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Differential Voting Weights and Relational Egalitarianism

Abstract

Two prominent relational egalitarians, Elizabeth Anderson and Niko Kolodny, object to giving people in a democratic community differential voting weights on the grounds that doing so would lead to unequal relations between them. Their claim is that deviating from a “one person, one vote” scheme is incompatible with realizing relational egalitarian justice. In this paper, I argue that they are wrong. I do so by showing that people can relate as moral, epistemic, social, and empirical equals in a scheme with differential voting weights. I end the paper by showing that from the perspective of relational egalitarianism, it is sometimes true that differential voting weights are *more* just than equal voting weights.

Keywords: relational egalitarianism; democracy; voting weights; Elizabeth Anderson.

1. Introduction

One apparent objection to giving people in a democratic community different voting weights is that doing so leads to unequal relations between them. Suppose my vote counts for one, whereas another person’s vote counts for two. Does such proportionality not create unequal relations between us in that she seems to have decision-making power over me? Such a scheme expanded throughout society would appear to constitute a hierarchical society in which people do not relate as equals. As Kolodny (2014: 291), a prominent relational egalitarian, points out: “if a procedure gives anyone a say, it should give everyone an equal say.” Anderson (1999: 318), probably the most prominent relational

egalitarian, agrees, asserting that “each citizen is entitled to the same number of votes in an election as everyone else.”¹

Although it might seem so, I want to argue that differential voting weights, given different stakes,² do not hinder the possibility of equal relations in a democratic community. My main claim is, thus, that if you are a relational egalitarian, you can support differential voting weights in democratic decision-making. In that sense, I break with “one person, one vote,” a central tenet in democratic theory, on behalf of relational egalitarianism.³

In order to investigate the relationship between relational egalitarianism and differential voting weights, I ask: Are differential voting weights in democratic decision-making *compatible* with relational egalitarianism? The question considers whether it is possible to relate as equals (in whatever sense demanded by relational egalitarianism) when people’s votes are given different weights in democratic decision-making. This question leaves open whether a different scheme (i.e. equal voting weights) also makes it possible to relate as equals in a relational egalitarian sense. Assuming this to be true and further assuming that equal and differential voting weights realize equal relations to the same extent, a relational egalitarian can—*qua* relational egalitarian—argue for either of these as the one to realize in democratic decision-making.

It is important to note that what it is to relate as equals in an abstract sense is different from what it is to relate as equals in a specific context (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 62). My aim is not to

¹ Relational egalitarians are not alone in objecting to differential voting weights; the one-person-one-vote tenet has also been and remains prevalent in democratic theory, broadly speaking. Dahl (1989: 109) writes, “at the decisive stage of collective decisions, each citizen must be ensured an equal opportunity to express a choice that will be counted as equal in weight to the choice expressed by any other citizen.” In the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*’s entry on democracy, Christiano (2018) points out: “democracy, it is said, extends the idea that each ought to be master of his or her life to the domain of collective decision making ... only when each person has an equal voice and vote in the process of collective decision-making will each have control over this larger environment.”

² I introduce the notion of stakes in the next section.

³ I am hardly the first to break with the central tenet of “one person, one vote” in democratic theory; see, for instance, Brighouse and Fleurbaey (2010). However, they do not discuss relational egalitarianism.

present an account of what it is to relate as equals in an abstract sense; while this is definitely an important question, it is also a comprehensive task, and I set it aside in the following.⁴ Instead, I investigate what it is to relate as equals in a specific context, namely in democratic decision-making. Although it does not directly tell us what it is to relate as equals in an abstract sense, hopefully this investigation can help us, indirectly, to delineate (some of) the boundaries of relational egalitarianism.

The paper begins by outlining what it means to relate as equals, as laid out by Lippert-Rasmussen (2018), and what I mean by differential voting weights (Section 2). I then argue that prominent relational egalitarians have emphasized that equal voting weights, as in “one person, one vote,” are necessary to realize equal relations in a democratic community (Section 3). In Section 4, I show that it is possible to relate as moral, epistemic, social, and empirical equals in a democratic scheme with differential voting weights. I conclude the discussion in Section 5, briefly pointing out that differential voting weights might even create more equal relations than equal voting weights in some circumstances.

2. Relating as Equals

Relational egalitarianism is not a single view. It is a wide variety of views with different answers to what it means to relate as equals. As Lippert-Rasmussen (2018) recently argues,⁵ when we say that “X and Y relate as equals,” this is always shorthand for “X and Y relate as equals in terms of Z,” and what Z is differs among different accounts of relational egalitarianism (p. 69). To keep my investigation as open as possible in order to explore the relationship between relational egalitarianism and differential voting weights, I do not want to commit to a particular Z.

⁴ For a discussion on what it is to relate as equals in an abstract sense, see Lippert-Rasmussen (2018, Chapter 3).

⁵ Moles and Parr (2018) also note, “... there is room for widespread disagreement among social egalitarians [what I refer to as relational egalitarians] about what makes relations between individuals valuable, in the relevant sense” (p. 2).

As Lippert-Rasmussen argues, relational egalitarians have proposed (at least) five different dimensions of Z, that is, of standing as equals. These are moral standing, epistemic standing, social standing, aesthetic standing and empirical standing (pp. 63–69).⁶ Although Lippert-Rasmussen does not intend this list to be exhaustive, I will treat it as such in the following and limit myself to investigating whether it is possible to relate as moral, epistemic, social, and empirical equals in a democracy with differential voting weights.⁷ I exclude aesthetic standing and merely assume that differential voting weights on behalf of stakes (which I describe shortly) do not create unequal aesthetic relations between people.⁸ Nor do I want to imply that voting weights are all that matter in order to relate as equals in a democracy. But it is, nevertheless, a central aspect and one that is interesting in itself—especially because, as described in the next section, some relational egalitarians argue that the one-person-one-vote dictum is necessary in order to relate as equals in a democracy.

Obviously, we can imagine various grounds upon which to give people different voting weights in democratic decision-making. Some of these are problematic from a moral point of view, such as giving more weight to the votes of whites relative to the votes of black people merely because they are white. As it is clearly too extensive to go through every imaginable ground for giving differential voting weights and doing so might not be necessary for the purposes of this paper, I limit myself to a particular ground in the following, namely affected interests as understood in the all-affected principle.⁹

In its generic version, the all-affected principle says, “everyone who is affected by the decisions of a government should have the right to participate in that government” (Dahl, 1990: 49; Goodin,

⁶ I elaborate on these dimensions when analyzing them in Section 4.

⁷ We can imagine both one-dimensional and multi-dimensional forms of relational egalitarianism (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 70). The present investigation is relevant to both.

⁸ This is not to deny the importance of aesthetic standing; for a discussion on aesthetic standing, see Fourie (2015).

⁹ One reason for choosing the all-affected principle is that it is a widely accepted solution to the boundary problem (Arrhenius, 2018: 102). As I argue in footnote 11, however, this discussion is relevant even if one does not support the all-affected principle.

2007: 51). As this definition is underspecified in various ways (e.g. Arrhenius, 2018: 104), it is not helpful for the purpose of this paper. Hence, I will utilize the proportional-stake version of the all-affected principle as presented by Brighouse and Fleurbaey (2010: 150), which we can present as follows:

AAP_{ps}: Everyone who is affected by the decisions of a government should have the right to participate in that government in proportion to their stakes.^{10,11}

It is relevant for our purposes that they take stakes to “measure how people’s interests are affected by the options available in the decision ... understood in terms of human flourishing rather than in narrow financial terms” (Brighouse and Fleurbaey, 2010: 137). They add, “interests should be evaluated in connection with a conception of social justice” (ibid.). This means that they measure stakes in accordance with a prioritarian principle, implying that the worse-off you are, the larger stakes you have and the more weight you get in the decision. They choose this baseline as they want to align democracy and social justice more closely. Another possibility would be to choose a prudential baseline, measuring stakes in accordance with what is in people’s self-interest; this would be different from the previous baseline as it would not favor the worst off (this might seem reasonable to those who want to separate democracy and social justice). For the purposes of this paper, I do not have to commit to a particular baseline from which to determine stakes since no matter which (plausible) baseline we choose, they all imply that people (sometimes) have different stakes, and that is all I need.

¹⁰ Brighouse and Fleurbaey (2010: 150) formulate it as: “[a]ll individuals should have their interests effectively represented in proportion to their stakes,” but I have rephrased it in accordance with the generic version of the all-affected principle.

¹¹ This does not mean, however, that this paper is only relevant to those who subscribe to the all-affected principle (although the all-affected principle is a widely accepted principle). One can imagine a similar stakes version of the all-subjected principle, according to which everyone who is subjected to the decisions of a government should have the right to participate in that government in proportion to the degree to which they are subjected. As Abizadeh (2008: 55) notes, it may be that citizens should have a greater say than foreigners as members of the former group are subjected to a greater degree than “members” of the latter. I expect that my arguments apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to this principle as well, although I do not have the space to prove it in this paper.

Note further that as it is a *proportional* principle, Brighthouse and Fleurbaey (2010: 141) seek to provide “a better implementation of the idea of equal respect than egalitarian rules”; instead of “one person, one vote,” it is “one person, voting power according to stakes.” This also means that if a person does not have anything at stake in a given decision, they do not get to vote on that decision (or they are included with voting weight 0).

We can find clear examples of cases in which people have different stakes and in which we agree that they should have unequal influence. Take for instance the principle of subsidiarity, according to which “powers or tasks should rest with the lower-level sub-units of that order unless allocating them to a higher-level central unit would ensure higher comparative efficiency or effectiveness in achieving them” (Føllesdal, 1998: 190). When we, following this principle, grant a power to the lower-level sub-unit instead of the larger unit, it is due to the fact that the members of the sub-unit have a larger stake in the decision than members of the larger unit. For instance, when we leave it to a region to decide where to place a functionally advanced hospital—instead of deciding this at the state level—it is because members in the region clearly have more at stake in this decision than members of the state. I am not saying that it is always possible to measure people’s stakes precisely, but that is compatible with there being situations in which we clearly agree that people have different stakes and should have unequal influence due to this fact; that is sufficient for my purposes.¹²

What I mean by differential voting weights in the following is, therefore, that in a given democratic decision, we include those with stakes and give voting power according to the size of each person’s stakes. As is clear, this is different from the “one person, one vote” rule that is prevalent in democracies.

¹² Neither am I denying that there can be differential voting weights without those weights being determined by stakes.

3. Relational Egalitarianism and “One Person, One Vote”

Before turning to analyze whether we can have equal relations under a differential voting weight scheme, I want to provide textual evidence for the claim that (prominent) relational egalitarians have argued that the one-person-one-vote tenet is a necessary requirement to relate as equals in democratic decision-making—and in democracy broadly understood.

Kolodny (2014) argues that “democracy is a particularly important constituent of a society in which people are related to one another as social equals” (Kolodny, 2014: 287). His thesis is that the value of relations of social equality supports what he terms an “equality constraint,” namely that “if a procedure gives anyone a say, it should give everyone an equal say”¹³ (Kolodny, 2014: 291). In other words, it is important that individuals enjoy *equal opportunity for influence* over the political decisions to which they are subjected if they are to realize social equality (Kolodny, 2014: 308)—and when we have ongoing social relations with other moral equals, we have reason to relate to them as social equals (Kolodny, 2014: 300).

How should we interpret equal opportunity for influence such that it satisfies social equality? According to Kolodny, we need to interpret it as equal opportunity for contributory influence. To understand this, it is necessary to distinguish between three forms of influence. First, one is *decisive* when the decision would have been different if one’s choice or judgment had been different. Second, “one has *control* over the outcome to the extent that one’s judgment or choice would be decisive over a wide range of changes in relevant conditions, including, especially, the choices and judgment of others.” Third, *contributory influence* can be understood, figuratively speaking, as placing equal

¹³ Kolodny argues that equality of opportunity, in a more permissive version, “requires equally weighted votes.” He continues, “This would be violated by John Stuart Mill’s plural voting scheme, which gave at least one vote to each citizen, but additional votes to those whose occupation or education indicated superior intelligence” (Kolodny, 2014: 289). If this is what we mean by differential voting weights, I agree with Kolodny that differential voting weights are incompatible with relating as (moral) equals (see also Miller, 1997: 231). However, we can imagine other grounds upon which to base differential voting weights that are not incompatible with relational egalitarianism, as I will argue in the next section.

weights on scales—understood as applying a vector of force, which together with other vectors, determines the result (Kolodny, 2014: 320).¹⁴ Kolodny argues that we must interpret equality of opportunity in the third sense, which can be measured as follows: “... by X-ing, I exercise equal contributory influence over a decision just when my X-ing has *equal a priori chances of being decisive over the decision*, that is, has equal chances of being decisive on the assumption that no pattern of X-ing by others is more likely than any other pattern” (Kolodny, 2014: 320f).

These comments make clear that Kolodny believes that unequal voting weights are incompatible with relating as social equals, as unequal voting weights clearly do not satisfy equal opportunity for contributory influence. Suppose B has half the voting weight of A in democratic decision-making. In that case, B does not have “equal a priori chances of being decisive over the decision” as A, inasmuch as A’s chances of being decisive are twice those of B’s. It follows, on Kolodny’s account, that A and B do not relate as social equals. The upshot is that according to Kolodny, we cannot realize the (his) ideal of relational egalitarianism if we attribute differential voting weights in democratic decision-making.

Note that the one-person-one-vote scheme—that which Kolodny names equal opportunity for influence—can actually lead to unequal relations in a democracy. Take the case of a permanent minority that loses out on every decision to the majority, such that the chosen decision is always that which the majority prefers and never the one preferred by the minority. In such cases, we can easily expect it to be hard for members of the minority and the majority to relate as social equals.¹⁵ Whereas members of the minority may regard themselves as inferiors¹⁶—after all, they constantly lose out to

¹⁴ Which is to say that equal opportunity for contributory influence reduces to equal voting power.

¹⁵ Cp. “Such a relationship, in which one party has the power to make most decisions, is, it seems to me, not one among equals” (Viehoff, 2014: 354).

¹⁶ Note that the point here is not merely that “members of the minority do not enjoy ... correspondence: a match between their choices or judgments and the decisions reached” (Kolodny, 2014: 327). It is not about the content of a particular democratic decision. Instead, it is an exacerbation *in social relations* due to lack of correspondence for the minority and due to “too much” correspondence for the majority over a range of democratic decisions.

the majority—members of the majority may regard themselves as superiors in that they solely decide on the democratic decisions of the polity. That is incompatible with them being equals, insofar as “X and Y relate as equals if, and only if: (1) X and Y treat one another as equals; and (2) X and Y regard one another as equals” (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 71) since (2) is not satisfied in that case. It is, thus, not necessarily true, *pace* Kolodny, that it is important among individuals that they enjoy equal opportunity for influence over the political decisions to which they are subjected if they are to realize social equality (Kolodny, 2014: 308). As argued in the next section, Kolodny’s ideal of social equality can be realized just as effectively with differential voting weights.

I now turn to Anderson, one of the most prominent supporters of relational egalitarianism. In addition to criticizing distributive views of justice, she presents her democratic conception of equality in her 1999 publication “What Is the Point of Equality?” which contains a negative and a positive aspect. In a negative sense, democratic equality entails the abolishment of oppression, understood as social relationships in which some dominate or exploit others. In a positive sense, democratic equality seeks to realize a “social order in which persons stand in relations of equality” entailing that people live in a democratic community instead of a hierarchical one. Anderson takes democracy to be “collective self-determination by means of open discussion among equals, in accordance with rules acceptable to all” and adds, “To stand as an equal before others in discussion means that one is entitled to participate, that others recognize an obligation to listen respectfully and respond to one’s arguments, that no one need bow and scrape before others or represent themselves as inferior to others as a condition of having their claim heard” (Anderson, 1999: 313). Does this mean that equal voting weights—as in one person, one vote—are necessary to realize democratic justice? It does, as Anderson (1999: 318) writes that “democratic equality guarantees not effective access to equal levels of functioning but effective access to levels of functioning sufficient to stand as an equal in society. For

some functionings, equal citizenship requires equal levels. For example, each citizen is entitled to the same number of votes in an election as everyone else.”¹⁷

Anderson also emphasizes the one-person-one-vote dictum as being necessary to realize democratic equality (relational egalitarianism) in a later publication:

[D]emocracy as a membership organization requires equality as well as inclusion. Pressure toward universal inclusion follows from the demands of equality. Equality is understood here as a relation among persons, whereby each adult actively recognizes everyone else’s equal authority to make claims concerning the rules under which all shall live and cooperate, and this recognition is common knowledge among all. As the standard democratic slogan goes, everyone counts for one and no one for more than one. This is not merely a voting aggregation rule (“one man one vote”) but a more general principle for organizing social interaction in a democratic society (Anderson, 2009: 215).

By indicating that it is not *merely* a voting aggregation rule, it follows that it is *also* a voting aggregation rule (i.e. relational equality requires a one-man-one-vote scheme). We can conclude that according to prominent relational egalitarians such as Anderson and Kolodny, a one-person-one-vote scheme is necessary to relate as equals in a democracy.¹⁸ The next section shows why they are wrong.

¹⁷ Anderson (1999: 317) further writes that voting rights are necessary to function as an equal citizen: “Citizenship involves functioning not only as a political agent—*voting*, engaging in political speech, petitioning government ...” (my italics).

¹⁸ Latimer (2018) presents an objection to plural voting systems which is related, although different from, the relational egalitarian objection that I discuss in this paper. Latimer’s objection focuses on the fact that democracy is a joint project. He says, “[d]epartures from political equality are impermissible when they undermine the joint project of democracy. Significantly, this objection ostensibly applies to all plural voting schemes” (p. 81). Whereas I do not have the space to discuss his argument fully in this paper (where my focus is on relational egalitarianism), let me just say that I cannot see why my proposal necessarily would undermine democracy as a shared project. In fact, if it would, then it seems that the principle of subsidiarity would be incompatible with democracy as well, since in such cases, decision-making is delegated to some on behalf of stakes, and I take it that most people are not willing to grant this.

4. Differential Voting Weights and Relating as Equals

In this section, I turn to analyze whether it is possible to relate as moral, epistemic, social, and empirical equals in a democracy with differential voting weights, my argument being that differential voting weights based upon stakes do not lead to unequal moral, epistemic, social, or empirical relations. This is significant, firstly, because as we have seen, some relational egalitarians claim that differential voting weights lead to unequal relations, and secondly, if Brighthouse and Fleurbaey (2010) are right that proportionality, instead of equality, is a better implementation of the idea of equal respect (p. 141),¹⁹ it is advantageous for relational egalitarians that their position allows for proportionality in democratic decision-making.

4.1. Standing as Moral Equals with Differential Voting Weights

Let us start with moral standing. According to Lippert-Rasmussen (2018), this is probably the dimension that most relational egalitarians have in mind when mentioning equal relations (p. 63).²⁰ As he notes, this is the case with Anderson (1999), who argues that it is impossible to have a community of equals if hierarchies exist in which people are ranked according to intrinsic worth. For instance, if people are ranked in terms of intrinsic worth based on race or gender, it would amount to a society of inferiors and superiors instead of a community of equals (Anderson, 1999: 312; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 37). Where adults are equally moral agents, “everyone equally has the power to develop and exercise moral responsibility, to cooperate with others according to principles of justice, to shape and fulfil a conception of their good” (Anderson, 1999: 312). Do differential voting weights rank people

¹⁹ Note that relational egalitarians care a great deal about the idea of equal respect (e.g. Anderson, 1999; Scheffler, 2015).

²⁰ He points out that—apart from Anderson, whom I present in the following—it “is manifest in Scheffler’s deliberative constraint which requires participants in egalitarian relations to have a standing disposition to treat each other’s interests as being equally constraining in relation to resolving practical matters” (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 63f; see also Scheffler, 2015: 25).

according to intrinsic worth? And do they prohibit some from exercising moral responsibility? To me, we must answer this question in the negative. Here, it is important that a democracy with differential voting weights based on different stakes does not rank people in terms of their intrinsic worth. Some get more voting power than others in a given decision not because they are intrinsically more valuable, as would be the case if some were given a greater voting weight merely because of being white (if whites were seen as morally superior).²¹ It is because their interests are affected to a greater extent than someone else's. Analogously, the fact that I give the candy bar, assuming I only have one, to the diabetic with low blood sugar rather than the healthy kid does not mean that the two are moral unequals.²² What matters to moral standing is not whether people get unequal amounts of something *per se*—what matters is on behalf of *what* they are given unequal amounts. If that something (i.e. stakes) does not have to do with intrinsic moral worth or can be justified by moral principles acceptable to all reasonable persons, unequal moral standing does not result.^{23,24}

Consider, as mentioned earlier, the principle of subsidiarity. As Arrhenius (2018) argues, we can see this principle as a practical approximation of the all-affected principle where different issues are handled on different levels (p. 103): some at a European level, others at a national level, others yet at a regional level, etc. When an issue is handled on a regional level—as opposed to a European or national level—it is because the issue primarily concerns (affects) the people at the regional level.

²¹ I thus completely agree with Nath (2011), who writes that “[t]he Indian caste system and the Apartheid regime in South Africa, as well as the widespread disenfranchisement of women and minority groups exemplify societal arrangements that failed to treat members of society as equals in the public domain” (p. 600).

²² I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this example.

²³ Cp. “X and Y are moral equals if, and only if, the same basic normative rules and axiological principles apply to them and if, in accordance with those rules and principles, X and Y are equally important in whatever respects are fundamentally morally significant (other than the fact that people relate to one another as equals)” (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 81).

²⁴ An anonymous reviewer asks whether the worry for relational egalitarians might be that differential voting weights send signals of superiority and inferiority. That might be the case, but the same could be said of a one-person-one-vote scheme in which, say, a religious minority continually loses out to the majority. In fact, this may be more likely in the one-person-one-vote scheme since the same group can expect to lose out in every case (given the fact that they are in the minority). Under differential voting weights, the minority can expect to be decisive, or at least more decisive than under the alternative scheme, in cases in which they have a lot at stake. See, moreover, my discussion of octogenarians later in this section.

I mention the principle of subsidiarity in this context because I take it that everyone would say that this principle does not lead to unequal moral standing merely by giving decision-making power according to stakes and consequently letting some people decide on one issue and another group of people decide on another issue. In the same way, when we grant decision-making power according to a proportional stake version of the all-affected principle within a democratic state—the case under consideration here—it does not lead to unequal moral standing that some are included and others excluded when a particular decision is made. Nor, *a fortiori*, does it lead to unequal moral relations that some are given greater voting power than others on a particular issue; we can imagine a situation in which, all told, everyone has an equal amount of votes but where it varies from issue to issue how many votes people have.

At this point, a critic might point out that octogenarians generally have fewer stakes than other pre-identifiable groups and are, therefore, given less overall weight in democratic decision-making. If this is true,²⁵ can we not say that differential voting weights due to stakes lead to the stigmatization of octogenarians, and therefore, also to the unequal moral standing of octogenarians and other members of the community? We need to note that the question is ambiguous since there is a difference between (i) whether differential voting weights *should*—given relevant facts about the differential treatment—lead to the stigmatization of octogenarians; and (ii) whether differential voting weights *will* lead to the stigmatization of octogenarians. I answer each in turn.

Since (i) is a question of whether differential voting weights should lead to the stigmatization of octogenarians given relevant facts about the differential treatment, the answer is no, for the following reason. That some have less voting power than others and fewer stakes is no reason for stig-

²⁵ It is true on conceptions of stakes in which stakes are determined partly by the duration for which you are influenced by the decision in question.

matizing them. This becomes evident when we notice how those who would stigmatize octogenarians—say, young or middle-aged persons—can expect to be in the same situation as the octogenarians when (if) they get to the same age. For this reason, young people who interact with old people might have available to them thoughts similar to the thoughts of people who interact with others in spheres where they do particularly well, e.g. “True I am in much better health than old Mike, who needs our help. However, once I get to be as old as he is now (if I do), then I will probably be no better off than he is now and I will then need younger people to help me” (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 133).

A whole-lives perspective makes clear that there is no reason why the octogenarians’ lesser weight should lead to stigmatization from young or middle-aged people, as they can expect to be in the same situation later and would not want to be stigmatized (just as young and middle-aged people will want support from young and middle-aged people at that time when they grow old themselves). Hence, let us turn to (ii).

The question, then, is whether differential voting weights *will* lead to the stigmatization of octogenarians? It is a possibility—at a non-ideal theoretical level²⁶—that differential voting weights will lead to relational inequality, but it is important to maintain that it does not have to; we can imagine circumstances under which octogenarians would not be stigmatized, e.g. because younger people were reminded continually that they can expect to be in the same situation as the octogenarians later on and would not want to be stigmatized under those circumstances. This, moreover, points to the fact that we can take steps to minimize the risk that such a scheme would lead to the stigmatization of octogenarians. Note, finally, that a one-person-one-vote scheme may also lead to stigmatization at the level of non-ideal theory if, say, the demos is divided into a permanent majority and a permanent

²⁶ I assume non-ideal theory is to be understood as partial compliance theory, i.e. all agents do not comply with the demands of justice, whereas ideal theory assumes full compliance (Valentini, 2012: 655). This non-ideal perspective is relevant for the reason that Anderson describes herself in a book from 2010 as doing non-ideal theory (p. 3). I would like to thank a reviewer for pushing me to make this clear.

minority; if the majority always wins in elections, and the minority always loses, it may result in the majority stigmatizing the minority.²⁷ This means that insofar as relational egalitarianism is incompatible with differential voting weights at the non-ideal level—for the reason that it may (not that it necessarily will) lead to relational equality—it is also incompatible with a one-person-one-vote scheme at this level; that is to say, from a relational egalitarian point of view, we do not have a reason to choose the one over the other.

We have now seen that differential voting weights due to stakes do not lead to unequal moral relations at the level of ideal theory. This is significant as the moral dimension is probably the one that most relational egalitarians have in mind when referring to equal relations (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 63). We also saw that differential voting weights may lead to relational inequality at the level of non-ideal theory, but the same is true of one-person-one-vote so that does not give us a reason, from a relational egalitarian point of view, to choose one over the other. For those relational egalitarians who only care about relating as moral equals, we can thus conclude that deviating from the one-person-one-vote dictum is compatible with their position, employing differential voting weights instead, insofar as differential voting weights are based on the all-affected principle and insofar as one-person-one-vote is compatible with their position. As mentioned earlier, however, there are other dimensions on which to relate as equals that some relational egalitarians care about, so let us turn to one of these, namely epistemic standing.

4.2. Standing as Epistemic Equals with Differential Voting Weights

People can fail to relate as epistemic equals through testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 64). Fricker (2007) defines the systematic case of testimonial injustice as

²⁷ See footnote 22 as well.

one where a “speaker ... receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer” (p. 28). “Mansplaining” is an example of testimonial injustice—the discursive misrecognition of a woman’s knowledge or authority by men (Schuppert, 2015: 123, n. 43). In a generic sense, hermeneutical injustice is “the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalization” (Fricker, 2007: 158). To exemplify, Fricker mentions the case of Carmita Wood, a victim of sexual harassment perpetrated by a male professor at Cornell University at a time when sexual harassment was not part of the collective hermeneutical resources, which rendered her unable to understand what had happened to her (think, for instance, of the difference the “me too” campaign has had in this regard). What is true of both these forms of epistemic injustice is that “the subject suffers from one or another sort of prejudice against them *qua* social type” (Fricker, 2007: 155). Do differential voting weights amount to testimonial and hermeneutical injustice?

To answer this question, we can answer another question: By being left out of a decision-making process, does an unaffected person suffer from testimonial and hermeneutical injustice? The reason the unaffected person is not given any voting power on the occasion where she is unaffected is not that her epistemic position is invaluable or is given less weight than that of the affected (the same is true of the less affected, who is given less weight than the more affected), it is only because her interests are not affected (or not affected to the same degree) by the matter to be decided upon.²⁸

²⁸ One might question whether people who are not affected by a decision have epistemic interests in that decision which are neglected in case they are left out. Even if one has such epistemic interests, it does not necessarily follow that it should lead to inclusion in democratic decision-making. If an epistemic interest were sufficient for having a claim to inclusion, it would be much harder to exclude anyone, since everyone, presumably, has that interest and a corresponding claim to inclusion. I find that implausible. Moreover, that we do not include people even though they have epistemic interests (if they do) does not lead to unequal epistemic standing in this case since no one is included due to their epistemic interests; everyone’s epistemic interests are treated in the same way, namely by not being taken into account. Instead, people are included to the extent to which they are affected by the decision in question, and the degree to which they are affected is determined independently of epistemic interests.

Indirectly, this also points to why my argument for differential voting weights is different from arguments in favor of epistocracy. Those arguments include people (and exclude others) based on epistemic reasons, namely because they are competent (or lack competence). Take, for instance, Brennan’s (2011) argument in favor of epistocracy. Basically, his argument can be summarized in what he terms *the anti-authority tenet*: “when some citizens are morally unreasonable,

Epistemic standing does not seem to enter the picture in the actual voting practice, which is what we consider in this paper. Another example to show this is the role of experts in democratic deliberation—they can have very high epistemic standing even if they have no voting rights at all.²⁹ It might be different, of course, if we consider the deliberation leading up to the voting. In that regard, we can easily imagine testimonial injustice, for instance in deliberation about financial matters, say banking regulations in the European Union where women’s testimony is given less weight than men’s due to prejudice such as “women do not grasp financial matters.” Since this paper is not about the relationship between deliberation and relational egalitarianism, we can set aside these worries and conclude that differential voting weights are compatible with equal epistemic standing.

4.3. Standing as Social Equals with Differential Voting Weights

Standing as moral equals is different from standing as social equals, as is evident in relationships where people relate as moral equals but not social equals, e.g. “the relationships of doctors to patients, teachers to students, parents to children ...” (Scheffler, 2005: 18). In the teacher–student relationship, the fact that students accept that the teacher gets to decide who speaks in her class does not show that they do not relate as moral equals, among other things, because such an arrangement serves everyone’s interests best (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 65). Thus, for those relational egalitarians who also (or only) care about social standing, it is not sufficient to show, as we have done, that differential

ignorant or incompetent about politics, this justifies *not granting* them political authority over others” (p. 713). This argument is different from my argument based on the proportional stake version of the all-affected principle inasmuch as my argument excludes epistemic reasons such as competence (or lack thereof) from determining who should be included (and which weight they should be given in the decision-making). Mulligan’s (2018) argument in favor of epistocracy is different from mine for the same reason (it determines voting weights on behalf of competence), although he seems to determine voting weights differently from Brennan as he determines them by a tool which takes into account how people have voted in previous elections and compares that to how other people have voted. I would like to thank both anonymous reviewers for pushing me on these questions.

²⁹ I would like to thank Sune Lægaard for suggesting this example. See also Brighouse and Fleurbaey (2010: 146): “it is entirely predictable, and not at all contrary to the principle of proportionality, that experts have more de facto influence than ordinary people in the deliberation process.”

voting weights are compatible with equal moral standing; we must also see if it is compatible with equal social standing.

Suppose that one member of the democratic community is almost never affected by the decisions that are to be decided upon (and is, therefore, almost never included in democratic decision-making), whereas another member of the democratic community is oftentimes affected by the decisions (and, therefore, oftentimes included). Is it possible for these two members of the democratic community to relate to one another as social equals? To answer this question, we can identify what relational egalitarians believe is bad in relating as social unequals and see whether these effects are caused by differential voting weights *qua* stakes. If they are not, we have strong reason to suspect that differential voting weights do not cause unequal social standing, or at least do not cause an unequal social standing that is contrary to the relational egalitarian ideal. According to O'Neill (2008), inequality (i) creates stigmatizing differences in status with the badly-off feeling like, and being treated as, inferiors; (ii) creates objectionable relations of power and domination; (iii) weakens self-respect; (iv) creates servility and deferential behavior; and (v) undermines healthy fraternal social relations (p. 126). I will discuss each in turn in the following.

With regard to (i), there are two distinct elements: whether the badly-off *feel like* inferiors and whether the badly-off are *treated like* inferiors. But we must also know who the badly-off are. Are they those who, *qua* the unaffected in a given case, are left out of deciding on this issue? Or are they those who are worst-off in distributive terms? Because we cannot expect the unaffected to be equivalent to the worst-off in distributive terms, we must take the badly-off to be those who, relative to others, have smaller (if any) stakes in general and are given lesser weight (or are left out) of the democratic decision-making. In terms of whether the—relatively speaking—unaffected feel like inferiors in this case, I cannot see why they should. They know that the reason they are left out of that particular decision or given lesser weight is that they are not affected to the same degree as others.

Therefore, they also know that *if* they had been affected to a larger extent in that particular decision, then they would have been granted greater weight in the decision-making.

Note further that special circumstances must apply for a member of the democratic community to be oftentimes unaffected (or only affected to a minimal degree). We can imagine this to be the case, e.g. if a person lives isolated in a forest, Thoreau-style. If this is the case, however, it is hard to see why he would feel like a social inferior at all since he has few encounters with the rest of the democratic community (possibly by choice). The following, therefore, seems to be the case: Either (a) the person is never affected and is, therefore, never included in democratic decision-making, or (b) the person is sometimes affected. If (a), it is not a problem for social equality since never being affected requires social isolation on his part,³⁰ in which case there can be no unequal social relations (since he is not part of any social relations in the first place). If (b), it is true that he will be included in democratically deciding on the issues in which he is affected. And since he gets to take part in deciding with others on the issues that are (socially) important to him, it is hard to see that it results in social inequality (in a relevant sense). The second clause in the disjunction shows us why differential voting weights on the basis discussed in this paper do not lead to some people being socially inferior. Hence, there is no reason to believe that differential voting weights “creates stigmatizing differences in status with the badly-off feeling like, and being treated as, inferiors”, or that if it does, this is due to differential voting weights (as argued in relation to moral standing).

³⁰ By saying that unaffectedness requires social isolation, I thereby assume that stakes should be understood not merely as a net result but also in terms of the factors that enter into the calculation of stakes. If stakes are understood as a net result, a person might possibly have no stakes as he is equally well off no matter what is decided—he gets the same amount of human flourishing from the options—and that he has social relations with others. The net result view of stakes is implausible however. Suppose that a person gets the same amount of human flourishing from being a lawyer and being a philosopher. On a net result view of stakes, we can merely decide on his behalf that he should be a lawyer since he has no stake. But it seems that because the two lives are widely different, he does have a stake in the decision even though they lead to the same amount of human flourishing, for which reason we should not only understand stakes as a net result.

Turning to (ii)—whether differential voting weights create objectionable relations of power and domination—we need to notice the word “objectionable.” Since not every relation of power and domination is objectionable, we need an account of when it is so. An obvious contender is Pettit’s account of freedom as non-domination in the sense that if one is not free according to this concept, we can say that one is in an objectionable relation of power and domination. According to Pettit (1997), “someone has dominating power over another ... to the extent that (1) they have the capacity to interfere; (2) on an arbitrary basis; (3) in certain choices that the other is in a position to make” (p. 52). It is hard to see that the affected have the capacity to interfere with the unaffected on an arbitrary basis (re: 2). According to Pettit, “an act is perpetrated on an arbitrary basis ... if it is subject just to the *arbitrium*, the decision or judgment, of the agent” (p. 55). This is clearly not the case when it comes to democratic decision-making,³¹ as the grounds for such decisions are laid out prior to the decision and one agent is incapable of just making a democratic decision when he wants to. Note also that even if the affected interfered with the unaffected through the decision-making process, the unaffected would be affected and would, therefore, have a claim to inclusion nevertheless. Neither is (3) satisfied since the unaffected is not in a position to make democratic decisions on matters in which they are unaffected, at least according to the all-affected principle. I thus conclude that differential voting weights due to affectedness (stakes) do not create objectionable relations of power and domination.

Whether differential voting weights weakens self-respect—that is, violates (iii)—is ultimately an empirical question, but we can discuss on what grounds it should (if it does) to aim at an answer. Suppose you are given less weight than another person from the community in a given democratic

³¹ Interestingly, when Pettit discusses when there can be interference without domination, he points to the fact that the public official “who interferes with people in a way that is forced to track their interests and ideals fails to enjoy subjugating power over the person affected. The official is subject to such screening and sanctioning devices, at least in the ideal, that they can be relied upon to act on a non-factional basis ... They interfere, since they operate on the basis of coercive law, but their interference is non-arbitrary” (p. 65). *A fortiori*, this seems to be true of democratic decision-making.

decision because the decision affects you less than it does her—does that weaken your self-respect? According to Rawls, self-respect (i) “includes a person’s sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out”; and (ii) “implies a confidence in one’s ability, so far as it is within one’s power, to fulfil one’s intentions” (Rawls, 1999: 386). From this, it seems to follow that in matters that are central to your life (to your conception of the good, your plan of life, etc.), it is significant for your self-respect that you can decide for yourself; for example, it is central to your life whom you are going to marry, and in case you do not get to decide this for yourself, it likely weakens your self-respect (among other things). If this is true, it seems likewise to follow that in matters that are not central to your life (to your conception of the good, your plan for your life, etc.), it is not significant for your self-respect that you get to decide. If it is further true that if a matter is central to your life, you are affected by this matter—as seems obviously true when it comes to democratic decisions that potentially alter your opportunity to pursue your “life plan”³²—differential voting weights do not weaken self-respect,³³ since you will be included in deciding on those matters that are important to your self-respect.³⁴

Having discussed (i), (ii), and (iii), let us now discuss whether differential voting weights create servility and deferential behavior. While I will not go into great detail, note that the power that the affected has over the unaffected (or those affected to a lesser extent) in terms of a given democratic decision is confined to this particular decision only. This is very different from the master–slave relationship—the most extreme case of servility and deferential behavior—where the master controls every aspect of the slave’s life. In the master–slave relationship, it is obvious why the relationship

³² Suppose that it is your life plan to combat climate change in order to secure the living conditions of future generations. Should a polity need to decide upon which climate policy to pursue, you obviously seem to have a claim to inclusion *qua* being affected.

³³ Wall (2007: 429) reaches the same conclusion, i.e. “that political equality is not a necessary element of the social bases of self-respect.”

³⁴ What about a person who has unreasonably fragile self-respect? We can say that equal social standing is based on the fact that people have reasonable demands in relation to their self-respect and that this is not true of the person with unreasonably fragile self-respect.

creates servility and deferential behavior on the slave's part. Given the difference between the scope of the master's control over the slave and the scope of the control of the affected over the unaffected, we clearly cannot expect the latter to create servility and deferential behavior (to the same extent).

Note moreover that it is only in those instances in which those without votes are unaffected that they are subjected to others;³⁵ this is similar to a situation in which a slave has an owner who only gets to decide for the slave in matters in which the slave has no stake. Given that the affected only control (in the sense of making decisions) the unaffected in some particular instances—i.e. those in which the unaffected have no stakes—and given that the relationship is reversed in other instances, there is no reason to expect differential voting weights due to affectedness to create servility and deferential behavior.

Turning now to the last parameter mentioned by O'Neill, inequality undermines healthy fraternal social relations. Clearly, fraternal social relations can exist even when decision-making is delegated to some. Suppose that I am on a vacation with two others, B and C. I am a foodie, and our choice of restaurant matters a great deal to me. B, on the other hand, is a bartender and puts honor in not drinking poorly mixed cocktails and is willing to avoid this at great cost. C cares a lot about his tan and sunbathing; he prefers the pool to the beach as he believes the beach is too crowded. In this case, it seems perfectly possible for us to have a fraternal social relation, even if we delegate decision-making between us such that I choose where we eat, B chooses the bar, and C decides where we sunbathe. If we extend this reasoning to decision-making on a society-wide scale, it seems likewise

³⁵ What does it mean to be subjected to a decision that does not affect you? As Frazer (2014: 386) explains, "the larger and more heterogeneous a polity is, the more likely it is that a significant percentage of the political decision-making will be about matters in which neither my interests are at stake nor about which I have any pre-existing preferences." Following this, suppose there is a law which specifies the requirements of obtaining a driver's license, and suppose further that a person who lives under this law has no interest in obtaining a driver's license as he lives in a metropolis. In this case, he seems to be subjected to this law without being affected by it.

true that when those affected decide on behalf of the community, this does not undermine fraternal social relations between members of the community (think, again, of the principle of subsidiarity).

To summarize. I have argued that differential voting weights do not (i) lead to stigmatizing differences in status; (ii) create objectionable relations of power and domination; (iii) weaken self-respect; (iv) create servility and deferential behavior; or (v) undermine healthy fraternal social relations. Since these seem to be the most central aspects of what we mean when we say that people relate as social unequals, I conclude that differential voting weights do not lead to unequal social relations. Remember further that even if it was true that unequal social relations result from differential voting weights, this does not imply that there will also be unequal moral relations. As we have seen, it is possible to relate as moral equals while being social unequals—this is true in cases in which students accept that the teacher decides who gets to speak in her classes (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 65)—and as we have further seen, differential voting weights due to stakes do not lead to unequal moral standing.

4.4. Standing as Empirical Equals with Differential Voting Weights

As an example of empirical standing, Lippert-Rasmussen (2018) writes that “a teacher who treats her students as if they all have the same learning potential treats them as equals when it comes to learning capacity” (p. 68). He argues that being equals, empirically speaking, is an important aspect of Anderson’s democratic equality, but that we can distinguish two interpretations of the ideal: (i) she says that “all competent adults are equally moral agents: everyone equally has the power to develop and exercise moral responsibility, to cooperate with others according to principles of justice, to shape and fulfil a conception of their good” (Anderson, 1999: 312; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 68). Whether all adults are equally moral agents is an empirical question that can be falsified by psychological studies;

(ii) on this interpretation, “all competent adults have at least a certain threshold level of power to develop and exercise moral responsibility etc.” (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2018: 68), in which case people are equals, empirically speaking, even if there are differences in their ability to develop and exercise moral responsibility above the threshold. Do differential voting weights hinder equal empirical standing? I have little to say about this dimension apart from noting that stakes treat them as empirical equals when it comes to democratic decision-making inasmuch as stakes (affectedness) are the same, and count for the same, for every person in the polity; “everyone equally has the power to develop and exercise moral responsibility” in proportion to stakes. It would be different if—like a teacher treating some students as if they had a lower learning potential than others—the stakes of some people in the polity were devalued compared to the stakes of others (even though that case would be compatible with the less demanding interpretation of empirical equality insofar as those whose stakes are devalued are still over the threshold). Differential voting weights based on the proportional stake version of the all-affected principle do not lead to people in the polity standing as empirical unequals, irrespective of whether we interpret the ideal in the more demanding or less demanding sense.

5. Conclusion

I have argued that contrary to what prominent relational egalitarians claim, a one-person-one-vote scheme is not necessary to realize equal relations in a democracy. Differential voting weights based on a proportional stake version of the all-affected principle satisfy equal moral, epistemic, social, and empirical standing. It is advantageous for relational egalitarians that the ideal of standing as equals is compatible with differential voting weights in democratic decision-making if Brighouse and Fleurbaey (2010) are right that proportionality, instead of equality, is a better interpretation of the idea of equal respect (p. 141).

I will end this paper by briefly discussing whether differential voting weights may sometimes be *more* in line with equal relations than equal voting weights by pointing to one instance in which differential voting weights would seem better to realize relational equality than equal voting weights. It seems that the inclusion claim of an affected person is stronger in a situation where “the affected ha[s] no option but to bear the consequences of the decision” (Miller, 2009: 217) than in a situation in which an affected person relatively easily, or at least more easily, can make himself unaffected. Think, for instance, of the difference between a highly educated employed person (say, a doctor) and an uneducated unemployed person. If both of them are affected by a government decision, it seems fair to say that the doctor more easily can make himself unaffected by the decision than the uneducated person for the reason that other countries would be willing to admit him due to his qualifications, i.e. the doctor has better exit options than the uneducated person. If we assume that this is true, it shows that the uneducated person’s autonomy is threatened to a larger extent by the decision than the doctor’s is, where to be autonomous is understood as requiring some degree of control to set and pursue one’s own projects and not merely to be subjected to the will of another (Abizadeh, 2008: 39). That there is this difference between the two individuals in how much their autonomy is threatened by the decision may be a reason to grant the former—the uneducated person whose autonomy is threatened to a larger extent—a larger weight in the decision-making than the latter, insofar as protecting autonomy is what justifies granting affected individuals a right to inclusion in the first place.³⁶ In fact, the uneducated person may complain that if they are granted the same weight in the decision-making, they are treated as social unequals (and maybe even moral unequals), inasmuch as the doctor’s lesser threat to his autonomy is ranked on the same terms as the larger threat to the uneducated

³⁶ That protection of autonomy is what justifies the inclusion claim of affected individuals has indeed been a prevalent view in the literature (see e.g. Brighthouse and Fleurbaey, 2010: 142; Näsström 2011: 122).

person's autonomy. It signals that the doctor's autonomy is more important for society than the uneducated person's.³⁷ To avoid this form of unequal standing, or at least to combat it somewhat, we can include a choice component in the all-affected principle, according to which those who can easily and costlessly, or more easily and with fewer costs, make themselves unaffected by a given decision (and have no good reason for not doing so) are given a lower voting weight on that decision than those who cannot, in order to grant their autonomy equal importance. Hence, we have reason to believe that, at least sometimes, differential voting weights are more just than equal voting weights from the perspective of relational egalitarianism.

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³⁷ This also explains why a person cannot get extra voting power by making himself affected, since in that case, the fact that he is affected does not threaten his autonomy. After all, he has chosen to make himself affected (he is in control). I would like to thank a reviewer for pushing me on this.

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