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The Social-Relational View of Recognition Respect¹

Introduction

Respect wears multiple hats in political philosophy: as a goal to be worked towards, a good to be distributed, and as a principle governing interactions. Often, what exactly we mean by ‘respect’ is different depending on the role the concept is playing. In this paper, I focus on recognition respect both as a component of Andersonian democratic equality and as an independent political value, a principle governing interactions – specifically, how it places certain requirements on the way political institutions such as states treat both citizens and non-citizens.

I argue for two claims: that recognition respect is implied by democratic equality as well as being a plausible political value, and that it should be understood in large part as a matter of an agent’s social-relational standing rather than as their merely being regarded in a certain way by others. Most distinctively, the second-personal emphasis on recognition respect, the conceptual requirement that recognising somebody as an agent involves recognising them as somebody to whom you are in principle accountable, requires that agents actually be able to hold you to account rather than merely that you see them as being the right sort of being to do so.

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Taken together, I argue that these claims suggest, fairly uncontroversially, that recognition respect should motivate anyone concerned with agency; and more controversially, that this implies that the republican idea of non-vulnerability ought to be more widely embraced.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, I set out a working definition of recognition respect, drawing on Darwall's 2006 account, and contrasting it most particularly with appraisal respect. I then make the case for recognition respect's political value: showing that certain kinds of treatment of agents are inconsistent with respecting them qua agents and that the value of political engagement is in part given by the value of agency. This can be thought of as an argument about the nature and value of recognition respect.

In the second section, I make an argument about the success conditions of recognition respect and the implications of these conditions, arguing that recognition respect should be understood as primarily constituted by standing in certain social and structural relations or kinds of relations, as opposed to being seen a particular way by others. I conclude that such an understanding in turn implies that agents must be non-vulnerable. So although the ideal of non-vulnerability is strongly implied by democratic equality, it is also implied by respect for agency, and the latter is already widely embraced.

1. *Recognition respect, appraisal respect and democratic equality*

1.1 Recognition respect and appraisal respect

In Darwall's 2006 book *The Second-Person Standpoint*, he argues for a particular kind of respect, 'recognition respect'. This is the notion of respect based on recognition of one's agency, rather than of some perceived excellence.² The latter, Darwall argues, is 'appraisal respect', a form of respect we must earn and which applies to excellence or merit, while

² Strictly speaking, I should say that Darwall thinks the object of recognition respect is the dignity or authority of an agent; however, since I wish to avoid arguments about dignity (and in any case take it that the important part of the claim is the dignity or authority *of the agent*) I refer to agency as the object of respect throughout this paper.

the object of the former is dignity or – crucially – authority, and must be presumed or simply granted on the basis of different qualities from those that prompt appraisal respect.³ The distinction matters because if appraisal respect were the only kind of respect (or the only kind that mattered), we would have fewer, or even no, theoretical tools to explain why certain rights, resources, etc should be guaranteed regardless of somebody's particular excellence. In essence, appraisal respect gives us a way of explaining why somebody should (or shouldn't) be given certain responsibilities, or rewarded with particular things over and above those things which are basic moral and political rights. Recognition respect gives us a way of explaining why we have these moral and political rights, and of explaining why they take the shape they do. An examination of recognition respect by contrast with appraisal respect should help to highlight the important differences between the two.

There are, firstly, no immediately intuitively obvious cases where I can somehow fail at agency in the same way I can fail at some excellence. I may, for example, make a hideously ill-advised decision about whether to go to the bar or to go home, but this is patently still an agential act in the relevant sense; I did not, contra some interpretations of Kant, somehow cease to be metaphysically free – or at least, didn't cease to be forced to act as if I were free – when I settled upon having another round. To grant someone recognition respect as an agent is not something we base on an assessment of how well they 'succeed' at agency. Instead, recognition respect directly regulates the authority we grant to others; when we offer someone recognition respect, we acknowledge their *prima facie* authority over their lives and their actions.

To give an example, say that you grant me appraisal respect as a philosopher to the extent that I meet particular conditions. In this case, the conditions will be to do with the extent that I display excellences or vices. Perhaps, for example, I don't *always* affirm the consequent, but often do so; this lessens your appraisal respect for me just insofar as I do it. But I cannot only sometimes be an agent, or only sometimes have basic human needs. If you make the evaluation that I am an agent, then the respect demanded admits of no apportioning according to 'how much' of an agent I am.

³ Darwall 2006, 122-126. I use Darwall's terms for convenience's sake.

There are fairly broad evaluative properties that we might use to determine agency: minimally, an agent must be aware of themselves as distinct from the world around them, and have a sense that they can, at least in principle, influence this world according to their choices.^{4,5} Once this determination has been made, the form of respect demanded – recognition respect – gives prescriptions on how we may act and what sort of reasons we must consider, rather than how we should evaluate the property.

The idea of recognition respect as playing a basic normative or prescriptive role leads to an important point. Appraising someone as an excellent left-back (that is, granting them appraisal respect as a left-back) only gives us certain realm-specific guidance: as spectators, it is appropriate to applaud their play; as team-mates, we should rely on them doing, or not doing, certain things down the left flank; as managers, we should be comfortable giving them certain responsibilities, and so on. But the normative force of all of this is dependent on whether we actually care about the realm in the first place: it is perfectly consistent for me to accept that Andy Robertson is an outstanding left-back and also not to take this as giving me any reasons to act, just so long as I don't care about football. Recognising someone as an agent, on the other hand, is

⁴ I've adopted this deliberately thin account of agency for two reasons: first, it means I can at least for the moment evade difficult arguments about whether such-and-such contentious feature is *really* part of agency; second, if I can show that a minimal account has such weighty substantive requirements, then it follows that a thicker account will have even weightier requirements.

⁵ Maybe I'm not an agent when I'm asleep, admittedly. The more serious problem is of cases such as those where somebody is medically (and, let's stipulate, correctly) judged to be 'incapable', and that is something I can't satisfactorily deal with here. Two points can be made, though: even a harmful or misguided use of agency still 'counts' as agency, on this minimal view (though there may be other values in play that speak against treating such agency as having over-riding value); and such a judgement still has to start from the presumption that the person in question *does*, at least under normal conditions, have a sense of themselves as distinct from and able to influence the world around them. The *prima facie* authority is not carried through, in other words, but that is because of specific defeaters with respect to some acts, not because the *prima facie* authority is itself defeated.

intimately bound up with treating them a certain way, and the recognition *itself* gives us some normative moral and political prescriptions that aren't dependent on whether we take ourselves to have other reasons to care about these prescriptions. Recognising someone as an agent requires that we take their desiring something to be a *prima facie* authoritative reason for them to pursue that thing. That is to say, while I might be able to consistently give someone appraisal respect as a philosopher, or a left-back, while also denying that they have any principled rights to self-determination, I cannot grant them recognition respect as an agent and deny them these rights. To borrow a framing from meta-ethics, I can cogently respond "so what?" to the claim that Robertson is the best left-back in Europe, but not to the claim that he is an agent.

Recognition respect as agents, then, is not something that we must earn or something that we can forfeit by our actions – unlike appraisal respect – but a kind of respect granted on the basis of what we are, which is to say on the basis that we are agents. Although we must obviously evaluate whether some particular candidate is in fact an agent, that is as far as the evaluation goes: where appraisal respect is scalar and tendered depending on how fully we meet the conditions for such respect (or many of those conditions we meet, etc), recognition respect is a binary affair. If we are agents, in short, we should receive recognition respect.

Darwall has another important claim: that such respect requires "seeing ourselves [and others] as mutually accountable...accord[ing] one another the standing to demand certain conduct of each other as equal members" (2006, 119). For Darwall, in fact, this is more or less the whole basis of morality, but I want to make a weaker claim: that recognising someone else as an agent does indeed require seeing them as being in principle able to hold us accountable (and, similarly, that we see them as being in principle accountable to us). The idea isn't that we can at all times and in all contexts demand that others justify their behaviour to us; it's just that we recognise them as being the *right kind of being* to demand explanation and justification.

It's worth noting that even to deny somebody's request for accountability or justification in some particular contexts is nonsensical if we *don't* think that they can in some others – to tell someone that they don't get to demand a justification for *x* is already to acknowledge that they're

the sort of being who can in general make such demands.⁶ It doesn't make sense to think that a toaster I throw out of the window could hold me accountable, nor to imagine that I might have to explain to the toaster why it can't demand justification of me on this occasion; it does make sense to think that the unfortunate passer-by who gets clocked by it could do so.

So: as I have outlined it here, recognition respect as a concept comes bundled in with some normative requirements, such that being recognised as an agent entails that we are regarded and/or treated a particular way – one such way being that we are seen as appropriate beings to hold others to account, and vice-versa. What these requirements and ways of treatment turn out to be, and why we should think that they obtain, is a matter largely for Section 2: in the next sub-sections, I show how recognition respect is implicit in democratic equality, and why it should appeal even to non-Andersonians.

1.2 Recognition respect and democratic equality

On Anderson's model, democratic equality is to be understood as something like each citizen having equal ability to "effectively exercise specifically political rights...[and] to participate in the various activities of civil society" (1999, 317) – in essence, that each citizen is able to take full part in the political life of a community. Although there is a distributive element to this, Anderson's account of egalitarianism is primarily relational: we are equal as citizens if we stand in certain relations to each other and to the institutions of our community. Questions of distribution are thus relevant insofar as, for example, some particular distribution of resources is required in order for us to stand in particular relations – we can't stand in relations of engagement with our political community if we can't get to town halls, vote on proposals etc, and we can't stand in any relations at all if we're dead of starvation.

⁶ I should emphasise here that I have in mind second-personal cases rather than third-personal – that is, where (at least in principle) we are telling *someone* why their specific request or demand is being turned down, rather than where we are explaining to a student why (e.g.) the toaster isn't the right sort of being to demand accountability and redress for its defenestration.

To a certain extent, then, the model of democratic equality foreshadows much of what I'll say about the social-relational view of recognition respect: it's clearly necessary to have enough to eat, and not to be held indefinitely without charge (and so on), to be able to function as an agent, and on Anderson's view, functioning "as a human" (1999, 317), which seems roughly equivalent to what I'd term functioning as an agent, takes priority to functioning as a citizen. This re-invites the question of why we should bother with my notion of recognition respect. There are two reasons: first, we need some reason to explain why we care that "people are intrinsically valuable...they are self-originating sources of claims, and have equal authority to make claims" (2009, 223), in the way that Anderson does. Recognition respect does this: if and insofar as we recognise people's agency, their status as self-originating sources of claims, we're committed to treating them in the sorts of ways that Anderson suggests. Second, it seems plausible that relational equality should apply to more than citizens insofar as there are relevant and uncontroversial ways in which non-citizens *should* be treated equally within a given community – when it comes to the provision of food and shelter, most obviously. Related to this, we need some non-arbitrary way to adjudicate between clashing claims, such as between increased political engagement for citizens at the cost of hardship for non-citizens, and it plainly won't do for citizens to come out on top simply in virtue of being citizens. Again, recognition respect provides such a method of adjudication, by emphasising that the value of political engagement is ultimately derivative of the value of agency.

Let's take these reasons in order. To see people as self-originating sources of claims is, it seems to me, just one way of seeing them as agents: it matters that they be able to self-direct in light of their values simply because they *are* their values – having some desire or value to *x* is enough to give a *prima facie* justification for their *x*-ing.⁷ That is to say, while democratic egalitarianism implies recognition respect, I think the implication works the other way round as well: caring about recognition

⁷ The claim here is that to be an agent is a sufficient, rather than a necessary, condition on being a self-originating source of claims. I think it might be a necessary condition on actually being able to *make* claims, but that's different.

respect means that we ought to care about people *actually standing* in relations that make them equally able (in principle) to issue claims. This is different from, for example, a Dworkinian notion of equality of opportunity (1981), or a Cohenite notion of equal access to advantage (1989), because these ideas of equality are ultimately about distributions rather than relations. It doesn't seem unreasonable to say – as Anderson does (1999, 295-302) – that equality of opportunities theories will permit people to fall into situations where they can no longer function as citizens, or as agents, because of bad option luck. But if we care about people being able to relate to others as equals – specifically about the relating, not about the presupposition of equal agency – then we ought to be democratic egalitarians. This isn't novel, and isn't my point here; rather, my point is that if we care about recognition respect, then we ought also to be democratic egalitarians.

The objection might then come that this is just to misunderstand what it is to recognise and respect somebody as an agent: that, in fact, we do so by giving them an equal opportunity to pursue whatever goals they happen to value, with the understanding that sometimes we pursue harmful things, or that we're mistaken about what we value (in other words, that recognition respect really just requires Dworkinan equality of opportunity). To some extent, my response to this must wait until later sections (specifically 1.3, 2.1 and 2.2), but I can foreshadow it by saying that if agency is valuable, then I think we've got good reasons to make sure (as best we can) that people continue to be agents, howsoever unlucky or foolish they might be. That implies to me something very similar to Anderson's idea of making sure that people are capable of functioning in certain ways – as humans, as citizens, and so on. In short, I think it implies that recognition respect as a value does imply a particular, substantive theory of justice, namely democratic egalitarianism.

Now for the claim that recognition respect may help us to adjudicate clashes between requirements for recognition as agents and recognition as citizens. The reasoning here is, again, fairly straightforward: if we're concerned first with agents as agents, rather than agents as citizens, then the relational egalitarian model of democratic equality has another gap to fill. Certainly, Anderson's (1999) multiple-step model suggests that operating as a human is lexically and normatively prior to operating as a citizen, but this doesn't tell us anything about the respect owed

to those who *aren't* citizens in the first place. Taking recognition respect as the underlying value, however, explains why we care about political engagement as a member of the community – it's because such engagement increases the scope of agency. It also explains why agency takes priority over political engagement; if you care about the latter, you have to care about the former, and treat it as more important. An agent can still operate as an agent (albeit with a reduced scope of agency) if their freedom of assembly is restricted; they cannot operate as an agent, let alone as a political equal, if they die of starvation or ill-health.⁸

So, recognition respect is implied by democratic egalitarianism: respect for agents or agency is the fundamental value underpinning democratic equality, explaining (some of) why we care about political engagement as equals and also explaining why securing agency must take priority over increasing political engagement of citizens. In the next section, I suggest that recognition respect should be held as a genuine political value even by those who are not Andersonians about democracy or justice.

1.3 Recognition respect as a political value

I've argued above that recognition respect is implicit in democratic equality. However, I think there is a good independent reason to hold it as an important (and plausible) political value – that is, as something that can and should play a role in discussions of political organisation and political legitimacy – regardless of whether one is persuaded by democratic egalitarian arguments. This reason is that 'recognition respect' denotes an agential good which is, at least in certain contexts, best pursued by

⁸ I should emphasise that in the actual world, certainly in the global 'West', a citizen/non-citizen clash in terms of provision is vanishingly unlikely – *contra* the British media, there is no tension between improved political equality as citizens and a decent life for displaced persons who aren't British citizens. But it's worth noting that the priority of agential resources over political resources *exactly* and straightforwardly explains why, for example, it is permissible to restrict freedom of assembly in order to prevent the spread of Covid. There are alternative if sub-optimal means of political engagement, but (let's assume) no alternative means of keeping infection rates down; you can go to an online town-hall if you can't go in person, but you can't do anything if you're dead.

political organisations and institutions rather than inter-personally (in turn, this thought motivates my eventual argument that we should think of recognition respect as being constituted largely by social and material conditions beyond individuals' attitudes).

When I claim that recognition respect is a political value, I mean to distinguish it from solely moral values – the question of what, if anything, differentiates the 'personal' and the 'political' must be left aside for now.⁹ So, for my purposes, to say that recognition respect is a political value is to claim that it is to do with how we ought to organise society, and that it is a proper aim of political institutions rather than solely an ethical injunction for individuals: there is some particular task or set of tasks that such institutions should perform, and (some of) the tasks entailed by the demands of recognition respect fall into this set.

The first such institutional task follows from the thought that to grant somebody recognition respect is to give them *prima facie* authority over their lives. If I am recognised as an agent, then my wanting to perform such-and-such an action should be presumed to be a good reason for relevant political authorities not to prevent me from performing that action. This is, of course, only *prima facie*: if it turns out that my urge to dance on the edge of a cliff is the result of my being blind drunk, then this is plausibly a defeater of my presumed authority. Notice, though, that it still might not be; and if I soberly, rationally etc decide that I want to court destruction in such a fashion, then it looks like I should still be allowed to do so. In practical terms, this might suggest that while it's permissible to make it *difficult* for folk to do things like prance about on cliff-edges (particularly since we will also have to consider, for example, the risks posed to children and animals by not having sturdy fences), it's probably impermissible to *punish* them for doing so. It will be legitimate to erect a barrier along a cliff-top walkway, in other words, but not to fine people for climbing over the barrier unless there is some other justification for doing so.

⁹ I suspect, also, that we might mean two closely related but distinct things by 'political value': that something is a political *rather than* moral value, and that it is a value that political institutions ought to pursue. I have elided these meanings here for the sake of not having to write a double-length paper, but am aware that the distinction is an interesting and potentially fruitful one.

Similarly, this *prima facie* authority does not mean that others may not in principle intervene to prevent us from performing actions which would fail to accord others the same recognition respect that we claim for ourselves. To re-use the above example, if I'm climbing over a cliff-top fence in order to hurl rocks at swimmers below, I can't claim that recognition respect for me entails that my action is permissible because I am authoritative over my actions. After all, we can safely presume that the swimmers want *not* to have rocks thrown at them – and recognising the swimmers as agents requires that we prevent them from being used as mere means to my misanthropic ends. Reaching again for Darwall, the notion of recognition respect as entailing that we see the others as (in principle) being able to hold us accountable for our actions (2006, 111-115, 119-121) is also doing some work here. To think that someone may hold me to account for some action is already to think that they have authority (within some more or less limited realm) to demand explanation and justification from us, and "I wanted to" is not a satisfactory response to "why were you chucking rocks at me?". So the relation holds both ways: if we recognise others as agents, we recognise their principled right to hold us accountable, and if we recognise others' rights to hold us accountable then we recognise them as agents.

Recognition respect, then, requires agents to be recognised as ends in themselves, with the concomitant *prima facie* authority over their lives – and to some extent over *our* actions – entailed by that. So far, so Kantian, and also not noticeably political as opposed to 'merely' inter-personal. Why else should we think of recognition respect as a political value?

One obvious candidate presents itself. If we are serious about recognising agents as *prima facie* authorities, then minimally we must recognise their authority to demand – and receive – those resources necessary for them to continue being agents. At the most basic level, these are food, shelter, healthcare and safety: nobody can be an agent when they're dead. I am working with a deliberately thin notion of agency here and so will confine myself to the claim that for somebody to be recognised and respected as an agent, the *least* they must have is somewhere to live in safety and health, such that they can make decisions about the direction of their lives without risking impoverishment, ill-health or arbitrary imprisonment.

That is, in order for someone to be granted recognition respect as an agent, they must also be granted whatever is required in order for them

to function as agents. These demands seem apt to be met by political institutions rather than being seen than as a purely inter-personal ‘private’ matter: one of the paradigm roles of political institutions is, even on the slimmest or most conservative conception that is still plausible, to provide the goods required for a minimally decent life. Since being able to operate as an agent is part of a minimally decent life, then we should regard recognition respect as a legitimate value for political institutions to pursue.

Again, accountability can play a useful explanatory role: if I can properly be held accountable for someone’s demands for food, shelter etc, then via ought implies can I must be able to meet these demands. Clearly, though, no individual can do this for every member of a political community – so the ‘agent’ being held accountable must be the political community itself, and it must be this community that meets agential needs.¹⁰

Imagine that there is some resource to be distributed, and which allows humans to operate as agents. The use of this resource is exclusive in at least some sense, either because it is a consumable resource or simply because it can’t be used by everyone at the same time. Since not everyone can make use of it simultaneously, we’re faced with a decision about who should get to use it at some particular time. Here, it seems fairly obvious that the correct way to make the decision is not for each individual with a claim to talk to every single other individual, as it might be if it were three flatmates discussing who got first dibs on the communal shower, but for there to be a collective decision-making process in which everyone can contribute. In other words, the best way of settling the resource allocation question here is for there to be a political decision on the matter; the value of agency is a political one, though not only a political one.

I say more about what this value requires in later sections; what is important for the moment is to note that the notion of recognition respect suggested here implies that political institutions should treat it as

¹⁰ I make no claims about group agency here. Whether we’re individually being held to account as part of the political community (or through it), or whether we compose some collective agent that is held to account, etc, doesn’t seem to make much of a difference in terms of such accountability, and recognition respect more generally, being a specifically political value.

a value of (roughly) the same sort as welfare or autonomy – something which is valued at least partly by working towards people’s actually having it, instead of something which is valued just by treating people as if they already do have it.

Lastly, adopting recognition respect as a political value conceptualises the pre-theoretic intuition that there is something profoundly hypocritical about the way that states lionise respect in the abstract while denying agents the minimum level of respect necessary for their continued agency. It explains, for example, why it sticks in the craw to see wealthy politicians harp on about the need for choice and self-determination at the same time as they take a machete to those social structures that allow us to make meaningful choices, to self-determine in light of values more wide-ranging than brute survival. Indeed, it explains exactly the thought that, for example, giving people the ‘choice’ to live in substandard and dangerous housing is in an important sense literally to treat them as lesser persons. This isn’t simply callous, or objectionably individualistic; it is a failure to meet the absolute minimum requirements for recognising and respecting agents as agents. If you really respect people as agents, then you must structure society such that they have the resources to operate as agents.

2. *Recognition respect as relational standing*

So far, I’ve argued that recognition respect, here understood as respecting agents *qua* agents, is a genuine and distinct political value (albeit one already implied by democratic egalitarianism), and that tendering it entails both negative and positive duties. Negatively, it rules out certain kinds of treatment, and positively, it places duties on political institutions to ensure that their members can continue operating as agents. In this section, I argue that the best way to understand these requirements is to think of recognition respect as being in large part constituted by agents standing in a particular set (or some particular sets) of social and economic relations. These relations go beyond the trivial claim that we must stand in relations where we are seen as deserving of recognition respect, which is why I talk specifically of the *social*-relational account of recognition respect; the obtaining of particular attitudes between per-

sons is not sufficient (and may not even be necessary) for agents to be granted recognition respect. What's required are relations that constitute a minimum level of material well-being and engagement with organising bodies: if we're serious about respecting agents *qua* agents, then we owe it to them to arrange social relations such that they can in fact exercise that agency, and such that they can in principle hold other agents and institutions to account.

2.1 Recognition respect: Attitudinal or socially relational?

First, let's get clear that I'm not arguing simply for people to be regarded in a certain way, for a particular relation of respectfulness to hold between two agents, or between an institution and an agent – basically in the way that Darwall thinks of it. If I were, all the argument would amount to is that certain kinds of treatment are inconsistent with attitudes of respect, and my claim that we should conceive of that respect relationally would be trivial.

As a first move, it's not too tricky to present cases where at least on the face of it, we all hold attitudes of appropriate respect towards an agent but they stand in relations that deny them the resources necessary to continue operating as an agent. Let's say that somebody has arrived in a community with a strict 'citizens-first' policy when it comes to the provision of basic resources; a policy with which all current citizens disagree, but have not yet managed to overturn. Here, though all citizens can sincerely aver that they recognise the newcomer as an agent who should be treated equally to any other agent, it's not the case that the newcomer actually *is* treated that way. If the agent really *is* regarded as equally deserving of respect as the rest of us, then it seems very odd that they don't stand in the same relations; there needs must be some story which explains why the putative equality of recognition by persons doesn't translate into their having equal access to the resources necessary for minimal agency.

One way to question this story (or, rather, to question whether it shows what I claim) would be to ask just how hard the citizens have tried to overturn this policy. Do they merely aver that it's unjust, post on social media about it and so forth, or have they taken practical (perhaps direct) action to try and change it? In the first instance, we might simply deny that they *do* have attitudinal respect; they make the right noises,

but it doesn't amount to actually holding the right attitude because that attitude demands more than talk. In the second instance, though, it's difficult to see what more the citizens can do to show their respect for non-citizens, and so the lack of recognition respect seems to be institutional – taken all in all, the non-citizens lack the relational standing of recognition respect, because the relevant relations include *actually being treated* in respectful ways by the relevant institutions. This seems right to me. But of course, the critic might now claim that all this shows is that the non-citizens are not *attitudinally* respected by institutions – the social relations which would be implied by such an attitude don't obtain, and so we oughtn't to think the attitude to obtain either.

This also seems plausible to me, as it happens. However, a response is available. If we hold that it's simply a case of institutions lacking certain appropriate attitudes then we're committed to making certain claims about whether institutions can *have* attitudes: whether they are collective agents with something analogous to individual agents' mental states; or whether their attitudes are set by the preponderance of attitudes held by individuals who make up the institution; or whether the 'attitudes' are simply shorthand for certain norms and policies, and so on. Perhaps such claims can be supported, of course, but the simpler move is surely just to distinguish between relations of respect that are necessarily interpersonal and constituted by individual attitudes (which if sincerely held have implications for how agents should act), and relations of respect that are constituted by relational standing including how one is treated by governing institutions and public services. It is difficult to *force* people to hold certain attitudes, but (theoretically!) easier to make sure that there are certain social relations and structures that take heed of the normative implications of such attitudes. I return to this point at the end of the section. For now, I think it's enough to say that even if all or most members of a given society do hold attitudes of recognition respect towards an agent, these attitudes don't simply equate to the agent actually standing in the relevant relations of respect.

There is an obvious and historically well-worn move to make here. That move is to accept that recognition respect *prima facie* demands equal treatment, as suggested above, but then to suggest that there are *ultima facie* reasons against equal treatment. The citizen and non-citizen both have equal claims on *some* institution providing the resources necessary

for continued agency, but they might not have equally good claims on a *particular* institution doing so. So, we can hold the same attitudes of respect towards them, but these attitudes end up committing us to different obligations. Walzer (1981) and Miller (2012), among others, clearly hold views of this sort.

In response, we can point to the fact that in many real-world cases, agents cannot plausibly seek resources from other political institutions. This is especially obvious with respect to displaced persons: if you've sold everything you own to pay for an unsafe boat trip across the Mediterranean, you're hardly in a position of untrammelled choice. This being so, such a defensive move is unsatisfactory even beyond the strong whiff of bad faith – the excuses of one 'Western' nation will be pretty similar to those of another, and we *know this*, so there's something especially disingenuous about the metaphorical shrug and "perhaps you'll have better luck next door" excuse.

We should probably be charitable about this, and assume that the interlocutor is not talking about turning people away with no food or shelter – rather, that they're arguing that (for example) governments should meet existing obligations towards refugees, including providing emergency accommodation and so forth, and hence denying that partly closed borders are inconsistent with recognition respect.¹¹

But even this assumption leaves two glaring problems. The first is that giving people just enough to survive isn't, actually, giving them enough to continue being agents – somebody confined to a processing or deportation centre *doesn't* have any particularly meaningful way of affecting the world around them in light of their desires; they're in the position of Raz's man in the pit, or (more pertinently) of the prisoner deciding which way to walk round the exercise yard.¹² So just keeping somebody alive isn't enough, even on the minimal attitudinal view, to be consistent with respecting them as an agent. The second problem is that it denies the authority of the agent. I've already said that this is just a *prima facie* au-

¹¹ They might, for example, argue that recognition respect for non-citizens merely entails something along the lines suggested by Fine in her recent work on refugees and safe passage – see Fine 2019.

¹² Raz 1986, 374-375.

thority, so – as I’ve said above – the problem isn’t that refusal to fulfil any old desire denies such authority. Instead, the issue is that when somebody’s request for agential resources is denied for the kinds of reasons that are standardly given (public order, limited resources, etc), they are not authoritative: it’s simply not the case that somebody is being treated as a source of values if their demands are fobbed off with palpably unconvincing excuses. Political communities like nation-states *might* have a claim against treating non-citizens equally if they were in fact right up against the limits of their resources; but nations that spend billions on their military and millions on state jamborees cannot expect to be taken seriously when they cry poverty as a reason for not providing agential resources for non-citizens.

So, while there’s some reason to think that even just sincerely holding an attitude of respect towards an agent qua agent entails certain commitments, it also seems true that there are situations where this attitude could be held by many or most individuals without the agent thereby being treated in the way the attitude demands. Attitudes of respect are therefore insufficient to constitute recognition respect. It does seem that presuming an agent’s competence to make political decisions will be involved somewhere along the line, but I think there are good reasons to believe that the kind of respect necessary for democratic equality requires a fuller conception of respect than this. Part of what is required for democratic equality, after all, is not (just) that we *think* agents are able to make decisions in this way, but that they *are*; and if it’s important, then we should do our best to make sure that agents are indeed so capable. This being the case, a presumption of competence will not fill out the notion of respect in the right way. The notion of holding agents as *prima facie* authoritative which is given by recognition respect, however, will do so, because it presumes that agents are competent over a wider range of claims including claims on resources necessary to allow them to continue operating as agents (and then as equal citizens). In other words, something like opacity respect is probably required by recognition respect, but the latter also calls for ensuring, rather than merely presuming, that agents can operate as equal citizens. An attitude of respect is insufficient for this.

What about necessity? It seems very plausible that recognising somebody as an agent involves thinking of them in a certain way – we surely can’t regard somebody as literally incapable of agency and simultane-

ously recognise them as an agent, on pain of conceptual confusion. In a similar vein, it may seem obvious that if we don't see something as meeting the requirements for moral considerability, we can't treat them as a moral subject. But this analogy should give us pause, since there is in fact a way for the above scenario to occur; namely, if there is some set of social relations in place which constitute treating that thing as a moral subject. Let's say, for example, that I am a hardcore speciesist and think that non-human animals are deserving of no consideration whatsoever, but that I live in a community where treating animals as moral subjects is enforced. That is, I will be prevented from or punished for mistreating animals, such that I am (from reasons of prudence rather than my moral values) forced to treat animals as if I *did* think they were deserving of moral consideration and was acting in accordance with that belief. In this example, my attitudes clearly aren't the determinant of what relations I stand in to the subject in this relevant sense. The relational component doesn't exhaust my reasons in this respect, of course – assuming that we buy the claim that animals are morally considerable, then I should in fact hold an attitude of consideration for them – but in terms of how the animals are situated, their relational standing, it need not be true that any given individual actually does respect (attitudinally) their moral considerability.

The analogy isn't watertight, of course; most importantly, non-human animals aren't (generally) as psychologically sensitive to displays of disrespectful behaviour as are humans, although whether this is true in a given case will depend on the specific behaviour and the specific human and non-human animals, and there are in any case different attitudes involved in seeing somebody as a moral subject and seeing them as an agent. So the thought experiment falls far short of proving that respect attitudes aren't necessary for recognition respect. However, it does suggest a distinction between some agent being *seen* (by some other particular agent) as deserving of recognition respect, and the agent being *granted* (by the political community) recognition respect; where some psychological attitude's obtaining is necessary for the former, but perhaps not the latter. That is to say, what determines whether somebody sees me with respect is plausibly different from what determines whether I occupy a social position consistent with (or constituted by) being granted that respect. It's to the implications of the latter that I now turn.

2.2 Implications of recognition respect as social-relational

I will now connect the claim that we should think of recognition respect in largely social-relational terms with the neo-republican notion of freedom from vulnerability to arbitrary interference (Pettit 1996; 1997). Specifically, I argue that since recognition respect requires that agents are able to continue operating as agents and are able to hold institutions accountable, the requirement for political communities to respect agents just *qua* agents implies that recognition respect is in large part constituted by non-vulnerability.

As laid out so far, recognition respect consists in being recognised and respected as an agent *qua* agent (as opposed to *qua* citizen, parent, etc; and as opposed to being granted appraisal respect for some excellence). Part of someone being respected as an agent, I've argued, is that they're given the resources to continue operating as an agent. This because respecting someone as an agent is inconsistent with denying them the things they need to be an agent, and because respecting someone as an agent entails granting their *prima facie* authority over their desires – and we can reasonably expect people to desire the resources necessary for their continued agency.

The first claim for why the relational view implies non-vulnerability is similar to Anderson's claims regarding democratic equality and resource distribution (1999). On such a model of recognition respect (as with the relational account of equality) the claims that agents have on resources are in this respect set by what's needed for them to occupy a particular set of relations to others and to political institutions, rather than by requirements of welfare, or of autonomy, or other political values. Importantly, however, recognition respect (like democratic equality) will be able to subsume at least some of these values thanks to what's necessary for meaningful agency. Recognising and respecting agents *qua* agents entails that we recognise and respect the needs of such agents, and for the two reasons given previously – what's necessary for operating as an agent, and the authority of agents over their own desires – these needs require more than (and may not even include) certain attitudes obtaining on everyone else's part. Rather, agents must stand in relations that by design allow them to self-direct according to their values without fear of arbitrary interference or un-

reasonably damaging consequences – in other words, they must not be vulnerable in the Pettitian sense.

In order to avoid the kinds of vulnerability (especially though not exclusively economic vulnerability) which threaten our ability to self-direct in accordance with our values, the resource baseline must be set partly relative to the positions and powers of other agents and of institutions. After all, the scope of agency may widen or narrow depending on where (and when) agents operate; it would be extremely implausible to claim that a Regency dandy lacked recognition respect because they lacked internet access through no choice of their own, and much more plausible to make the same claim about somebody in the contemporary UK. Conceiving of recognition respect social-relationally, in terms of non-vulnerability, has the advantage of being able to explain the distinction between (for example) lacking resources because of disaster conditions and lacking resources because of injustice. The social-relational account isn't alone in being able to do this, of course, but it can do so simply and consistently, and that's surely a virtue. If somebody lacks the resources necessary for continuing to operate as an agent, but are situated such that by design they would be able to claim such resources (if they were available), then they are being treated with respect appropriate to their agency, and they are also non-vulnerable. If, in contrast, they lack those resources because they are situated such that they're denied access to these (available) resources, then they are not being granted such respect. So a volcanic eruption which causes crop failures doesn't, or needn't, mean that agents in a subsistence agriculture economy aren't being afforded respect; their society is structured such that they are genuinely held to be deserving of the things they need to survive, but (some) of those things just don't exist. Conversely, an affluent society containing citizens who lack these basic resources cannot claim to be treating those citizens with the respect they deserve as agents: it's the difference between rotten luck and a rotten society, and political philosophy should surely focus primarily on the second problem rather than the first.¹³

¹³ The same, obviously, is true of any society that fails to give resident *non*-citizens such resources.

That, then, is the broad argument for why we should think of recognition respect relationally, and as (in large part) non-vulnerability. Here's how non-vulnerability connects with the specific claims that recognition respect requires agents be able to operate as agents and to demand accountability. My claim is that if one is non-vulnerable, then one stands in the relations which (part-) constitute recognition respect for two reasons: first, because to be non-vulnerable is – barring disaster conditions, which I have already addressed – a necessary condition for us to be able to continue operating as an agent, and to do so by design. Second, because to be non-vulnerable is to have contestatory powers that make one able to hold other agents and institutions to account, thus fulfilling the distinctive requirement that recognising somebody as an agent requires recognising them as somebody who you are in principle accountable to. I'll take these reasons in order.

When it comes to operating as an agent, the non-vulnerability condition functions in several different but closely-related ways. Most obviously, to lack access to the basic requirements of life is to be vulnerable to arbitrary interference: if the cost of my opposing some interference is, or is likely to be, the denial of food, water or shelter, then I cannot meaningfully contest it. Similarly, precarity of subsistence alters the threats/offers scales significantly: if I am comfortably-off and you offer me fifty quid to kick a cat, then (assuming I'm minimally morally competent) I will obviously reject the offer.¹⁴ If, though, I'm just keeping my head above water, then the calculation becomes much more complicated, and more importantly I'd rather not have been asked the question in the first place – I would rather not have to choose between “no money, happy cat” and “money, injured cat”, and this fairly uncontroversially makes the putative offer a coercive one.¹⁵ Finally, if I'm in a situation where I sim-

¹⁴ I have here more-or-less adopted the view of coercive offers given in Zimmerman 1981.

¹⁵ To take a different line, we might also say that in this situation I'm forced to kick the cat, in a Cohenite fashion – given that I need to survive, I have no reasonable alternative to kicking the cat. See Cohen 1983. Whether or not coercion without adequate justification amounts to a complete denial of agency I leave to one side; all that matters for my purposes is that such coercion *reduces* agency, which seems obviously true here.

ply don't have access to the necessities of survival, then I'm vulnerable for the above reasons *and* I'm at the point where it's arguable whether I am self-directing according to my values in the first place; to pick up on an earlier point, and as Nussbaum's observed (2000; 2006), something distinctive of human agency seems to be lacking in a context where I can make no decisions beyond those directly relating to my survival. If agency requires *only* that we can decide between *x* and *y*, then I'm still an agent in this context; but even the deliberately thin account I've assumed throughout requires more than this. So vulnerability threatens my agency by making it implausibly or unreasonably difficult for me to self-direct according to my values; both because I may simply be *unable* to do so, or because the cost of doing so would be unreasonable. Conversely, non-vulnerability means that I can make decisions, even very difficult ones, without risking my basic ability to act as an agent.

Now for non-vulnerability and accountability. As I've indicated, there is a disconnect between merely seeing somebody as the right kind of being to hold you accountable – in the way that an imaginary interlocutor in a thought-experiment would be the right kind of being – and that person actually being *able* to hold you accountable. Though recognition respect can't require that every agent is equally able to hold every other agent, or institution, to account at all times, if it's to be understood in a more than merely attitudinal way then being recognised as the right kind of being to demand accountability must entail that every effort is made to facilitate this demand. Non-vulnerability, with its requirement that agents hold meaningful contestatory powers, does this: on the social-relational view what it means for me to be granted recognition respect is that I actually *can* hold others to account.¹⁶ Think about the difference between somebody's thinking that their colleagues are the right kind of beings to demand accountability from them when it comes to conduct in professional contexts, and there being an institutional norm or set of norms such that they cannot in fact ride roughshod over demands for justification. In the first instance, even if the attitude is sincerely held,

¹⁶ There's a parallel here with the constitutively relational account of autonomy, whereby our autonomy is constituted in large part just by standing in relations that actually allow us to pursue our conceptions of the good. See, for example, Oshana 1998; 2006; 2014.

it doesn't amount to *correctly* seeing colleagues as able to hold them to account (because they can't!), while in the second instance the attitude is largely irrelevant: colleagues being able to demand accountability is a function of their having contestatory powers, i.e. a function of the social and institutional structures they are situated within. This second case both presents the correct 'view' for colleagues to hold about each other, and ensures that the view has meaningful consequences.

Invoking talk of contestatory powers, of course, invites questions about how we should think of these powers. Remaining within the Pettitian framework, the question is whether contestatory powers consist in "reciprocal power" or in "constitutional provision" (Pettit 1997, 67-68) – roughly, whether it consists in agents having roughly equal social, political and economic powers against each other and against institutions, or there being legal rights and systems, backed by the power of the state, that ensure a genuine possibility of contestation. As an example of the former, I can demand accountability from – have contestatory powers against – management regarding some change to working conditions if their refusal to explain or consult about the decision will be met by a mass walkout (such that they would then find themselves in a very awkward position of trying to fire x hundred people); whereas constitutional provision would allow me to demand accountability through legally-mandated consultation, or through an industrial tribunal challenging the decision.¹⁷

It is tempting to say that my view is agnostic between them, especially as (unlike Pettit, or indeed Anderson) I don't see even the ideal state as a necessary or sufficient guarantor of non-vulnerability. However, if we presume statism, then I suspect that constitutional provisions will be necessary: since we're concerned with the structures that people find themselves in, and these structures include the state and its organs, it seems plausible to say that the structures must ensure (or try their best to ensure) that agents can hold each other, and hold institutions, to account. If agents do not stand in these structures, it's difficult to see how

¹⁷These shouldn't be taken to be exclusive possibilities, of course – plausibly, the best chance for non-vulnerability is to have both reciprocal power and constitutional provision.

we could make the claim that those agents stand in the appropriate relations of recognition respect, especially given the imbalance of power between the state and any given agent or group of agents. A state that merely says “don’t dominate each other, and we won’t prevent you from forming pressure groups”, and otherwise holds off, doesn’t seem like one that is producing structures that by design give people contestatory powers against potential arbitrary interference, or that by design allow agents to demand accountability of more powerful bodies. This isn’t to say that reciprocal power is excluded – in fact, if we’re in a state that *does* fail to instantiate the appropriate relations, then we’ve got a strong reason for agents to try and produce reciprocal power insofar as they can – just that the presumption of the state brings with it the necessity of constitutional provision for contestation insofar as contestatory powers are a requirement of non-vulnerability.¹⁸

This, it will be noticed, means that anyone who is already concerned with non-vulnerability and with recognition respect won’t find their position much altered; neither will the democratic egalitarian. However, neither democratic equality nor non-vulnerability are as widely-held values as is respect for agency – indeed, insofar as non-vulnerability is a key component of the republican conception of freedom, it has come under fire for simply being a way of securing negative liberty rather than anything distinctive.¹⁹ If I’m right, though, then anyone concerned with agency ought to be *directly* concerned with non-vulnerability regardless of how they think about freedom, or of how they think about equality in political philosophy: to respect someone as an agent entails doing the best one can to ensure that they can continue to operate as an agent and to hold other people accountable. This being so, there is a fairly straight line between recognition respect as a political value and non-vulnerability as the constituent of such respect – for an agent to be granted recognition respect by a political community is for them to stand in relations that protect their agency and their ability to hold that community to account.

¹⁸ As it happens, I think states are incapable of accommodating such contestation (see Humphries 2021), but that needn’t detain us here.

¹⁹ E.g. Lang 2012.

Conclusion

To summarise, I've argued that recognition respect is a good candidate for explaining and motivating Andersonian-type democratic egalitarianism, as well as being an independently appealing value; and that given the fundamental appeal to agency, it should be understood as being primarily constituted by social relations rather than attitudinally. If we're to understand it this way, I think we should understand the relevant relations as those of non-vulnerability: to be respected as an agent is in large part to stand in relations that prevent you from being arbitrarily interfered with, as such relations guarantee your ability to continue operating as an agent and to hold other agents and institutions to account.

I think this is important for two reasons: first, it fills out the picture of democratic equality a bit further (and allows us to non-arbitrarily adjudicate clashes between the various 'levels' of functioning that Anderson identifies). Second, it suggests that more people are committed to the value of non-vulnerability than may be thought at first glance: it's fairly uncontroversial to hold that agency is a political value and, on my view, this means a commitment to recognition respect or something very like it as a political value.

If I am right, this means that anyone who cares about agency should care about non-vulnerability – this doesn't seem like a surprising result to me, but it is nonetheless novel given that non-vulnerability is often taken to be a much more controversial value than agency in the literature.

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