact deems herself inferior as a result.

inequality even if this has no further effect on people's attitudes and relationships.

4.

The previous section offered a reconstruction of social status hierarchy and its moral significance. In this section I want to explore what social status hierarchy, so understood, entails for our assessment of political equality. Specifically, I argue that, once social status hierarchy is properly understood, it becomes quite problematic to defend the ideal of political equality by appeal to the anti-caste intuition. Why? Because if my account of social status hierarchy is correct, there need be no complaint based on status hierarchies just because some people have certain rights or claims that differ from those of others, and advantage their bearers over others. For as long as society justifies these inequalities in a way that does not treat one person (or her fundamental interests and claims) as more important than another (and her fundamental interests or claims), the inequalities are compatible with our status as social equals. As the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789 had it, "Men are born free and equal in their rights. Social differences can only be based on general utility."³³ – but that (the Declaration implicitly allows) they can. And when it comes to the distribution of political power, it is often possible to explain, in a relatively straightforward way, the gap between quality and claim that we associate with status without attributing superior importance to one person's interests or claims, or taking society to make such an attribution.

To make this suggestion both more concrete and more plausible, consider an example of unequal political power that, it seems to me, fits this description.

Necessary Representation: An egalitarian tribe, one in which all adults are generally assumed

³³ Quoted in (Dahrendorf 1972), p.92.

to have equal status, comes into conflict with another tribe about shared hunting grounds. Some agreement needs to be negotiated. The agreement will be binding on all members of the tribe. But for some reason or another (the other tribe is far away, much work needs to be done before the harvest, etc.), only a single member of the tribe can participate in the negotiations. One person (call her R) is chosen, perhaps because she speaks the other tribe's language (and so the negotiations will go more smoothly), perhaps because she is the fastest runner (and so will be back sooner with the details), perhaps because she is the least competent harvester (and so her absence will be least noticed). R goes and negotiates the treaty with the foreign tribe. And since the treaty is binding on all members of her own tribe, R has therefore also made rules that bind all her fellows.

I think there is no doubt that R has greater political power here than any other member of the tribe. And yet I also think that she need not therefore be deemed their social superior. In other words: whatever complaint R's fellow citizens may have about this arrangement empowering R (and I do not deny that they could have justified complaints), their complaint cannot reasonably be that, if R is so empowered, then R is their social superior in a morally problematic sense. (This remains true, it is worth adding, even if the treaty will be binding for many years into the future, and so R's decision will affect how the tribe will live for a long time to come. It remains also true if R has received no detailed instructions from the other members of the tribe, but acts on her own best judgment, as a 'trustee' rather than as a 'delegate' of her tribe, during an extended stay with the other tribe.)

This example provides intuitive support for the claim that not all inequalities in power amount to inequalities in social status of the sort we associate with class or caste. Furthermore, it fits with the explanation I offered why sometimes inequalities in claims (including inequalities in power) do not undermine equal social status. Whether it does undermine it, I have suggested,

depends precisely on why someone has special claims, including greater power. And given what I said in setting up the example, we here have an explanation of R's superior political power that does not depend on any assumption that she is, or is thought by the other members of the tribe to be, their social superior – as someone who somehow matters more than they do.

In light of these observations, let me discuss in more detail Niko Kolodny's defense of political equality based on relational egalitarian concerns.³⁴ Kolodny's examples of paradigmatic social inequality are, as I mentioned earlier, servant/lord of the manor, slave/master, plebian/patrician, and untouchable/Brahmin. In other words, he is concerned with inequality associated with caste and class. Kolodny also argues that social inequality is instantiated, in a fairly obvious way, where society gives some people greater power or de facto authority than others. Even if the society otherwise show equal concern for people's interests, and for their claims to means that enable the pursuit of their personal life plans, it is a presumptively unequal society (i) if some have "greater relative *power* (whether formal or legal, or otherwise) over others, while not being resolutely disposed to refrain from exercising that greater power as something to which those others are entitled"; or (ii) if some have "greater relative *de facto authority* (whether formal or legal, or otherwise) over others, in the sense that their commands or requests are generally, if not exceptionlessly, complied with (though not necessarily for any moral reasons)" and they lack (once again) the right disposition to refrain from exercising that authority.³⁵

³⁴ Elizabeth Anderson, the other prominent relational egalitarian proponent of democracy, does not seem to me to be open to the same worry I raise here, at least on the most charitable reading of her argument. On that reading, Anderson's relational argument for democracy is much less direct than Kolodny's. Democracy is not required by relational equality as such. Rather, relational equality requires that public officials act for public ends, public ends are determined by the public interest, and people should be given a democratic say in determining what the public interest requires if we are to make sure that everyone's interest are to count equally. See (Anderson 2010), p.107. (On a less charitable reading, Anderson relies on a story about delegation not dissimilar to Kolodny's, and assumes that public ends can somehow – as a conceptual matter – set only by the people themselves. If that were her position, it would be subject to the same worries I believe beset Kolodny's view.)

³⁵ (Kolodny 2014), pp.295. Kolodny also mentions, as a third possibility, someone's having "attributes (for example, race, lineage, wealth, perceived divine favor) that generally attracts greater *consideration* than the corresponding attributes of others." (p.296) I think consideration is indeed more closely tied to issues of caste inequality. But as we

And yet the discussion in the previous suggestion shows that, if our concern is with caste inequalities, then there is no problem as such with inequalities of power or de facto authority. As long as these inequalities are justified in the right way, they do not pose a threat to our equal social status as members of our society.

Kolodny recognizes that not all social relations that assign differential power to people give rise to worries about status inequality. He recognizes, for instance, that many private associations are inegalitarian: churches, employment relations, families, and so on. But he thinks he has a straightforward explanation for the much stronger objection we have to an unequal distribution of political power than to an unequal distribution of power in private relations: Private relations usually include exit options, or other opportunities to avoid standing in the unequal power relation.³⁶ As a result, it is within our power to determine whether others have unequal power over us; and that itself reduces the impact that the inequality has on our lives. Political power, by contrast, usually arises in relations that lack significant exit options or other opportunities to avoid being under another's power.

I think this is right. And I think this does indeed explain why we are often (though not always) much less concerned with inequalities of power or authority within certain private relations. But though correct, the appeal to exit options is clearly insufficient to deal with the tribal example I offered earlier: there the assumption was that, just as in any other political community, membership is not easily given up, and so the unequal power of the tribal emissary R cannot be compensated for by other members' opportunity to avoid being bound by the outcome of her negotiations via exit.

just saw, unequal consideration amounts to caste inequality only if it lacks a suitable social justification. In light of this, and because Kolodny himself is content to forego appeals to consideration, and reach democratic conclusions via appeals to the significance of unequal power or de facto authority (p.298), I will not pursue this third possibility.

³⁶ (Kolodny 2014), p.304.

The distinction between private and political decisions is not the only resource Kolodny invokes to explain why sometimes we are relatively unconcerned with unequal power. He also suggests that unequal power is unproblematic where the person who has greater power is merely the agent of those over whom the power is exercised.³⁷ This explains, Kolodny suggests, why political representation need not pose a threat to our equal social status: our representatives (and, by extension, someone like R in my example) may have more power or de facto authority than we do. But they are nonetheless not our superiors because they have and exercise this power qua agents of the people, who have merely *delegated* decision-making power to the office holder.

I agree that there need be no problem of social inequality between citizens and their representatives. Speaking purely anecdotally, many years ago I used to know my local MP reasonably well. And though I knew that he had power that I lacked, I never thought that he was, in any interesting sense, my social superior. But is this best explained by the fact that the MP was (indirectly, via the community of constituents) my agent?

It depends on what the agency relation amounts to. On one understanding of what delegation amounts to, it may require that the principal has substantive control over the agent. I doubt, however, that this is strictly necessary. For it is highly doubtful that citizens do have substantive control over their MPs. Clearly individual citizens lack such control. But in fact I doubt that even the community as a whole possesses it. (Just consider the significant divergence between a representative's voting patterns and her constituents' preferences that is common in many democracies.) One response to this would simply be that our democracies fall short of the ideal of delegation, and thus also of realizing social equality between MPs and ordinary citizens.³⁸

³⁷ (Kolodny 2014), p.317.

³⁸ This appears to be Kolodny's response: "No doubt, many of our representatives only pay lip service to the idea that they are public servants." (Kolodny 2014), p.318.

But I don't think this is adequate. For as I see it, even though our actual democracies fall significantly short of giving citizens actual control over their MPs, it is not the case that MPs are (in general) their citizens' social superiors qua MPs. (They may very well be their social superiors as a matter of class. But at least in many European countries, like the UK or Germany, class structures cut across political office. One doesn't stop being working class simply because one is elected to Parliament.)

On another view of delegation, the central feature of delegated power is precisely that it is not justified by, and exercised for the sake of, the interests of the power-holding agent, but by, and for, the interests of the principal. The latter may be true even where the principal has no control whatsoever over the agent. (Though in practice, it may often make sense to introduce such control, not for its own sake, but precisely for the sake of ensuring that the agent acts for the principal's benefit only.) This, I think, offers a more plausible account of why my MP is not my social superior. But it also entails that what creates conditions of social inferiority and superiority is not possession of unequal power or de facto authority as such. Rather, whether unequal power constitutes relations of social inferiority or superiority depends on what justifies the unequal distribution of political power.

I thus want to suggest that relational egalitarian arguments that start from a concern with caste or class hierarchies do not provide reasons for valuing political equality as such. This follows from the fact that the distribution of power or de facto authority is not an independent constituent of unequal status relations of the sort we associate with caste and class. Instead political equality is nothing more than a *baseline*: If nothing of the right sort, by appeal to the equal interests and claims of the community, can be said to justify the inequality in power, then it is unjustified, and power must be distributed equally. But if there is a suitable argument – if, to speak with the French revolutionaries, unequal political power advances “social utility”

(understood in a suitably egalitarian fashion, treating everyone's interests etc. as being of equal fundamental importance) – then political inequality is not even regrettable.

To conclude this section, let me flag that this argument also undermines attempts to ground democratic authority in appeals to relational equality understood on the anti-caste view. Kolodny argues that, “If I were to disregard the democratic decision, then I would be depriving others of equal opportunity to influence this very decision. For influence over the decision, in the sense relevant in this context, is not simply influence over what gets engraved on tablets or printed in registers; it is influence over what is actually done. Insofar as relations of social equality are partly constituted by precisely that equal opportunity for influence, I would be, by depriving others of that influence, relating to them as a social superior, at least in that instance.”³⁹

But if equal power (or ‘equal opportunity for influence’) is not a constituent component of equal social status, then this argument runs into trouble. Unequal power may be compatible with social equality if it is suitably justified. If one thinks that acting contrary to unjust legal demands is an adequate justification for claiming special power, then justified resistance or disobedience need not give rise to a complaint about inequality.⁴⁰ If I thought I could disobey because I was special, superior to my fellow citizens, then there would indeed be a problem. But if I think that anyone who found himself in my situation – anyone confronted with this unjust law, and able to disobey – would have reason, and permission, to act as I do, then there is no reason to think that I take myself to be anyone's social superior, or that my disobedience is in any way incompatible with our having equal social status.

³⁹ (Kolodny 2014), p.315.

⁴⁰ I am setting aside the further point that, since my disobedience need not be authorized by any societal norm, my disobedience need not translate into social status hierarchy either.

5.

Let me next turn to what we may call the *friendship conception* of relational equality: an understanding of the significance of egalitarian relations that takes as its starting point paradigmatically egalitarian relationships like friendship or marriage. Though perhaps not wholly independent of the anti-caste version of relational equality, it is clearly not neatly aligned with it. There is no neat alignment, because in a society that is deeply structured by social hierarchies like caste, people are capable of having egalitarian friendships or marriages, if not across caste or class lines, then at least with people who share their status. (Two servants can realize an ideal of egalitarian friendship among themselves even though they are both inferior to their master.) But neither is there complete independence because in a society governed by class hierarchies it is difficult for a master and a servant to have a friendship among equals. Even if neither of them endorses the social norms that govern their respective social status, and even if they both try as hard as they can to ignore these norms, the fact that these norms are socially enforced will make it difficult (though perhaps not wholly impossible) to escape the societally imposed inequalities, and avoid having them foisted upon their own interpersonal relationship.⁴¹

The following discussion of the friendship conception of relational equality will focus on two points in particular. First, equal power is, I think, a constituent component of egalitarian friendship. Thus an appeal to this conception of relational equality will avoid many of the problems we encountered in the previous sections. But, second, we must ask whether the ideal of friendship can plausibly be thought to govern our political relations – or, rather, which features of friendship relations are essential for triggering the demand for equal power, and whether these features plausibly have a counterpart in the political domain.

⁴¹ Indeed, some sociologists use density of friendship relations as an indicator of class structure (understood in the sense discussed in Section 3): (Chan and Goldthorpe 2004).

Consider a friendship, marriage, or similar relationship. I assume that participants in such relationships have special concern for one another, and thus take the other person's interests as making demands on them that are greater than those made by the interests of others, who are not their friends. But *special* concern is not enough for friendship. There must also be a commitment to *equal* concern. It is, in other words, part of our understanding of friendship that friends take the demands made by their friends' interests to be symmetrical to those that their own interests make on their friends.⁴² More specifically, they each accept in principle that "the other person's equally important interests ... should play an equally significant role in influencing decisions made within the context of the relationship" *and* they each have "a normally effective disposition to treat the other's interests accordingly" in their deliberation, "constraining [their] decisions and influencing what [they] will do."⁴³

Equal concern is, however, not enough. There is also a requirement of equal power over the relationship. And this requirement is not a mere by-product, but a constituent component of our egalitarian ideal of friendship. Friends should have equal power – understood as equal opportunity for influence – over the norms and interactions constitutive of their relationship; and failure to distribute power over the relationship equally means that the relationship falls short of its egalitarian ideal.

Consider an example: Imagine spouses who each accept that the other's interests are as important as their own in determining how they should relate to each other, and who have the corresponding "normally effective disposition". Nonetheless they may end up disagreeing about the character and norms of their relationship, or how they should interact or act together. They

⁴² I don't want to exclude the possibility that there may be other relationships that give rise to special obligations and yet lack that symmetrical character. But these would not be relationships of friendship, and would lack the distinctive value that friendships have.

⁴³ (Scheffler 2015), p.25.

may disagree because equal concern may underdetermine what they should do. Or they may disagree because they differ as to what exactly equal concern requires, whether because they have divergent views of what interests properly count as part of their marriage, or because they disagree about how weighty different interests are. To make the example more concrete: Spouses in an egalitarian marriage may find themselves disagreeing about whether they owe it to their neighbor to invite her to a party they are holding, even though they both would be happier if the neighbor didn't come. (In other words, their interests are aligned, but their judgments about what to do in light of these interests are not.) If one of them unilaterally goes ahead and invites the neighbor even though he knows that his spouse disagrees that they are obligated to (and thus should) do so, then this is, I think, a problem for their relationship. As a one-off event, it may be relatively minor. But if it happens frequently, then this would, it seems to me, threaten their egalitarian relationship, simply because the person extending the power exercises (and, in recognizing that he does, implicitly asserts a right to) unequal power over the relationship.

Let me add some more specific comments about this example, before I consider whether we can explain the importance we attach to how decisions are made among friends without appeal to an ideal of equal power. First, I assume that in a friendship, the concern is with equal power over the course of the relationship, rather than for one-off decisions (though assigning unequal power over one-off decision of sufficient importance may be difficult to reconcile with equal power over the relationship in its entirety). This explains, in part, why it may not be especially problematic for the spouse in our example to extend the invitation this one time, if there will be future opportunities where his partner will similarly get to decide how they proceed in the face of disagreement.

Second, what matters is the parties' opportunity to influence the shape of the relationship. But not all forms of influence is equally problematic. Consider the capacity to influence a friend

by rationally persuading her that certain moral and other values make one rather than another course of action superior for us as friends. Even if that capacity is distributed unequally – one friend offers more persuasive arguments than the other – we do not generally deem this to be a problematic form of unequal power. I think the best explanation for this is that, where the effect we have on our friend depends on her judgment of the plausibility of our arguments, she properly attributes the judgment to herself rather than to another. Part of what it is for friends to relate to each other as friends is to see each other *and themselves* as beings with certain agential capacities – the kinds of beings who can have, and respond to, obligations of friendship. Among these agential capacities is to appropriately respond to reasons central to the friendship, including reasons about how best to understand the character of the relationship. So a friend (qua friend) should properly treat her rational convictions regarding the proper character of the friendship as her own, rather than attribute them to another, even if that other played a role in bringing the conviction about by rational argument.⁴⁴

Next, let me consider two ways in which one might try to think about friendship without making room for a distinct ideal of equal power. First, some discussions of friendship assume that they are relationships centrally built on consensus.⁴⁵ On such views, friends must come to agree on a particular understanding of the character of their relationship and the norms governing it. Failure to reach a common understanding undermines the friendship. I highlight such views because they cast doubt on my earlier claim that equal power is a constituent component of friendship and similar egalitarian relationships. On consensualist views of friendship there is, to be clear, a sense in which it matters that friends have equal power over their friendship. But this

⁴⁴ For an alternative sketch of why ‘judgment-dependent’ forms of influence are morally unproblematic in ways that others are not, see (Kolodny 2014), pp.334-336.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., (Mansbridge 1980), pp.9-10.

concern with equal power is essentially derivative: if each friend must agree to the norms and decisions governing the friendship, then each has veto power; and if each has a veto over the same set of decisions, then (assuming each of them is equally free to use it) they each have equal power. Yet the real concern is with each party's agreement, not with equal power.

The consensualist view of friendship is, however, implausible. Disagreement, including disagreement about the character of the relationship, is endemic to many friendships and marriages, and need not cast doubt on their value or egalitarian character. Our friendship can still be good (and good for us) even if we disagree about what it would take for it to be best; and we can still relate to our friend as an equal, and recognize that she relates to us in the same way, even if we disagree about how best to understand the character of our relationship. To be clear, this is not to say that disagreement is never a problem. If we disagree so severely about what it is to relate to each other as equals that we find it impossible to see the other's actions and attitudes as truly governed by a commitment to equal concern, say, then we will find it hard to sustain the value of an egalitarian relationship like friendship. Still, there usually is (and should be) much room for divergent views before we reach this point in a friendship.

Is consensus, if not required, then at least an ideal in a friendship? I doubt it. To be clear, if there is one correct answer as to how the relationships would best be structured, then it would be ideal if both parties to the relationship reached that answer. But consensus is here a mere by-product of aiming at the truth. And if one person's view of the relationship deviates from the correct answer, there is no particular value in the other person's converging on the same incorrect (or suboptimal) view.

This last claim requires clarification in two respects. First, by 'views' here I mean the parties' understanding, not just of what norms govern their relationship, but *why* these norms are ones worth being governed by. So in denying that convergence in views matter, I do not mean to

deny that there is value in settling on a common set of norms that govern our interactions, guiding both what we do to, and what we expect of, each other. Where spouses disagree about how their common life should be organized – who should do what chores, who has what responsibilities, whether they expect birthday gifts from each other or not – they will often nonetheless converge on an understanding of what it makes sense to ask of each other, and what it makes sense to deliver. (This partly reflects the instrumental value of shared norms, and partly the importance of reciprocity in relationships among equals.) But such convergence can be achieved even if the parties disagree about what the norms should be at a deeper level: I believe that it would be best if we gave each other presents only at Christmas, and only go out for dinner on birthdays; my spouse believes it would be best if we gave presents to each other both for Christmas and for birthdays. But we also agree that it would be better if we converged on a common way of doing things than if one person gave (and expected) gifts according to one schedule, while the other gave (and expected) them according to the other. So if I consistently refuse to give birthday presents, then after a while, my partner may accede to my favored scheme, and stop giving, or expecting, birthday gifts – not because she comes to think that this is the best way of doing things, but because she believes that it is better to settle on a common way of doing things than to keep following different norms.

Second, denying that consensus is an ideal in friendship is also not to deny that, if there is convergence among the parties' views about the nature and obligations of their relationship, this will often suffice to sidestep worries about unequal power. If we can act on a shared view, then there normally is no need for us to try and influence each other, or exercise power over each other and the relationship. But this is not to say that consensus among the parties is *special* in this regard. Even if we do disagree, we can settle on a common way of doing things in line with the demands of equal power, whether by taking turns in making contested decisions, deferring to an

impartial third party, or adopting other egalitarian decision procedures.

The brief sketches of how parties may practically converge on a common set of norms regarding their relationship – one party’s refusal to budge from what they think is right, or (to return to the earlier example of inviting a neighbor) one party’s simply taking advantage of being in a position to effectively settle the matter by taking steps that would make the other’s favored option overly costly (as it would be to expressly retract the neighbor’s invitation once it has been extended) – may suggest another way of thinking about the role of power in friendship. The problem, reflection on these examples may suggest, is first and foremost that one party makes use of *arbitrary* power advantages to settle how the friendship will proceed in the face of disagreement. It is, on this view, arbitrary that I can withhold birthday gifts, and thus force my partner to settle into a gift-giving scheme that she deems inferior to the alternative; and it is arbitrary that one spouse is in a position to invite the neighbor, and that once the invitation has been extended, retracting it is overly costly and the matter thus effectively settled. What makes these power advantages arbitrary is that they are unjustified: there is no good reason why I should be able to prevail in the disagreement with my spouse, or why the partner who prefers extending the invitation should be able to settle the matter the way he did. More generally, one may think that friendship is incompatible with unjustified power advantages, but not with justified ones – and so equal power is, even in relations among friends, a baseline but not an independent ideal in its own right. We would, in other words, be no better off appealing to the friendship conception of relational equality than we would be appealing to the social status conception.

But this ignores that even justified power advantages may be problematic from the point of view of egalitarian friendship. One way to see this is to recognize that, even in the examples just mentioned, the party’s use of power need not be unjustified – except insofar as there is a distinct requirement of equal power. For if it were indeed morally wrong not to invite the

neighbor, and the reason why the spouse extended the invitation is because he recognizes that it would be morally wrong, then it would seem that he has a justification for doing what he did. Now perhaps the thought is that, though his *use* of the power that he had was justified, the fact that he *had* the power was not. But what could explain that his possession of the power was unjustified except that, in possessing the power, he was able to bypass his partner's disagreement and thus exercise unequal power over the relationship? I don't see any plausible answer, and thus conclude that our assessment of the situation does presuppose a genuine commitment to equal power among the parties, not just as a baseline, but as a requirement in its own right.

Another way of making this point is to highlight cases where an unequal distribution of power is perhaps even more obviously justified. If one partner is much more reliable in judging what course of action would be best, but usually cannot persuade the other within the time frame when a decision has to be made, then an instrumental concern with outcomes would reasonably justify empowering the more reliable partner to make all those decisions with regard to which the conditions just sketched apply. And even if this includes pretty much all of the relevant decisions that have to be made together, this would, on a mere baseline view, not be problematic, since the reliable partner's greater power would not be arbitrary. Yet I think a friendship that would have this shape would be decidedly lopsided, and *worse as a friendship*. (This is so even if, all things considered, the instrumental benefits of the unequal distribution would make up for the resulting loss in the value of the relationship.)

6.

I take away from the discussion in the previous section that friendship and similar relationships involve a genuine commitment to equal power: the parties to the friendship should have (roughly) equal opportunity to influence the character and norms governing their relationship. Thus

relational egalitarian arguments that start from the ideal of friendship, rather than the paradigmatic evil of caste or class societies, can relatively straightforwardly make sense of the moral significance of equal power. They do, however, face a difficulty that the previous arguments did not face: they must explain how the ideal of friendship can plausibly be extended beyond the relatively small, face-to-face relationship in which it is usually at home, to cover a much larger political community of the sort governed by modern democratic institutions. How do we justify applying the demands of friendship to an entire polity?

One strategy would be to accept that the requirement of equal power applies, in the first instance, to small-scale interpersonal relationships; but to then argue that the laws that govern our community at large themselves shape how we may relate to each other within a particular marriage or friendship.⁴⁶ But this strategy runs into trouble. Consider, for instance, an arrangement that denies voting rights to everyone who fails to pass a literacy test, or tests of political knowledge. Even if half or so of the population would be disenfranchised as a result, the actual power that any of the remaining voters has over the laws governing the community is minuscule. So if our concern were with how much power two friends have over their relationship, the fact that one of them is enfranchised and the other is not would be of limited importance to them: there are many sources of differential power among friends, and differential enfranchisement would have much less of an effect on the overall power balance than many other social inequalities that friends can regularly tolerate.⁴⁷

I am consequently inclined to think that the relational egalitarian argument for political equality depends on the plausibility of arguing that political relations are themselves governed by

⁴⁶ For the sketch of such an argument, see (Viehoff 2014), p.363.

⁴⁷ Matters might be different where we are imagining the friendship between an absolute ruler and another, over whom the ruler may wield unlimited power. But the argument we are after is meant to establish something like democracy, not merely justify some restrictions on absolute monarchy.

(something very much like) the norms we ordinarily associate with friendship. But that it is plausible may be doubted, for there are a number of features that may seem to clearly set apart friendship (and similar relationships) from relations we have (and indeed could have) with our fellow citizens in a democratic community. To assess the force of this concern, the following discussion asks whether any of the features that most plausibly set apart friendship from political relations centrally bear on whether requirements of equal power apply among friends.

What may most obviously set apart paradigmatic cases of friendship from political relations are the size of the group and the kind of interaction the members engage in. Friendship commonly involves face-to-face interaction (or their mediated counterpart: phone conversations, letters...) and is (partly for that reason) limited to groups of a manageable size. By contrast, what we think of as political relations arise commonly among groups the membership of which is many magnitudes larger than even large-ish groups of friends; and consequently there couldn't be face-to-face interaction among all, or even a significant portion, of the polity's members.

But although size and face-to-face interactions are important for understanding central aspects of friendship, these features do not seem crucial for understanding the applicability of egalitarian demands of equal power. If groups grow too large to allow for regular face-to-face interactions, this significantly changes the character of the relationship in important ways: the idea that a certain form of emotional intimacy, or certain kinds of interactions that presuppose face-to-face encounters, are central to the group's character becomes difficult to sustain. But other important features could survive: members of the group may continue to take themselves to have special obligations to each other, to be specially committed to each other in particular ways, and so on. And, crucially, I see no reason for thinking that the mere loss of face-to-face interactions, and the mere increase in size beyond what we associate with standard cases of friendship, would undermine the members' sense that they should have an equal opportunity to

shape the character of the relationship and the norms governing it.

Another crucial feature of friendship is its distinctively non-instrumental value, and the fact that those party to it have to value it – and each other – in a correspondingly non-instrumental fashion.⁴⁸ This is not to deny that friendship has instrumental value. (Friends have special obligations to help one another, and so when I am in trouble I may find it instrumentally beneficial to have friends rather than be friendless.) Still, there is an important sense in which the instrumental value cannot be too central to it: On a plausible view, the special obligations we have to friends depend on the special value of our relationship, and the special value of our relationship depends on our valuing the relationship, and each other, appropriately – which means, crucially, not just (or even primarily) as instrumentally beneficial. The role our valuing attitudes, and corresponding dispositions, play in grounding the relationship's value and our relationship-dependent obligations, one might think, in turn explains why friends should have equal power over the relationship: because the relationship depend on our attitudes, we have power over it; because the attitude of each of us is necessary, we have equal power.

By contrast, it may be suggested, political relations are crucially instrumental in orientation: we make decisions as part of a political community because we need to solve certain problems together. (Political relations may, for instance, be necessary for doing justice: without forms of collective action made possible only by large-scale authoritative decision-making, we couldn't discharge moral obligations that we owe to one another.) And the instrumental value of political relations is largely independent of the attitudes we take towards them. So we lack the resources to explain why parties to the relation should have equal power over it that we did have in the case of friendship.

⁴⁸ For an influential articulation of this line of thought, see (Scheffler 1997).

But this attempt to distinguish friendship from political relations goes wrong in at least two places. First, it overstates the difference between the value of friendship on the one hand, that of political relations on the other. Most importantly, even if political relations have instrumental value, and we would have political obligations on purely instrumental grounds, it may *also* be true that political relations have additional non-instrumental value (and citizens correspondingly non-instrumentally grounded political obligations) under the right conditions. And among these conditions may be that the citizens suitably value one another, and their relationship, non-instrumentally. Second, the requirement of equal power among friends is not best explained by the fact that friendship depends on the parties' attitudes. Grant that the parties' attitudes are among the existence conditions of the relationship's value and the parties' obligations. (I think the precise relation between our attitudes and the relationship's existence and value is somewhat complicated. But spelling it out in detail won't be necessary for our purposes here.) Still, this only means that *whether* the norms that constitute the relationship are truly reason-giving for the parties depends on their attitudes. But this leaves plenty of room for one person's having a much greater opportunity to influence the specific norms governing the relations. It is possible, for instance, to imagine a relationship that depends on the attitudes of the parties, and in which one party nonetheless defers to the other when it comes to specifying what obligations they have to each other. The possibility of such a relationship shows that pointing to the importance of the parties' attitudes is not sufficient to explain the more specific requirement of equal power that is central to friendship and similar egalitarian relationships.

The discussion in the last paragraph does, however, point us towards another, and I think ultimately more plausible, explanation of the role that equal power plays among friends. Friendships are shaped by those who are party to the relationship, not just because the relationship and its value depends on their attitudes, but because the character or content of the

relationship – the specific norms governing it – is itself partly under their control. Not all friendships impose the same obligations on us; and the particular obligations they do impose – which depend in part on the actual reciprocal expectations of the parties, in part on what their past interactions have made reasonable to expect of each other – can be shaped, intentionally and unintentionally, by the parties. Now one might think that this malleability of friendship and similar relationships is itself a mere side-effect of its dependence on the parties' attitudes, and without further normative significance. But on another view, such malleability is itself central to how we think about friendships: part of what it is to be a friend is to *create the friendship together*, by shaping its character and the norms that govern in. If this is as central to the friendship as is the fact that friends have concern for one another's wellbeing, then a commitment to relating to one another as equals is not exhausted by a commitment to equally taking the parties' interests into account, but also requires giving parties an equal opportunity to shape the relationship *together as equals* – and so we can explain the requirement of equal power among friends.

How might this explanation of the commitment to equal power extend from friendship to political relations? As I said earlier, I see no reason for thinking that political relations could not also have non-instrumental value, and that our political obligations could not in part derive from the non-instrumental value of the relationship in which we stand to our co-citizens. To this we may now add the observation that the norms governing our political life are also malleable: different political relationships may differ in character, and in the norms that govern relations among co-citizens. There may be limits to the malleability of these norms, set by considerations of justice, for instance. But in this regard political relationships are not fundamentally different from friendships, which are also constrained by justice and similar requirements.

Four points are worth highlighting. First, we must distinguish the account of equal power just offered from another view for which it may be mistaken: the view that we each have a

personal autonomy interest in shaping our own lives, and thus also in shaping our relationships; and that, in light of our commitment to equal concern, we would also try to advance those interests equally within the relationship, by giving people equal power over it. I have misgivings about such an argument⁴⁹; but my concern here isn't to criticize it, but merely to distinguish it from the relational egalitarian account that I sketched. First, the interest that the relational account focuses on is not a general interest in giving shape to our lives, but a *specific* interest in *shaping this relationship*. If the concern were with a general interest in giving shape to our lives, then it would be possible that one person's interest would be advanced by having control over the relationship, and the other's by having control over other features of her life. It would not, in other words, yield the specific focus on equal power over the relationship that is, I think, central to our understanding of friendship.

Neither – and this is the second point – does the argument assume that each friend has an interest in shaping the relationship in particular (rather than, as on the view distinguished in the previous paragraph, their life in general), which must then be weighed against similar interests other friends have. Instead it assumes that each friend has an interest in shaping the relationship *as an equal* together with others. In other words, the value of shaping and creating the relationship that is internal to the relationship (rather than derived from the more general concern with personal autonomy) is conditional on the shaping and creating being undertaken by us as equals.

Third, as I pointed out, there are constraints on the malleability of the relationship imposed by requirements of justice and similar considerations. This may impose important limits on the value of egalitarian political arrangements, and the authority of democratic procedures. In fact, I think there is a genuine worry that any argument that appeals to the value of egalitarian

⁴⁹ I discuss some of these in (Viehoff 2017).

relationships will be confronted with the fact that, however, valuable the relationship it, political outcomes are also of enormous instrumental significance – for one, they also affect many other egalitarian relationships, like marriages –, so that ensuring that the outcomes are as good as they can be might in practice usually take precedence over a concern with the non-instrumentally valuable relationship in which we stand to our fellow citizens.⁵⁰ I have nothing very useful to say about this here, other than to flag that I believe this worry will extend to just about any account of the value of political equality (and procedural considerations more generally), and is not limited to relational egalitarian arguments.

Fourth and finally, I want to highlight how, even if the demands of equal power that are familiar from the case of friendship may in principle be extended to political relationships, the conditions under which they do so extend are potentially much more restrictive than they would have been on the caste model. I assume that the egalitarian requirements associated with the caste model ultimately depend on not much more than our general commitment to people's equal moral status. This explained why it is compatible with unequal power – because such inequality need not cast doubt on our equal moral status. It also entails, however, that the egalitarian demands associated with the caste model apply to societies in general, and are largely independent of specific local conditions.

Matters are quite different when it comes to the egalitarian demands associate with friendship and analogous political relationships. These demands – including, specifically, the demand of equal power – rest on the existence of non-instrumentally valuable interpersonal relationships. And these relationships exist only if the parties are in some way or another committed to them: they must recognize the value of their relationship, and grant a suitable role

⁵⁰ For worries along these lines see, e.g., (Stemplowska and Swift Forthcoming).

in their deliberation to its norms. To be clear, the relationship can exist even if the parties to it fall far short of its ideals: Up to some point, we remain friends even if we are both bad friends and regularly neglect the special obligations we owe to each other. And in a group of people who relate to each other in a certain way, there may be significant disagreement about the precise character of the relationship, and yet the relationship plausibly exists and makes normative demands on us. Still, at some point – most obviously if people lack all disposition to treat each other as equals, but plausibly already before then – the relationship begins to disintegrate, and its value and normative force to disappear. So on the relational egalitarian argument I have defended in this and the previous section, the demands of political equality, and the reason we have to obey democratic decisions, will be conditional on local circumstances in ways that they would not have been on the alternative, caste-inspired model of equality.

7.

This essay has sought to address a largely overlooked problem for recently prominent relational egalitarian arguments for political equality: One relational egalitarian argument takes as its starting point the problem of social status hierarchy, and is concerned with the ideal of a society not structured by castes or classes. This ideal obviously applies to political relations. But it does not in fact impose a requirement of equal power on political societies. Another relational egalitarian argument takes as its starting point the ideal of egalitarian friendship. This ideal does seem to impose a requirement of equal power over the relationship. But it is much less obvious that it can be applied to our political community.

Let me conclude with some brief methodological observations. I have here focused on two paradigmatic examples of relational equality – friendship, and a society not marred by caste structures – and asked whether these examples can be used to fill in the details of the relational

egalitarian defense of the ideal of political equality. Someone might accept everything I have said up to now, and yet be rather less pessimistic about how much the appeal to relational equality can do when it comes to vindicating the ideal of political equality, because she thinks that there are other plausible ways of filling in the details that I have not considered. She might, in particular, propose that there are other examples of egalitarian relationships that simultaneously satisfy the twin conditions on which this essay has focused: showing equal power to be an ideal in its own right, and being applicable to large-scale political communities. Candidate examples that have been proposed to me are that of a philosophy department running its affairs collegially, people on a camping trip planning their weekend together, and members of a *kibbutz* collectively deciding how to organize their common economic life.

I cannot show that arguments appealing to such alternative instance of egalitarian relationships could not succeed. But I think there are good reasons to be quite doubtful that they will. The problem is that, while there is a wide variety of relationships that have an egalitarian flavor, and are non-instrumentally valuable, few of them are as morally foundational as friendship and social status equality. When I think about various other examples – like philosophy departments, camping trips, or *kibbutzim* – then their way of being arranged seems itself in need of justification; and such a justification would be provided most straightforwardly by pointing out how organizing our collective endeavor in the department, on the camping trip, or in economic production along such egalitarian lines brings these relationships themselves closer to the paradigm of friendship, or protects us from status inequality. This is especially true when it comes to the feature of such social endeavors that matters most to our discussion here: how decision-making power is distributed among the participants. (Perhaps I have an intuitive grasp on how a camping trip, to realize a certain non-instrumental value, would have to be set up to benefit everyone equally. But whether decision-making on the trip would have to be set up in an

March 23, 2018

egalitarian fashion for non-instrumental reasons, I struggle to say; and when I find myself in the mood to say that they should be, I struggle to avoid thinking that it's because that's what a camping trip *among friends* would look like. But then the appeal to such examples adds little to the discussion offered here.

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