



Envy's Non-Innocent Victims

Iskra Fileva

Department of Philosophy, University of Colorado, United States

Abstract: Envy has often been seen as a vice and the envied as its victims. I suggest that this plausible view has an important limitation: the envied sometimes actively try to provoke envy. They may, thus, be non-innocent victims. Having argued for this thesis, I draw some practical implications.

Keywords: envy, vice, virtue, victim

There are strings in the human heart . . . that had better not be vibrated.

Mr. Tappertit to Miggs, Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*

Envy is a vice, and the envied are its victims. This is one of the major strands in our thinking about envy. Thus, we say such things as, "Be careful with Bertha, she envies you," or, "Don't believe what Gus says about Ethan—it's envy speaking," alleging that Bertha may harm you out of spite or that Gus is speaking to undermine Ethan's reputation behind his back. We find this view in literature as well: Dumas' Count of Monte Cristo, for instance, is so envied for his personal qualities, quick rise in the ranks, and the love of a beautiful woman that he is framed for a crime. In Jean Genet's play *The Maids*, two maids envy their mistress and conspire to kill her. Balzac's character Bette, from *The Cousin Bette*, envies the social status and superior physical beauty of her cousin, Hortense Hulot, and plots to destroy Hortense's happiness. The view of envy as a vice with the envied as its victims goes as far back as the Book of Genesis, where we find the story about Cain and Abel: Cain, envious of God's love for Abel, kills Abel. And in the *Parson's Tale*, Geoffrey Chaucer suggests that envy is the worst of all sins, "For truly, all other sins are sometimes only against one special virtue, but

Corresponding Author: Iskra Fileva, Department of Philosophy, University of Colorado, UCB 232, Boulder, CO, 80309-0232, United States; email: iskra.fileva@gmail.com.

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certainly Envy is against all virtues and against all goodness. For it is sorry of all the goodness of his neighbor, and in this manner it is diverse from all other sins" (Chaucer [1387-1400] 2011, 66).

Philosophers have, historically, been sympathetic to this conception of envy as well. For instance, in the *Rhetoric* ([384 BC-322 BC] 2015), Aristotle suggests that envy can lead us to be unfair and deny pity where pity is owed, writing:

If therefore we ourselves with whom the decision rests are put into an envious state of mind, and those for whom our pity, or the award of something desirable, is claimed are such as have been described, it is obvious that they will win no pity from us (1388a25-30).

And Kant says that envy "aims, at least in terms of one's wishes, at destroying others' good fortune" (1998, 459).

There are other strands in thinking about envy and its moral assessment. For instance, it has been argued recently that there are different kinds of envy, and that some—the kind that takes as its object the good of the person envied rather than that person him- or herself and that does not wish to deprive the envied of said good—are not malicious (Protasi 2016).¹ It can be argued also that envy is not so much a moral vice as a cognitive defect, that it is irrational or perhaps, childish and immature (cf. Farrell 1980); or contrariwise, that it has an important moral function: to attune us to injustice (La Caze 2001; La Caze 2002; Thomason 2015; cf. Frye 2016; and Bankovsky 2018). And literature offers examples of people who envy, but see themselves—rather than the object of envy—as the victim. For instance, in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (1909, 6), Gilbert Osmond has the following exchange with Elizabeth Archer about his envy:

"As good as he's good-looking do you mean? He's very good-looking. How detestably fortunate! – to be a great English magnate, to be clever and handsome into the bargain, and, by way of finishing off, to enjoy your high favour! That's a man I could envy."

Isabel considered him with interest. "You seem to me to be always envying someone. Yesterday it was the Pope; to-day it's poor Lord Warburton."

"My envy's not dangerous; it wouldn't hurt a mouse. I don't want to destroy the people – I only want to BE them. You see it would destroy only myself."

Similarly, in the tale I referenced earlier, Chaucer goes on to say that envy, unlike other sins, has no "delight in itself" but only "anguish and sorrow."² And an internet

search reveals a remarkably high number of Google hits for the phrase "dealing with envy" (read Becker 2016; Houghton 2011; Villines 2013).³

So the view that envy is to be classified simply as a moral vice whose victims are the envied has detractors. Who is right? The answer to this question is important, because the way we see envy has implications for the practical question of what to do about it. If envy is a vice, and the envied are its victims, then a natural suggestion would be that enviers must get rid of the vice. If, on the other hand, envy is irrational, then what an envier has to do is recognize the irrationality involved. Again, if envy is a sign that there is an injustice in the social structure, then perhaps, we ought to amend the social structure.

In what follows, I will argue that there is truth to several of the accounts of the nature of envy and the accompanying proposals regarding how to deal with envy, but there is an important aspect of the problem that has received scant attention so far, at least on the part of philosophers: the role frequently played by the people envied in the genesis of envy. As I will suggest, envy's purported victims—the envied—are sometimes less than innocent. This view has implications regarding the question of how to deal with envy.

Before I turn to the question that interests me, a clarification is due. In speaking of envy, I have in mind the view I take to be implicit in ordinary language: roughly, pain at another's good combined with a desire for said good. Other authors have distinguished different kinds of envy, and I will return to some of these distinctions later, but for my purposes, speaking of envy simpliciter will be best. Second, "envy" may refer to discrete emotional episodes as well as to a character propensity. I take it that on the envy-as-a-moral-vice view, discrete emotional episodes are generally expressive of a character propensity. (A person may sometimes act out of character and perhaps, feel out of character but not too frequently or too intensely.) When I discuss instances of discrete emotional episodes, I do so on the assumption that if envy is a character flaw, those instances are expressive of that flaw in much the way instances of feeling inordinate pride in oneself and one's achievement are expressive of the character trait of vainglory.⁴

A FEW PROPOSALS MADE BY OTHERS

Proposal 1: Envy is a character flaw, and it must be overcome by the envier.

There is something deeply intuitive about the idea of envy as a moral vice. Perhaps, what's particularly morally troublesome about it is the element of ill will. This may manifest itself as a wish to destroy another's good future, as Kant suggests in the

passage quoted earlier, but it may also be simply pain. Pain of this sort seems bad enough all by itself, and sufficient to classify envy as a moral vice: we ought to rejoice in another's good fortune, not be pained by it. This precept must be qualified. Pain at unjustly acquired good fortune—for instance, wealth accumulated by purloining public funds—is not morally bad, and likely not envy but moral outrage, unless perhaps it is accompanied by a desire to be in the place of the person purloining funds. Again, if someone's joke at your expense provokes laughter, your being pained by this rather than pleased by the other's ability to make the audience laugh is not morally bad either (though envying the other's sense of humor in general would seem morally bad). But in the usual case, envy appears morally problematic.

This view can be disputed. For instance, one can argue that envy is an emotion, and that emotions cannot be morally evaluated.⁵ Or else one can claim, as we will see in the discussion of proposal five (5) below, that our private psychological states—whether or not they can be morally evaluated—are no one else's business. But let us assume, for the sake of argument, that envy is a moral vice. What is to be done about it?

A broadly Aristotelian approach to dealing with envy seems natural. Aristotle suggested that we can align our emotions with virtue by first acting virtuously. Emotions can, on this view, be largely expected to follow suit. If we apply this proposal to envy, we can say that an envious person can free him- or herself of envy by electing to act as though he or she isn't envious. For instance, Bryan can congratulate his rival Gerry on winning a game of chess the two played, perhaps even praise a particularly ingenious move of Gerry's. On this view, Bryan can gradually get rid of his envy (on the assumption that Gerry continues to win). There is a separate and important question concerning the precise mechanism involved here. I suspect that different mechanisms will underlie the acquisition of different virtues. Aristotle likened moral virtue to excellence in other practical domains, for instance, the excellence of a horseman or an archer: anyone who wishes to be an excellent horseman must get into the habit of riding. Similarly, those who wish to possess moral virtue must get into the habit of choosing the right thing.

The Aristotelian view fits well with the acquisition of virtuous habits, such as self-restraint in the use of the internet or going to the gym. But what about envy? I think it is fair to say that acting in accordance with virtue would likely loosen the internal resistance to virtuous action and, in that sense, bring one's motivation closer to that of the virtuous person.⁶ In addition, we can note, going beyond Aristotle, that acting virtuously is consistent with self-respect and so is inherently pleasant. Thus,

it is connected to virtuous emotions not just via the channel of habituation but via a second channel: that of the pleasure we derive from respecting ourselves. The person who congratulates a chess rival on the rival's victory likely derives pleasure from the act, and that mitigates the pain of envy.

This proposal has much going for it. The morally troublesome consequences of envy would be taken care of if the proposal could be successfully implemented in every case. No less importantly, even if envy is not a moral vice, it is, as Chaucer suggests, a painful emotion to feel. If envy is eliminated, so will be the pain associated with it.

The strategy can sometimes be successfully implemented; but not always. This is because first, acting magnanimously may not be open to the envious person. The object of envy may be someone with whom the envious person has no direct interaction, and so no occasion to behave magnanimously. Thus, a person may envy someone higher up in the hierarchy at the company where he works, someone with whom he does not directly communicate. Without an occasion to behave magnanimously, the pleasure of behaving with self-respect may not be available to the envier.⁷ Perhaps the envious can derive a modicum of pleasure by refocusing their thoughts and not dwelling on the objects of their envy, in a manner consistent with self-respect. But without any witnesses, this strategy will often prove insufficient. Eliminating envy as a side-effect of habituation may be difficult or impossible when what one must habituate oneself to is refocusing one's thoughts rather than acting. We have much less control over thoughts than we have over actions. What else could be done?

Proposal 2: Envy is irrational, and it can be eliminated by recognizing the irrationality.

It can be argued that the envious make a mistake: their own good is neither increased nor diminished as a result of another's good or lack thereof.⁸ Suppose Corey envies Daniel and begrudges him his good looks. Corey, on this view, is being less than fully rational: his own looks are what they are regardless of Daniel's looks. If we recognize envy as irrational, then perhaps the recognition will help us rid ourselves of it. Consider a comparison: if Ben is afraid that Sam is going to hurt him because he's had a dream in which Sam hurts him, recognizing that fear as groundless and irrational will typically lessen or eliminate it, at least if Ben is moderately rational (of course, that may not happen if Ben is paranoid).

There is something to this argument. There are billions of people on the planet, and the looks of one particular person will usually have no measurable impact on one's own looks-related prospects. Analogous considerations will apply to many other cases of envy. However, it would be a stretch to say that envy is always irrational.

There is likely a reason why Corey is not envious of better-looking men in general but is envious of Daniel in particular: perhaps Daniel is a cousin treated better by the extended family on account of his better looks; or else Daniel and Corey socialize with the same group of people, and women show much less interest in Corey when Daniel is there.⁹

More generally, it is hardly irrational to have an emotional response to one's position relative to comparable others.¹⁰ What we get in life often depends not simply on our own qualities considered in isolation, but on how our qualities compare to those of others. Indeed, there is evidence that others' assessments of us are often influenced by whom others compare us to. Perhaps Corey would be ranked as good-looking if raters see only a picture of him, but ranked as less good-looking if they first see a picture of the strikingly good-looking Daniel.¹¹ Similarly, a teenager wearing a pair of jeans with an old cut is not irrational to envy a classmate who has swanky new jeans. The reason is that part of what's bad for a teenager about wearing old-fashioned jeans is that classmates are unlikely to accept the teenager with the old-fashioned jeans as one of the "cool kids." If, however, all kids had old model jeans, then no teenager would be particularly bothered by the fact that his or her own jeans were not new.

Note, finally, that even if our relative position were of no practical consequence, our human tendency to compare ourselves to other people is so deeply ingrained that pronouncing it "irrational," even on perfectly good grounds, would likely do little to counteract it, so the practical problem of what to do about envy would remain.

Proposal 3: Envy is a character flaw when malicious, but it need not be; malicious envy ought to be converted into non-malicious envy.

I derive this proposal from some remarks Sara Protasi makes at the end of her discussion of the varieties of envy. She suggests that steps can be taken to convert malicious envy into one of its non-malicious brethren, for instance, emulative envy (Protasi 2016, 544). Emulative envy, as Protasi understands this term, is a motivator for self-improvement: the person who feels this type of envy is focused on the good the envied person possesses, rather than on that person him- or herself, and she feels the good to be within her reach, not in the sense that she can take it from the envied person but in the sense that she can obtain it independently. For the person who feels this type of envy, the one envied is a model to be emulated. This type of envy is not morally pernicious, since the envier does not seek to harm the envied and deprive the envied of the desired good.¹² In addition, emulative envy can be commended on prudential grounds: it may provide an incentive for personal growth.

This proposal has key advantages, paramount among which is the motivation for self-improvement. However, the suggestion has limitations as well. Most importantly, perhaps, the good possessed by the envier may be simply unobtainable, as when the short and broad-nosed Corey envies the athletic Daniel, whose face resembles that of an Apollo statue. When the desired good is unobtainable, envy will typically remain inert, and thereby, painful. Moreover, as Protasi herself notes, all varieties of envy are painful, even the least harmful one in her view, emulative envy (451).¹³ Can anything be done about that pain?

Proposal 4: Envy is a sign of injustice in the social system. Eliminate the injustice, and you will eliminate the envy.

I take this next proposal to be implied in the accounts of authors who argue that envy—or at least some forms of it—helps attune us to injustice (La Caze 2001; Frye 2016) and can be quite excusable (Bankovsky 2018). If that's right, then perhaps we can eliminate envy by eliminating social injustice.¹⁴

I have doubts about the idea that envy attunes us to injustice.¹⁵ The proper response to a perceived social injustice is not envy but righteous indignation or something of that sort. Consider: a slave who envies his or her master and wants to be a master rather than abolish slavery is showing a morally inappropriate response to slavery (though perhaps not an irrational or unfitting response).¹⁶ Nonetheless, I am sympathetic to the idea that if we eliminate social injustice, we will thereby reduce envy, whether or not envy attunes us to social and moral injustice.

There is a second worry, however. Envy is often experienced in response to a perceived advantage of another which is not—and is not deemed by the envier—to be a result of social injustice. People may envy another's talents, calm disposition, smoothness of manners, and a variety of other things that are not due to injustice.¹⁷ In all those cases, there will be prudential as well as moral reasons to try to deal with envy in some other way.¹⁸

Proposal 5: Envy experienced in private is no one's business but the envier's. We don't need to deal with envy but only with its outward manifestations.

This is the last proposal I wish to discuss before turning to my own. I saved it for last because I think that this is the view closest to the one most ordinary people hold implicitly. In an essay under the title "Concealment and Exposure," Thomas Nagel (1998) has argued that we need not try to eliminate negative emotions—including envy—either on moral or on prudential grounds. Many of us, Nagel maintains, are secretly mean people, secretly envy the success of friends, or wish bad things to

happen to others. That in itself is not a problem, however. A problem, according to Nagel, would arise if we start speaking our hearts on each and every occasion. But we need not do so. What is more, we need not feel guilty for the occasional fumbling of our hearts. All we need to do *vis-à-vis* our untoward thoughts and feelings is relegate them to a "private sphere" and give up on the attempt of subjecting that sphere to public moral standards: it is just healthy, Nagel's intuition seems to be, to indulge in some emotions that have traditionally been regarded as morally suspect, including envy. The wide adoption of such an attitude is a sign of progress in society. There are two reasons for this. One has to do with social cohesion: it is easy to preserve peace with others if we relegate unpolished episodes from our emotional lives to a private sphere. Doing so is also a means to a kind of liberation. It is enough that we have to edit what we say and do. We do not, in addition, need to censor what we think and feel. Nagel writes: "To internalize too much of one's social being and regard inner feelings and thoughts that conflict with it as unworthy or impure is disastrous. Everyone is entitled to commit murder in the imagination once in a while, not to mention lesser infractions" (Nagel 1998, 7).

There is something intuitive about Nagel's suggestion. It seems that what's really liberating about the news that "God is dead" is not, *pace* Ivan Karamazov, that we can conclude that everything is permitted. No, because that conclusion is false. Fears such as those of Mrs. Wilberforce, "who, upon hearing about Darwin's theory of evolution remarked 'Let's hope that it is not true but if it is true, let's hope that it does not become widely known,'" (Brown 1994, 70) seem to have been ungrounded. Our standards of public behavior have not changed significantly as a result of the disenchantment of the universe, except perhaps in those aspects that concern religion directly. What has changed are the norms we perceive as applicable to our inner lives. God used to be seen as an observer of that part of us. In a secular world, there is no observer—or rather, none other than us. We have our conscience, to be sure, but it may be good for us to loosen its grip somewhat. And if this invites the charge that a moral theory that takes this route provides a justification for not-so-virtuous human drives, the reply should probably be that moral theory need not take the place of the now absent God. That it should for once stop worrying about how to make people better and busy itself with the question of how to make them happier. Now that God is dead, our inner life can be assumed to be our own business.

I think it would be fair to say that something like this view is held by most of us. A psychiatrist I know shared with me once that patients never go to see a psychiatrist because they want to correct a moral flaw, for instance, in order to free themselves

of racist biases. This came to me as no surprise. Most of us probably think that while a person can choose to counteract a negative emotion such as envy, whether to improve her own character or for prudential reasons, a person does not have to do that (let alone pay to correct a moral flaw hidden from view). It is something optional. All that is really required is to behave in accordance with moral precepts, not to make our emotions conform to those precepts.

I believe, however, that this proposal, for all its strengths, has limitations as well, and they are of two kinds.¹⁹ First, some normative constraints on our private realms are probably indispensable. Thus, if a father discovers that he is envious of his son's achievements, he should probably try to get rid of the envy, and ideally, replace it with pride.²⁰ More generally, the flipside of the complete inner freedom is that others may do whatever they like with us, so long as they do it in private. I think that somewhere deep in our hearts we hope they will be generous enough to treat us gently.

Second, and more importantly for my present purposes, even if there are no moral reasons to try to eliminate envy, there are still prudential reasons to do so. Envy remains painful even when engaging in such things as fantasizing about the envied person's failure provides a small amount of counterbalancing pleasure. In addition, the achievement of a unified self, which is probably the healthiest brand of selfhood, requires that we attempt to forestall the opening of too great a gap between our public and private 'I,' avoid getting into the habit of thinking one thing and saying another.²¹ Aristotle thought something similar and declared virtue the most important ingredient of happiness, but as mentioned previously, his strategy for cultivating virtuous emotions will sometimes fail. What I wish to do now is outline one more strategy.

MY ALTERNATIVE: ENVY AS A COMMON PROBLEM, TO BE DEALT WITH BY JOINT EFFORT

Consider the following quotations:

Man will do many things to get himself loved; he will do all things to get himself envied. (Mark Twain [1897] 1989, 206)

Grandcourt did believe that Deronda, poor devil, who he had no doubt was his cousin by the father's side, inwardly winced under their mutual position; wherefore the presence of that less lucky person was more agreeable to him than it would otherwise have been. An imaginary envy, the idea that others feel their comparative deficiency, is the ordinary cortège of egoism; and his

pet dogs were not the only beings that Grandcourt liked to feel his power over in making them jealous. (George Eliot [1876] 1996, 231)

What these quotations suggest is that being envied may sometimes be the envied's fault, at least partly. This will be so when the envied either aims to provoke envy (and succeeds) or else is utterly oblivious to the possibility of provoking envy in others. The former type of behavior may be selfish and irresponsible while the latter is generally insensitive. What I wish to argue is that we have responsibility to try not to provoke envy in others. The degree to which we ought to try not to provoke envy will depend on the circumstances, but in principle, we must keep in mind that envy is a painful emotion to feel, and other things being equal, we ought not cause gratuitous pain to others.

It is natural to object to this point by saying that even if so, one's being consumed by envy is one's own fault, that only people prone to envy would feel envy. That only those with a bad character would. It could be suggested also that perhaps the person envied has succeeded thanks to very hard work, but that those who envy see the reward only, not the effort behind it. And finally, that whatever the case, the envious would do well to focus on what they themselves can do to earn a reward, rather than looking at the plates of others.

There is truth to all these points, but all must be qualified. Note, first, that envy needn't betray a flaw in one's moral character. There are situations in which envy would be a natural response on the part of an otherwise virtuous human being. Consider an example. Jennifer and Amelie are schoolgirls. Amelie is a very intelligent and beautiful girl while Jennifer is a hard-working girl of average skills and looks. One day, the class of Amelie and Jennifer goes out on a picnic. Amelie goes, and Jennifer doesn't. The reason Jennifer does not go is that the literature teacher has mentioned there might be a test on the next day, and Jennifer wants to prepare well for the test. Amelie goes. The literature teacher does, indeed, give a test on the next day. As becomes clear later, Amelie gets an A and Jennifer a B-. If Jennifer feels envy in this case, does that mean she has a flawed character? I would argue not.

What I wish to suggest is that Amelie here can either improve or exacerbate this situation. On the one hand, she can flaunt her accomplishment, talking about how fun the picnic was or how easy the test was. She can "rub it in," as the expression goes. Or she can be mindful of Jennifer's feelings and point out, for instance, that, even though before the picnic in question she had not studied for the test coming the next day, she generally reads a lot of literature, a lot more than is actually required,

and that her richer background knowledge helps her find her way better whenever there is a test, and so on.

All that, of course, is a very delicate matter. Amelie can attempt to do the things I suggest but do them with such haughtiness as to make Jennifer even more upset. But all that follows from this is that doing the right thing—here and elsewhere—may be hard. It does not follow that Amelie may disregard Jennifer's feelings.

Note that my argument does not depend on accepting my assessment of the Jennifer and Amelie case. One can probably think of examples in which the case for responsibility on the part of the envied may be even stronger. For instance, consider two brothers, Jack and Jim. Jack is the younger brother and is in a committed, loving relationship with a woman named Lily. Jim, on the other hand, though older, has had no luck in love yet and has gone through three painful breakups in the last two years. It would be quite natural—and not vicious—of Jim to feel some envy in this case. Knowing this, Jack should take some steps not to provoke envy, for instance, by pointing out that he's had painful breakups as well or that things between him and Lily are not as picture-perfect as they seem (if they are not).

As for the point that one should make the best of one's own situation instead of looking at what others have, that point is well taken. Many would perhaps remember the Biblical story in which three men start out unequal, one having a lot, one some, and one very little money. In a year or so God goes to see what they did with their money and finds out that the man who had a lot made a great fortune, while the one who had very little lost even that. The moral of the story is typically taken to be that we should all try to make the best of what we have and not spend time envying our neighbor or complaining about initial disadvantages.

There is wisdom to this moral. It seems undeniable that whatever one's initial position, one would do well to make the most of it. But acknowledging this can go hand in hand with the recognition that very often, who envies and who is envied depends not on character but on luck. If the tables were turned—if, for instance, Jennifer and Amelie or Jack and Jim from my examples were to swap places—the envy would likely flow the other way.

All this is compatible with acknowledging that a person who is truly good will tend to rejoice in another's success or happiness even when he himself fails or is full of sorrow.²² On the other hand, there may be people whose envy cannot be mitigated even with the best efforts of the one who envies. My point is that these two ends of the spectrum, like the ends of any spectrum, are—for all their theoretical interest—of limited practical importance. Most cases fall somewhere in between, in between the

saintly and the beastly, the virtuous and the vicious, in the realm where one envies or is envied, pains others or suffers pain depending on the situation one finds oneself in.

Moreover, even to the extent envy is a genuine moral flaw, we may have responsibility to take steps not to provoke envy: we ought not mindlessly—let alone intentionally—do things that make others worse people. Consider an analogy: we ought not provoke a person we know to be prone to anger, because we enjoy observing him lose control of himself and become a plaything of his passions. This is true even though proneness to anger may be a character flaw. Same with triggering envy. More generally, though our primary responsibility is for our own dispositions, we have some responsibility for the dispositions of nearby others.

There is a qualification I wish to make here. A person can go too far in an attempt not to provoke the envy of others. A psychotherapist I once met told me that she was in the process of treating a patient who was constantly sabotaging herself for fear of surpassing her sister. This patient, much like Amelie from my example, happened to be both more intelligent and more beautiful than her sister, and it pained her to see her sister disadvantaged. This problem can be dealt with by means of common effort too, but this time, the burden would be largely on the sibling in a less enviable position to encourage her sister not to sabotage herself, perhaps by showing pride in her sister's accomplishments. Thus, while I here focused on the responsibility of the one envied for the envy he or she provokes, my main point is that envy is best managed with common effort. This might mean releasing the person in an enviable position from potential feelings of guilt.

Note that I am not recommending the strategy outlined here as a sole remedy for all cases of envy. Sometimes, recognizing envy as irrational may suffice (as when Pete envies his brother for winning a chess tournament but realizes that had he won, he'd be expected to play more chess, which he doesn't want to do). More importantly, the moral vice account is, as we just saw, true of some people—those at the extreme end of the spectrum. People who would be prone to strong envy despite the best efforts of the envied not to provoke it. There is a further question of whether such people ought to work on that flaw or simply on its outward manifestations, as Nagel suggests; or else whether they should try to convert malicious into emulative envy, as Protasi suggests (each route may sometimes be appropriate). There is also a case to be made for the view that social reforms that eliminate injustice may reduce envy as well even if I am right that moral indignation and not envy is the appropriate response to injustice. So I am not rejecting the accounts I discussed. Rather, my aim

was to show that none of them taken singly nor all of them together suffice. My purpose is to add a tool to the toolbox (not ruling out future additions by others).

There is an important question to consider at this point. Do I intend to claim that people have an obligation to try to forestall another's envy? I do not wish to put the point quite so strongly. There is probably a duty to avoid intentionally provoking envy in others. That's malice. There may also be a duty to avoid certain types of behavior that often lead to envy, such as bragging.²³ But the normative reasons may not underwrite a duty in other cases. Sometimes, taking steps to ensure others do not envy one would be the virtuous thing to do without being morally required. The important point is this: negative emotions such as envy may seem recalcitrant, but are much less so if we come to view them as a common problem, to be dealt with by means of joint effort. This is not to suggest that we can eliminate envy entirely and build an envy-free utopia, but we can reduce it greatly.

Finally, the following objection may be on the minds of those who are not persuaded: "What if the person envied truly enjoys being envied? What's the argument that such a person should forego the satisfaction in question?" Sure, I've given moral reasons. But we know those often fail to motivate. Are there any self-interested reasons to proceed as I suggest, or are there only moral reasons?

I believe there are self-interested reasons as well. One harkens back to something I mentioned earlier—in treating others gently and with care, we establish grounds for ourselves to be treated in a like manner. This point may not convince everyone, however. Perhaps we think that others we may potentially envy cannot be trusted to attempt not to provoke our envy, and that the best we can do is mitigate the situation for ourselves by provoking someone else's envy and thence deriving pleasure that counterbalances the pain caused by our own envy.²⁴

I confess that I have nothing but an intuitive feeling to argue for here, but it seems to me that the kind of satisfaction one can derive from another's envy is not the best kind. I doubt we really want to take the risk of having those who envy us say all manner of cruel things behind our backs, when we are not there to defend ourselves. More generally, some people have managed to be successful without being resented and to be fortunate yet still loved. I would conjecture that those are happier—more flourishing—people compared to those who rely on others' envy to float their boats.

In conclusion, the main point I wanted to make here is that our emotions are not simply our own business. Not in the sense that we are morally responsible for what we feel and so others somehow have a say in that. Nagel is probably right that for the most part they do not. But we are at least partly responsible for what others feel.

And it is not as though they always have a "say" in what we do to make them feel the way they feel either. What I've argued is that we may need to respond to and attempt to forestall their pain even if the pain is such as they should, according to all public conventions, keep to themselves and try to deal with, as best as they can, in private.

Notes

1. Protasi calls the type of envy in question "emulative." *Read* also Roberts 1991 and Neu 1980 here. As Protasi notes, however, Justin D'Arms (2016) has argued that there is no such thing as non-malicious envy. *Read* also D'Arms and Kerr 2008.
2. Chaucer [1387-1400] 2011, 66.
3. 11,400,000 hits, to be more precise. For perspective, "Hiroshima bombing" has 13,100,000, while "Richard Nixon" has 43,700,000 hits.
4. I thank an anonymous referee for pressing me to clarify this point.
5. Roberts (1991) ascribes this view to Scheman (1979). Nic Bommarito (2017) argues forcefully that inner states are subject to moral appraisal independently of action tendencies.
6. Although there is, on the other hand, the phenomenon known as "moral licensing"—roughly, the tendency to take (mostly unconsciously) one's present moral actions as a license to act immorally in the future. *Read*, for instance, Sadcheva, Iliev, and Medin 2009; Merritt, Effron, and Monin 2010.
7. An anonymous referee suggests that in this case, the envier may behave magnanimously by praising the envied to third parties. I agree that this will often be possible. However, there are cases in which it won't be practically feasible. For instance, suppose X envies his high school friend Y who achieved great success. X now lives in NYC, far from his hometown in rural Alabama, and none of his friends know or care to hear about Y so there is simply no one X can praise Y to.
8. Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson (2000, 82) ascribe the view that envy is irrational to John Rawls but claim that Rawls' argument is "belied by human nature and the prevalence of positional goods."
9. There are interesting questions related to the psychology of envy, and the conditions that give rise to it. People may envy one colleague but not another, seemingly similarly positioned and perhaps, more successful than the first. Envy may thus seem to resemble falling in love: a person may fall in love with X rather than Y despite the fact she judges X to be more lovable. But this is a side point. For the question here is simply whether envy is irrational in the cases in which it does arise. It isn't, and the fact that it may not arise in relevantly similar circumstances does not show it to be so.
10. Farrell 1980 considers a parallel argument with regard to jealousy—that is, that

jealousy involves some kind of error—and he rejects it for reasons similar to mine here. It could be argued, Farrell says, that the jealous espouse a "commodity theory" of affection according to which the more affection my partner gives to another, the less there is for me. But this theory is false, and the jealousy it grounds rests on a mistake. Farrell says in response that jealousy need not involve an error of this sort, "[T]he jealous party's desire for exclusivity might be based not on the (presumably false) belief that love and affection, say, are (in the relevant respect) like scarce commodities, but on the (perhaps quite plausible) assumption that he or she will compare quite unfavorably with any competitor and hence on the consequent desire not to have any competitors with whom to be compared" (1980, 551).

11. This phenomenon in its general form is referred to by economists as a "contrast effect." Listen to Hartzmark and Shue 2018, and the authors' discussion of their research on the Freakonomics podcast (Dubner 2016).

12. Ronald de Sousa 2018 makes a similar case with regard to jealousy, arguing that the pain a person may experience when witnessing the pleasure his or her beloved takes in the company of another can be transformed into the positive, pleasurable state of compersion.

13. Protasi here appeals to Van de Van, Zeelenberg, and Pieters 2009.

14. La Caze, Bankovsky, and Frye all make proposals along these lines.

15. The attempt to see envy as a source of moral knowledge can be classified as a special case of the general attempt, associated especially with Antonio Damasio but also with philosophers such as Ronald de Sousa and Robert Solomon, to see emotions as important sources of knowledge that have a crucial role to play in practical reasoning. Read Damasio 2005, de Sousa 1987, and Solomon 1977. I have a lot of sympathy with the general program. However, I also share a concern expressed recently by Christine Tappolet: some emotions do not readily lend themselves to the sort of rehabilitation Damasio advocates. Read Tappolet 2018.

16. A view along these lines is defended by one of La Caze's critics, Stan van Hooft (2002). Another critic, Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, argues relatedly that envy is not a moral emotion because "its core evaluative concern – namely, the negative evaluation of our undeserved inferiority – is not moral. This concern does not express a moral concern regarding how people should be treated, but merely a personal concern regarding what our fortune should be" (2002, 151).

17. An anonymous referee suggests, plausibly, that many of the goods people desire

that are, at first glance, not due to social injustice, e.g., good looks, have a social injustice component because what looks are rewarded or considered good may depend on an unjust social hierarchy. I think that's right, but there are many desired goods that are not due to injustice. If two researchers are working on a problem, and one of them solves it first, getting all sorts of accolades, the other may be envious. Injustice may have nothing to do with who solved the problem first (in fact, the researcher who solves the problem first may well be the one coming from a less privileged background).

18. Jerome Neu, similarly, expresses skepticism with regard to the prospect of eliminating jealousy by means of social reforms. He writes, "It was one of the hopes of the sixties (as of many other periods) that by restructuring social relations, it might be possible to eliminate jealousy and other painful, 'bourgeois,' passions. This was the hope that inspired many in the commune movement. It has been largely, I think, a failed hope" (1980, 427). I am sympathetic to this point though, of course, social reforms are always needed to address cases of injustice. What effect those reforms may or may not have on envy is a separate issue altogether. There would be strong moral reasons to deal with injustice even if it that had no measurable impact on envy. On the flip side, a world is imaginable in which all those who benefit from injustice in a society cultivate the disposition to be mindful and to try not to provoke envy in others in much the way I suggest, so there is grave injustice but not much envy. This injustice will remain a moral problem that we ought to deal with.

19. Anthony Kenny (1963) rejects the view that emotions can be seen as Cartesian private events. Daniel Farrell (1980, 541) cites Kenny's discussion approvingly. I mention this issue only in passing as discussing it would take me too far afield.

20. Protasi (2017) makes a somewhat different proposal: that we should aim for an ideal of wise love that makes room for envy but seeks to replace malicious with emulative envy. Though I think there is something deeply humanist about Protasi's view—we should, indeed, adopt ideals that accommodate human psychological propensities—I think that an envy-free love is better and a worthy ideal. However, which of us is right does not matter for present purposes since the two of us agree on the main point I make here, namely, that there are normative constraints on our private realms. Protasi suggests that we ought to convert envy for a beloved into a good kind of envy while I think that ideally, we ought to eliminate it, but we both think that something ought to be done, something more than just ensuring that the envy not manifest itself in action.

21. Several authors have emphasized the importance of agential unity, most prominently, perhaps, Frankfurt and Korsgaard. Read Frankfurt 1988 and Korsgaard 1989, 2009.

22. Indeed, someone who intentionally tries to provoke the envy of a very good person may end up being the one who envies when she discovers that the other's goodness serves as a protective shield, immunizing her against envy.

23. There is empirical evidence for a connection between boasting and malicious envy. Read Smith and Kim 2007. I thank an anonymous referee for JPE for drawing my attention to this. The referee suggests also that the claim one mustn't be boastful can be defended on independent grounds that have nothing to do with envy. What I would say in response is that a defense of a "no boasting" principle that misses the possible connection to envy would miss something of crucial importance. In all likelihood, boasting would not be seen as a character flaw at all without a propensity to compare ourselves to others, and to envy when the comparison is unfavorable to us.

24. In a *This American Life* episode called "Suckers," aired September 27, 2002, a young couple are persuaded to pay a lot more for a house than the house is worth. They then steal some bolts from a big supply chain. Host Ira Glass says about the petty theft, "The opportunity presented itself. They took advantage. And, my friend, it felt good to steal. It felt good to make someone else the sucker. They think they are going to do it again. That is what they have learned from the previous owners of their house." Transcript available at: <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/222/transcript>. Despite the psychological benefits of this sort of vicarious revenge, however, I think we should agree that this type of behavior—passing on the victimization buck, so to speak—is both a bad idea and morally bad.

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