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Obstacles to Achieving Relational Equality

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Abstract

This chapter examines the obstacles to realizing relational equality that emerge when questions of practical implementation are taken seriously. Building on the thesis's broader aim of grounding relational egalitarian theory in realistic assumptions about individual endorsement and institutional compliance with the demands of relational equality, the chapter identifies two central challenges. The first arises from what I understand as epistemic distance: individuals may fail to endorse the demands of relational equality because they do not epistemically relate to the wrongs experienced by others, which, broadly speaking, occurs when they do not know others' experiences. The second concerns vested interests and arbitrary power: institutions may fail to comply with egalitarian demands because they align with the vested interests and arbitrary power of a group of people. The chapter proceeds in three sections. The first section introduces the paradigmatic relational dynamic between the privileged and the oppressed, clarifying whose endorsements and which interests are at stake. The second section analyzes how epistemic distance bears on non-endorsement, and the third section examines how vested interests and arbitrary power shape institutional non-compliance. Taken together, these analyses illuminate how both individual non-endorsement and institutional non-compliance pose significant barriers to the realization of relational equality.