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Emulative envy and loving admiration

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Abstract

Would you rather your friends, family, and partners envy you, or admire you, when you flourish? Many people would prefer to be admired, and so we often strive to tame our envy. Recently, however, Sara Protasi offered an intriguing defence of "emulative envy" which apparently improves us and our relationships, and is compatible with love. I find her account unconvincing, and defend loving admiration in this article. In Section 2, I summarize Protasi's nuanced account of envy. In Section 2, I argue that irrespective of how we analyze emotions in general we can argue that it is preferable to prioritize the cultivation of some emotions over others. In Section 4, I challenge Protasi's assumptions about the affinity between love and envy. My core argument is in Section 5 where I examine envy's impact on the envier, the envied, and relationships. Envy impedes an authentic relationship to the goods and goals in the envier's life, alienates the envied, and stifles joint-action. From all perspectives admiration typically fares better. After briefly considering the objection that admiration may impede love in Section 6, I conclude, in section seven, that admiration should be preferred to emulative envy in our intimate relationships.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In this article, I attempt to defend the intuition that it is typically better to admire a friend or lover than envy them. Envy is a thorny emotion, especially in our intimate relationships with friends, family, or romantic partners. On the

one hand, envy can seem like an unavoidable consequence of our comparative tendencies, which intimate relationships can exacerbate. On the other hand, envy seems especially misplaced in intimate life. Should we not try to appreciate the achievements of our friends and lovers without pain at what we lack? A natural way of trying to square these thoughts is to accept our proneness to envy, but strive to tame the emotion and cultivate joy and admiration instead.

But perhaps this obvious suggestion is misguided. Sara Protasi has tried to make space for a form of envy in our intimate relationships: emulative envy. She argues that envy takes different forms, but that emulative envy has a positive motivational role which helps us improve ourselves and our relationships and can be virtuous and compatible with loving someone. If Protasi is right, then instead of trying to remove envy, or replace it with other emotions, we might have to work instead to feel good over problematic forms of envy.

In itself, this is a surprising conclusion because envy is typically viewed as a consuming emotion, and one which poses particular dangers to our intimate relationships. But equally surprising is the way Protasi defends emulative envy by distancing it from the emotion of admiration, and the fact that she argues that emulative envy is preferable to admiration in our intimate relationships.

In this article, I take a closer look at the relationship between envy and admiration in intimate life. By "intimate life" I have in mind our family relationships, friendships, and romantic entanglements: relationships where care, love, and emotional vulnerability are common features. Much of my discussion may also apply to less intimate relationships too, like those between colleagues where envy is also frequent (Betzler & Löschke, 2021).[1]

My goal is to motivate the idea that we should prioritize cultivation of admiration over envy. To that end, this article has the following structure. In Section 2, I outline Protasi's account of envy and its different forms. In Section 3, I explore the implications of Protasi's view for emotion management. I argue that irrespective of the broad account of emotion we adopt, there are still ways we can argue that it is preferable to prioritize the cultivation of some emotions over others. In Section 4, I address the assumptions underpinning Protasi's "ecological" argument about the affinity between love and envy. In doing so, I make the case that is it possible to tackle envy without risk to love. The remainder of my argument then shows why we ought to do this, and why admiration is typically preferable to envy in intimate relationships. To establish this claim, in Section 5, I compare two imagined relationships: one where emulative envy predominates, one where admiration predominates. I assume the perspective of the envier; the perspective of the envied; and the relationship as a whole. In Section 6, I consider an objection about admiration before concluding, in Section 7, that admiration should be preferred to emulative envy in our intimate relationships.

2 | EMULATIVE ENVY

Sara Protasi develops a nuanced account of the nature and varieties of envy (Protasi, 2021). Her view helps us distinguish envy from jealousy, understand the different focal objects and motivational profiles of envy's various forms, and so understand its prudential and moral benefits and burdens. This project can be viewed as pursuing what Myisha Cherry terms the "image variation view" of envy as an emotion with distinct varieties, rather than resting content with an account in "broad strokes" (Cherry, 2021, pp. 11, 12). Protasi's account helps us resist simplifying caricatures of envy, and—if accurate—it motivates finer-grained practical attempts to parse our emotions and a more targeted approach to regulating them.

So how does Protasi understand envy? Envy is an emotion which has negative affective valence and a tripartite structure encompassing the envier, the person envied, and the good envied. The core concern at envy's heart is that we are disadvantaged or inferior because we lack something we value that someone else has. This contrasts with jealousy, where we are sensitive to the potential loss of a valued good, we already have.

Protasi thinks two conditions are necessary for envy to arise. The "*similarity condition*" holds that we typically envy people who occupy the same social "comparison class" as us (Protasi, 2021, p. 22). The *self-relevance condition* holds that the good we envy must relate to our identity. Envy, on this account, is a social emotion elicited by comparisons between ourselves and our peers which concern things we care about, like wealth, standing, or prowess.

Envy was traditionally separated into malicious and benign forms but Protasi improves upon this binary by suggesting envy has four variants which can be distinguished along two dimensions: (1) the focus of envy's concern and (2) the perceived obtainability of the good we envy. The "lack" at the heart of envious feeling is inflected differently along these dimensions in ways which give different shape to what envy feels like, what it focuses on, and how it motivates.

An example helps us identify the four kinds of envy. Robbie envies his friend Brian over his successful philosophy publications. If Robbie's envy is *inert*, he is focusing on the good he lacks, a successful publishing record, while sulking because he thinks he can never achieve one himself. If Robbie's envy is *emulative*, he also focuses on Brian's successful publishing record but thinks it is achievable and is motivated to work harder at writing. If Robbie's envy is *spiteful*, he focuses on Brian more than on Brian's publications, but he is inclined to frustrate Brian's future work because Robbie thinks he could never have a good publishing record. Finally, if Robbie's envy is *aggressive*, he also focuses on Brian but thinks he can somehow obtain good publications by stealing Brian's ideas for himself.

In different ways, inert, spiteful, and aggressive envy seem prudentially and morally troubling and so we arguably have good reason to try tame them; most obviously if we feel them often, but also in more episodic cases where we feel envy intensely. We might try to tame our envy through various kinds of emotion regulation; perhaps by trying to direct our attention away from the person envied to the good envied, or from what we lack to what we have, or perhaps by trying to experience a more productive motivational pull, rather than sulking or feeling destructive (c.f. Gross, 2013).

If Protasi is right, however, then not all forms of envy are cause for concern or should be targets for suppression or removal. Emulative envy is the positive outlier on her taxonomy. (When I discuss envy in the rest of this article, I have emulative envy in mind.) Protasi describes emulative envy as "hopeful", "non-adversarial" and "non-malicious" and central to it is the motivation to improve ourselves and "level up" (Protasi, 2021, p. 44). If we envy someone in this way they are "not there as a rival to beat…but as a model to look up to" (Protasi, 2021, pp. 44, 45). Emulative envy has prima facie prudential and moral value in motivating us directly to try and attain the good things other people have. (Assuming they are *actually* good.[2])

We might worry that emulative envy is disguised admiration, but Protasi is right to suggest that "the two emotions differ in affect, appraisal, situational antecedents, and motivational tendencies" (Protasi, 2021, p. 48). First, emulative envy feels bad; it has a negative affective valence whereas admiration does not. Second, emulative envy is tripartite in encompassing ourselves as well as the person envied and their good, whereas admiration focuses mainly on the other person. Admiration is therefore less comparative than envy, even if some comparisons help us appreciate why someone's good is worth admiring. Third, admiration does not meet the similarity condition but instead "typically arises towards people who are perceived as much superior" to us; it also need not meet the identity condition as we can admire things which are not relevant to us (Protasi, 2021, p. 49). Finally, the motivational profile of admiration is different because although we are drawn to "affiliate" ourselves with the admired person, admiration broadens our focus and motivates us more toward long-term improvements rather than the narrower focus of emulative envy which motivates us toward short term improvements (Protasi, 2021, p. 49).

Recall Robbie and Brian. Robbie's emulative envy of Brain is painful, he feels inferior due to a lack when compared to Brain's publications, but in such a way that he is motivated to improve himself by focusing on that good. He envies Brian precisely because they are in the same social comparison class and because he (Robbie) also cares about publishing philosophy.

Emulative envy might motivate, and so have instrumental value, but Protasi also argues it can be morally good. She offers several reasons for this. One thought is that since emulative envy focuses predominantly on the good envied rather than the person envied, it involves no ill-will toward others (Protasi, 2021, p. 79). Her main argument, however, is to view emulative envy through consequentialist eyes and suggest that it motivates us in a positive and hopeful way, despite the pain we feel. Emulative enviers are characterized as "templates of fair competition" who may "move the whole society forward" in striving for good things (Protasi, 2021, p. 80). Protasi thinks any concern with personal inferiority revealed by our envy is drowned out by its confident and proactive dimensions and, in any

case, being concerned with our "inferiority or disadvantage with regard to something good is just human, and most of us are aware of that" (Protasi, 2021, p. 81). Finally, Protasi suggests emulative envy might be a virtue. Her thinking rests on the premise that social comparisons are an entrenched feature of human social life. Emulative envy is then positioned as the most positive and constructive form of our tendency to compare and be sensitive to the lack of good things (Protasi, 2021, pp. 90, 91).

If emulative envy is a virtue, it is not surprising that Protasi thinks it is compatible with love both descriptively in the sense that people who love each other might envy each other, and normatively in the sense that *ideal* love can coexist with emulative envy. By "love" she has in mind something like a positive caring attitude toward someone with whom one also has a relationship (Protasi, 2021, p. 97). She gives several arguments to think we should not aim for our loving relationships to be free of envy.

The first argument rests on an ecological metaphor.[3] Since love and envy arise in the same kind of "soil" trying to change the soil to remove envy would halter love (Protasi, 2021, p. 100). The soil she has in mind is social comparison; her core idea is that "similarity in its various manifestations is a necessary condition for both love and envy" (Protasi, 2021, p. 103). We purportedly love people who are like us, but those are precisely the people we are liable to envy.

The second "indirect argument" holds that our envy for those we love is "an ingrained psychological propensity" but that since "we should not endorse normative ideals that go against ingrained psychological propensities" we cannot endorse an ideal of love free of envy (Protasi, 2021, p. 108). This argument is presented as an application of "ought implies can."

These are arguments against removing emulative envy from relationships where it is present. But Protasi also suggests that emulative envy can be part of loving beneficence. She thinks that a wise lover might "encourage the beloved to feel emulative envy toward her" because "envy can be an opportunity for growth, both for the relationship and the lovers" and competition can be "a chance for shared, genuine improvement and reciprocal, altruistic support" (Protasi, 2021, pp. 111, 112). If this is true, then lovers who naturally fail to feel emulative envy might have reasons to try and bring it about within their relationship.

We might be tempted to think admiration should replace emulative envy in intimate life. Protasi offers two reasons to think otherwise which apply to emulative envy in all contexts. The first is that admiration will not motivate us to act directly to improve ourselves or our relationship. Her one exception to this is the "case of loves that are more unequal" where "it might be easier to bring oneself to develop admiration" (Protasi, 2021, p. 110). Her second reason, expressed fleetingly without development, is that "it is probably easier to move from one variety of envy to another than to move from envy to admiration" (Protasi, 2021, p. 110). This seems to be a practical claim about the feasibility of certain forms of emotion regulation and cultivation; that is, a claim about the specific forms of cognitive re-evaluation we might be able to undergo in order to shape what we feel.

Protasi offers the friendship between Lenù and Lila, in Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend* novels as a case where envy contributes to mutual flourishing by motivating striving. Envy suffuses their friendship at different points alongside their overarching efforts to encourage and support each other.

3 | EMOTION CULTIVATION

Protasi argues that emulative envy is often a good response to a feature of someone's life, and has some advantages over admiration. She arrives at this conclusion through the careful parsing of envy's sub-variants in order to distinguish between its good and bad forms.

From our practical perspective, however, we can wonder what the implications of this conclusion are for emotion cultivation. If we are rarely envious of our friends or lovers, or disposed to admire them, should we *try* to experience emulative envy? To me this seems unintuitive. Instead, I will defend the idea that admiration is often preferable

to even emulative envy in our intimate lives, and that this is true even if emulative envy is appropriate in specific situations. As a result, we have reason to prioritize the cultivation of admiration.

This claim needs to be qualified carefully, as I may seem to understanding emotions in a way which presupposes Protasi's general approach is false from the offset.[4] I could be read as suggesting that emotions in general are opposed to each other such that it makes sense to try and remove our "bad" feelings and replace them with "good" ones.[5] But Protasi and other people who want to distinguish between the sub-variants of an emotion, clearly have a different approach. They adopt what Maria Vaccarezza and Ariele Niccoli, following Aristotle, call the "right mean argument" which holds that all emotions, even putative "negative" emotions, have a place in our lives (Vaccarezza & Niccoli, 2019). On this view talk of one emotion being preferable to another *in general* is misguided; that, "although excess and defect of each emotional trait should be ruled out by means of education and habituation, there is no emotional trait that, in itself, we should get rid of and that cannot be displayed in its virtuous (justified, intermediate) form" (Vaccarezza & Niccoli, 2019, p. 336).

It is worth nothing that by "appropriate" Vaccarezza and Niccoli have in mind that an emotion is both fitting, in the sense that its content correctly represents the nature of the object to which the emotion responds in size and shape (D'Arms & Jacobson, 2000) and acceptable in the sense that we are justified in feeling the emotion, that is, there are no strong moral or prudential reasons to avoid feeling it even if it would be fitting to do so (Vaccarezza & Niccoli, 2019, p. 342 footnote 1).

This is not the place to defend a general approach to the emotions. Instead, I want to argue that we still face interesting practical questions about emotion cultivation even if the right mean argument is true and we can parse emotions with care and evaluate their variants for appropriateness in specific contexts. My strategy in later sections is to discuss considerations which seem to suggest admiration lacks some of the negative impact envy has on the envier, person envied, and wider relationship. But those claims of mine can be understood in different ways.

One way of thinking about my later discussion, and perhaps the most plausible, is as disagreeing about the *appropriateness* of emulative envy. This approach would concede that emulative envy can be fitting in some situations but suggest there are often prudential or moral reasons to think feeling such an emotion is inappropriate. Perhaps admiration has a better impact on interpersonal relationships, for example.

Judgments of appropriateness can be broader than those of fittingness. Although the latter typically center on episodes of emotion, considerations of appropriateness can take into account *patterns* or *dynamics* of emotion over time and within relationships.[6] Emulative envy might be fitting at a specific moment, but perhaps inappropriate as part of an ongoing pattern of emotional responses to someone which is undermining a valued relationship, or exacerbating competitiveness.[7]

Disputes about appropriateness have both an empirical and theoretical aspect. They are empirical because they require us to consider the impact of specific emotions on ourselves and other people. They are theoretical because there are different dimensions to our emotional responses to the world, and so we can consider what those dimensions are and whether some are more important than others. Some emotions might be more directly motivating, whereas others broaden our attention or spark reflection. A point which will be relevant later is that we should not focus exclusively on the motivational dimensions of emotions when considering their broader appropriateness.

Evaluations of appropriateness are often comparative; it makes sense sometimes to step back and ask whether it is better for us to feel one emotion rather than another. Interpreting this impulse is not always easy, as we can find ourselves in situations where two or more emotions both appear fitting. One reason why Protasi's discussion of emulative envy is so interesting is precisely because it seems to gesture toward this possibility, that is, toward situations where it may seem fitting for someone to feel emulative envy of a lover's patience, say, or to feel admiration.

There is an underlying issue here about fittingness. We might think emotion X and emotion Y cannot *both* be fitting responses to the same situation seen in the same way because emotions are individuated by their evaluative content and so for X and Y to be distinct emotional responses to a situation we have to be viewing that situation *under different descriptions*.[8] Suppose this analysis of emotions to be true, we are still often able to appraise one

situation in several different ways by viewing it under different descriptions in turn.[9] Viewed like *this*, envy is a fitting response to our partners triumph, viewed like *that*, admiration is fitting.

When faced with these situations we can ask whether we have reason to prefer one description of the situation over another, and so try to see the situation in one way rather than another.[10] These are matters of emotion cultivation, particularly since our appraisals of situations—the ways we "see" each other—are not isolated but form patterns and are integrated into our broader conceptual repertoire. We can have reason to try and appraise a situation under a specific description, as part of an effort to cultivate one kind of emotion over another which itself is part of a broader effort to foreground one mode of engaging with the world over another. For example, we might view our partner's promotion (situation) as a professional success which reflects their skill (description of situation) due to a desire to view them generously and respect the struggle inherent in human action (mode of engaging with world) rather than being competitive or self-absorbed (alternative mode of engagement).[11]

It is worth making two final points about emotions and emotion cultivation. The first thought is that in trying to work on ourselves and shape our emotional lives we tend to direct our attention toward traits or patterns of feeling. We hope to become less angry, or more compassionate, and reach for heuristics and modes of reflection which help with this. Our attempts to redirect our attention, for example, might be quite general as we urge ourselves to be less comparative simpliciter, rather than compare ourselves to others with greater nuance. Our practical focus—"try to be less angry!"—is usually less specific than our evaluative focus—"was she overreacting just now in calling me a moron?" As a result, general processes of emotion cultivation may sit alongside our acceptance of the right mean argument's approach to the evaluation of specific emotional episodes.

You could object, however, that just because we often approach emotion cultivation in this way does not mean we should. Perhaps our focus should be instead on the Aristotelian task of trying to ensure our feelings are sensitive to specific situations in size and shape; a task which requires us to stop thinking in terms of general traits and start being more specific in how we direct our attention or reappraise our emotions.

My reply might be termed the "risky cultivation response." Since we are imperfect and emotionally fragile, our efforts at emotion cultivation have to be *strategic*. Theoretically, we can accept the right mean argument, and the parsing approach to emotions; theoretically we might appreciate that emulative envy can be appropriate, or jealousy justified; but this does not translate easily into our practical efforts to change ourselves or regulate our feelings.

For one thing, there is an intuitive asymmetry here. Someone who does not experience jealousy, say, or who is seldom prone to schadenfreude, might not want to try and start cultivating those emotions even if they believe they can be fitting and appropriate. They might be reluctant to do this because they want to avoid overshooting the mark in practice, as it were, and start feeling jealous or schadenfreude in other contexts without justification. Some forms of cultivation risk worse consequences than others. If we get it wrong in trying to have a nuanced sense of jealousy, or rage, we might harm others, or jeopardize our relationships, whereas downplaying these efforts risks harm to ourselves (on the assumption that failures to feel jealous, for example, are akin to lapses of self-respect [Kristjánsson, 2018; Wesselinoff, 2022]). If we assume that we should be more willing to risk harm ourselves than impose it on others, then certain forms of emotion cultivation are less justified than others.

More weakly, someone who is struggling to work on their emotions might *prioritize* efforts to become more joyous or compassionate over efforts to become more envious even if they do not avoid the latter altogether. Viewed in terms of what is fitting or appropriate, different episodes of feeling can be equally justified, but this does not mean they are on a par when it comes to what we prioritize in practice.

I hope to have shown that even if we accept the right mean approach to emotions, then there are still important questions to ask about the relationship between different emotions and the practices of emotion cultivation. My arguments below apply also if the right mean argument is false, and we can appraise emotions in more general terms; or if it is true but we want to evaluate emotions for fittingness and appropriateness in a different way (perhaps focusing on temporally extended patterns of emotion, over episodes).

4 | THE ECOLOGICAL AND INDIRECT ARGUMENTS

Protasi's "ecological" claim is that envy and love arise because we think we are similar to someone else. She worries that if we try to address envy by becoming less comparative, we are thereby undercutting an important precondition of love itself. If this is right, it would give us reason to hold off trying to become free of envy.

This is an interesting line of argument which warrants careful discussion. Protasi is trying to remain neutral between theories of love in the course of her argument, but we can raise interesting questions about the fit between some visions of love and emulative envy. On a union theory of love, for example, lovers purportedly view themselves as a "we," and their identity and practical perspective is inherently a shared identity (Nozick, 1989; Schmidt, 2018). If love is like this, then the merging of identity would eclipse the separateness required for interpersonal comparisons, and so reduce envy, since if one of the lovers achieves something, or has a good, there is a sense in which they both do.[12] What this shows is that Protasi's ecological argument works only on theories of love which retain the ontological separateness of the lovers.[13]

More generally, however, the ecological worry seems insufficient to stop us asking pressing questions about emotion cultivation. To begin with, it is worth noting that Protasi's phrasing is quite strong. She writes that "we envy *only* those who are similar to us in some relevant sense" (Protasi, 2021, p. 21 italics added). Although there is certainly evidence to suggest this is a tendency of many people to envy those socially similar to them (e.g. see discussion in [Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2007] whom she cites approvingly), there is also evidence to support the idea that people envy "up" across social hierarchies and that envy helps to constitute hierarchies (Lange et al., 2022). If this is right, then either envy can also be targeted at people who do not seem to be similar to us, or the notion of similarity in play here is very elastic. Similarly, distance from someone is not necessary for us to admire them. At least occasionally, the fact that we compare ourselves to someone is precisely what generates admiration as we are well-situated to fully appreciate their achievements. Finally, although people do seem to romantically partner with other people similar to them (Horwitz et al., 2023) this is clearly not always the case. At least occasionally, opposites attract. All this shows is that the ecological argument has less force when we consider these outliers. Some people envy despite difference, or admire due to closeness, or love someone who is different. Those people are freer to try and cultivate their envy, or admiration with less need to worry that doing so will compromise their love. Unless we have independent argument to think these outliers are pathological or morally problematic, we might want to consider how we could become more like them, or how our society might encourage more people to be outliers.

But even if we conceded, for the sake of argument, that similarity underpins both love and envy, in the sense that we typically love or envy those people who we regard as socially close to us, it would still not be clear that this assumption gives us sufficient reason to stop trying to be less envious. Just because a shared factor underpins two attitudes does not mean we should avoid working to alter or remove one of those attitudes if it is harmful. For example, consider "cognitive empathy", the ability to understand someone's states of mind (Batson, 2009; Eslinger, 1998). Cognitive empathy is central to compassion, but the ability to understand someone's state of mind also underpins pity, or schadenfreude, or cruelty (c.f. Williams, 2006, p. 14). As this example shows, the fact that one ability underpins many kinds of attitudes does not weigh against our efforts to avoid cruelty, or to ensure our schadenfreude really is appropriate.[14]

At most, love and envy's close association with comparison and similarity might shape *how* we tackle our envy, i.e. how we try to cultivate our emotions. There are different forms of emotion cultivation (Gross, 1998, 2013). Put in simple terms, we can try to control the situations we are in, how our environment is organized, the things we are focusing on, the ways we reflect on our feelings, and the ways we act on or communicate our feelings to others.

If envy is an especially comparative emotion, then some strategies might be easier to implement than others. We may struggle to stop comparing ourselves to other people, or decouple comparisons from diminished self-esteem, but find it easier instead to avoid triggering situations (competitions, certain forms of social media), or refocus our attention (using mantras to remind ourselves of what really matters) or by focusing our efforts on constructive forms of emotion communication (like occasional "venting", tactful conversations with friends, or

seeking therapy). Expressed in terms of Protasi's metaphor: we might not be able to change the soil in which love and envy grow, but we can work hard ensure envy does not dominate and overshadow love.[15]

A similar point applies to the role of other people in addressing our emotions. It may turn out that envy is quite resistant to direct rational oversight or forms of emotional regulation that rely on reappraisal. If we have little control over the emotion then forms of blame from other people might be counter-productive, but this does not prevent others from offering us what Robin Zheng called "formative criticism" aimed at helping us appreciate the impact of our envy, its comparative underpinnings, and its connection to hierarchy and status (Zheng, 2021). Formative criticism is part of "aspirational morality" in that it is aimed at helping us improve our agency by better understanding the distance between our ideals and behavior with concrete suggestions for improvement rather than sanctions (Zheng, 2021, p. 10).

My response to the ecological argument applies also to Protasi's indirect argument. We should reject her premise that we cannot adopt moral ideals which are in tension with our "ingrained psychological propensities." For one thing, she recognizes that some people are not very envious so the propensity she has in mind is one at the level of human beings in general. This raises the practical possibility that individual people, you and me, can work to be more like those outliers who experience envy less frequently.

More strongly, we should still address our comparative tendencies even if they are psychologically ingrained. Having a tendency to feel a certain way does not mean we will always feel that way, nor that we can do nothing to change how we feel. In-group favoritism, to take another example, seems central to human sociality but most moral frameworks would have us resist this favoritism and there are practical ways we can use formative criticism to try and help each other develop a more compassionate and outward-looking moral vision.

5 | ADMIRATION AND ENVY IN INTIMATE LIFE

To see how admiration is typically preferable to even emulative envy, I want to consider how each emotion might shape an intimate relationship. For convenience, I am imagining two similar academic couples in romantic relationships, Ava and Bryn and Carli and Dana. These people love each other, live together, share some interests and values (not limited to their academic work), and have some joint practical commitments. The key difference is that Bryn is prone to envy Ava whereas Dana is prone to admire Carli in situations where they are sensitive to the achievements of the other person. Let's consider how envy might impact Ava and Bryn's relationship in contrast to Dana and Carli's.

5.1 | The envier

One obvious point of difference which can be overlooked in grappling with the idea of emulative envy is that envy feels bad, whereas admiration does not. (Protasi recognizes this [Protasi, 2021, p. 45]).[16] Ava's successes make Bryn feel bad, Dana's successes make Carli feel good. Most people, given the choice, would prefer to typically experience pleasant emotions. We prefer pleasures to pains. Positive emotions also seem to have beneficial ramifications within a relationship, unlike negative ones, by "broaden[ing] and building" our emotional landscape and prompting us to feel other good things (Fredrickson, 2013). This is especially valuable in contexts where our feelings might shape how others perceive us or react to us. Given the choice, we want our emotions to open us out to our partners and make us feel more positive. This point does not require us to take a blithe view of love and intimacy. Close relationships make us vulnerable, and part of vulnerability is the susceptibility to negative emotions like anger, or grief. To note the painful feature of Bryn's dynamic with Ava is not to suggest Dana never feels bad due to her intimacy with Carli.

Another reason why Bryn's envy of Ava might be problematic in comparison with admiration is how it orients him to good things and his goals. Instrumentally, the desire to overcome a painful feeling by acting to achieve

something might increase the amount of good in his life; he sees Ava succeeding, feels he is missing out, works harder, and is able to succeed himself. Yet Bryn could worry that his actions are reactive and that he has not formed his own relationship to various goods in life. This can be so in two ways.

First, Bryn could come to want something because Ava has it. There are many forms of flourishing and numerous goods to work toward but emulative envy has him locked into the things which feature in *Ava's* life, such as a certain vision of career success. Later he might realize he did not form his own relationship to this goal. He may share interests and values with Ava, but there seems to be value in arriving at his own distinct sense of which goods to pursue.[17]

Second, you might think of contexts where emulative envy grips Bryn because he *already* wants what Ava has.[18] Emulative envy might serve as a catalyst which motivates Bryn to seek what he desires already, rather than supplying him with new desires. These experiences of emulative envy, however, can still raise questions about Bryn's agency in at least three ways.[19] First, Bryn may later wish his motivation was more considered, and less directly a consequence of his emotional reaction to Ava, or that he could be motivated in other ways in the absence of envy. Second, even if we think there is nothing wrong with being motivated reactively as a result of our emotions, Bryn may still prefer to be motivated to act at a *time* of his choosing. Third, Bryn might look back and realize his envy predisposed him to choose, or to prefer, *Ava's* means to the end he desires, rather than a means which may be more suitable to him.

To be clear, there is nothing wrong with being open to influence by others. We often come to desire new things, or value new pursuits, because we come to see how others desire or value them. Nor am I downplaying the motivational aspect of emotion or suggesting we can be motivated by our judgments alone. The point is simply that Bryn would be a better agent to the extent that he is able to act in ways he endorses, at a time of his choosing, using means well suited to his ends. Envy can bring make it harder to do this. To recognize this point is also not to suggest that emulative enviers literally copy the people they envy. Bryn could be creative, or flexible, in the means he uses to seek what Ava has, or manage to delay his actions, and so on, but much has to go right here for his painful feeling of envy to manifest in a way which is not regrettably reactive, especially if Bryn's envy concerns a significant life goal or value.

In section three, I suggested that when thinking about the appropriateness of an emotion like envy we may encounter theoretical questions about the significance of different features of emotional life. The example of Bryn provides us with one. His envy of Ava might have use in being strongly motivating, but the value of strong motivation has to be balanced against other considerations, such as the extent to which his feelings make it easy for him to reflect on his goals, or the ways they might impact other people. Sometimes being strongly motivated is a hindrance.

5.2 | The envied

If envy's painful character for the envier was all there was to it, then perhaps the feeling could be justified even within intimate relationships. One justificatory strategy would be to focus on envy's purported motivational power and suggest this has benefits which outweigh burdens. Maybe Bryn is fortunate in feeling something that makes him more likely to act in an immediate way to improve himself and potentially improve his relationship with Ava. Indeed, Carli might doubt the value of admiration if Dana is less motivated to act. Compared to other kinds of inert or spiteful envy, emulative envy is less stifling or aggressive, so even if it feels a little bad, it could be worse.

Discussion of the relative motivational profiles of emulative envy and admiration is complex, and I will return to it below. Here I want to consider the impact of envy on the person envied. This perspective is often neglected in discussions of envy, and deserves attention.

In general, studies of envy's impact on the envied in a variety of contexts and relationship types highlight the mixed or ambivalent emotions which can arise, with envied people sometimes experiencing increased self-esteem but also anxiety or fear about their relationship with the envier, or the social consequences of envious hostility (Lee et al., 2018; Parrott & Rodriguez Mosquera, 2008; Romani et al., 2016).

I am not downplaying the potentially positive experiences of being envied here, but it is worth noting that they may depend on someone being predisposed to being comfortable with competition or potential social superiority (Parrott & Rodriguez Mosquera, 2008, pp. 124, 125). In contexts where relational equality is expected or desired, such as friendships and romantic relationships, envy seems to provoke negative feelings in the envied since it threatens that equality. My aim here is to consider how this might arise in a romantic relationship.

Consider Bryn's envy from Ava's perspective. She is fortunate that his envy is not spiteful or aggressive and that instead of sulking or undermining her Bryn is trying to improve himself. Initially, Ava might even find his envy a bit amusing as he rushes to work harder. But frustration and doubt set in as it became clear he had this envious tendency.[20]

For one thing, she is sensitive to his pained feelings. Ava finds it hard to be around someone who feels bad because of her and Bryn's emotional ache makes her feel bad too. This is not emotional contagion, as she does not feel envy herself, but the emotional impact of habitual negative feelings in a relationship are not confined to the people who have them. Carli and Dana may have to grapple with other emotional challenges, but in this respect, Carli is lucky in being admired.

Bryn's envy can make Ava feel trapped, emotionally. Carli can feel good that she is admired for what she has done, and it seems fitting for her to admire Dana in return when Dana achieves good things. But this dynamic seems inaccessible to Ava. She imagines whether to feel *good* that Bryn envies her, but the suggestion leaves her cold; it seems cruel to take pleasure in her ability to make Bryn feel bad because he lacks something, even if that thing is indeed good. The fact that she plays a causal role in his pain makes a difference here, she feels implicated. This unwillingness to be bound up with someone's negative emotions also explains why Ava would reject Protasi's suggestion that she should "encourage the beloved to feel emulative envy toward her." She recognizes that envy might prompt his improvement and self-growth, as a matter of fact, but so might experiences of disorientation, fear, or grief and just as she would not want to hurt Bryn in those ways so she sees no need to make him envy her either.[21]

Ava's main reaction to Bryn's envy, however, is to feel neglected. Ironically, the aspect of emulative envy which Protasi claimed made it good to feel, is what makes Ava feel ignored. Protasi argued that emulative envy is a good form of envy because it focuses on the lacked object rather than the person possessing that object. Insofar as someone enters into our emulative envy it is as a "model" we should strive to emulate with respect to some good (Protasi, 2021, pp. 44, 45). But Ava does not want to be a model for Bryn. She wants to be his loved partner.[22] She wishes Bryn would do more to recognize and celebrate her achievements as distinctly *hers*; as things she, his lover, has achieved and which merit celebration and sympathetic joy (Coren, 2023). From Ava's perspective, Bryn's envy makes her wonder whether he really is able to do what love arguably requires; namely, try to attend to her generously as an individual (John, 2013; Jollimore, 2011). Their loving relationship should be sustained by his recognition of her as important and valuable in herself, not as an exemplar of how to achieve independently valuable goods.[23]

Ava may also fear her love of Bryn is liable to be undermined over time the more he envies her and tries to emulate her. Over time, she finds herself in a relationship with someone who is striving to be more like her, or to achieve what she achieves. But she wants a relationship with Bryn, the person she was initially drawn to. In embracing his envy, she is in essence embracing a relationship and form of identity that increasingly revolves around her, which seems self-absorbed. She does not want to have an intimate relationship with a version of herself but instead to be open to other people in all their complexity in a way that leads to new perspectives and mutual forms of understanding.[24]

These difficulties leave Ava unable to take a positive emotional stance toward the envy she induces in Bryn, which risks leaving her feeling alienated. None of this is to deny that we cannot make some room for ourselves in our intimate relationships. We can compare ourselves to other people, notice our shortcomings relative to some good, and work to improve. This impulse is central to moral change, and can make us better people. But emulative envy is often an inappropriate response to the success or goods held by someone we care about, especially when we envy frequently. It is too easy to neglect the perspective of the person envied when discussing the (limited) instrumental benefits of emulative envy. These benefits can be in tension with the demanding forms of attention

and concern we should be directing at our friends or loved ones. Experiencing Bryn's envy leaves Ava feeling stifled or alienated, unable to take pleasure in Bryn's feeling, to respond in kind, or to encourage more of his envy over time. Recognition of this fact should concern Bryn, and provides him with reason to try to be less envious of Ava. Admiration and joy do not suffer similar limitations.

5.3 | The relationship

In intimate life we often want to do things *together* with other people. We do not simply share goals or values, but we want to work with others to pursue them as a team rather than alone and in parallel. Even when our goals diverge, we want to be supported and nurtured as we pursue them.

With this in mind, we can ask whether emulative envy help us in doing things with others, or whether admiration is more likely to fare better. To answer this question, we need a brief detour to return to the purported differences between emulative envy and admiration.

Recall that Protasi thinks the reason why emulative envy differs from admiration, and the reason why emulative envy is useful in relationships, is precisely because it motivates us to act with immediacy, unlike admiration. Two questions arise in response to this idea. First, is this a good characterization of the difference between envy and admiration? Second, even if admiration lacks this direct motivating force, should envy be preferred over it as an emotion to cultivate in loving relationships? To answer them, we need to understand how Protasi characterizes admiration.

Broadly speaking, Protasi thinks the characteristic motivation of admiration is *emulation* (Protasi, 2021, p. 49). But she defines admiration as "a pleasant emotional response to the perceived excellence of an object (often, but not necessarily a person), whose primary function may be to 'enhance one's own agency in upholding ideals'" (Protasi, 2021, p. 50). She arrives at her account by drawing on empirical research which suggests that envy narrows our cognitive focus whereas admiration broadens it (Harmon-Jones et al., 2012; Schindler et al., 2015). In particular, envy, unlike admiration, is said to motivate "immediate action" (Schindler et al., 2015, p. 298).

In response to this it is worth noting that even if envy and admiration differ in *immediacy* of motivation, we should not forget that admiration can play *some* motivational role. The idea that admiration can move us to act is central to emulative accounts of admiration, for example, which hold that in admiring someone we are motivated to emulate them in a relevant respect (Zagzebski, 2015).

More fundamentally, however, we have reason to reject emulative accounts of admiration. For one thing, these accounts will struggle to accommodate cases where we appear to admire people who we would be unable to emulate, or in cases where we have no desire to emulate them. Sometimes we just admire, full stop. In other situations, admiration does motivate but in ways more varied than mere attempts to emulate someone or what they are doing.

Alfred Archer develops an alternative account of admiration which overcomes these difficulties, the *value promotion* account (Archer, 2019). Archer thinks that to admire something is simply to want to promote the value of that thing. Crucially, we can promote the value of something in many ways depending on the circumstances, our temperament, and ability. Trying to emulate someone is one way of doing this, but so is applauding them, or trying to encourage them further, or looking to support the existence of the practice in which they excel, and so on (Archer, 2019, p. 148).

When we view admiration in this wider value-promotion way it is easy to see that it is often better suited to personal relationships than emulative envy. Put in terms of the research underpinning Protasi's view of the difference between envy and admiration, I think it is *beneficial* that admiration motivates us "to approach the other and the ideas he or she represents, which leads to self-expansion" and "opens up" us "to recognise challenging but worthwhile long-term perspectives" (Schindler et al., 2015, p. 306).

To see this, consider how relational contexts differ from other kinds of agency. In our relationships we typically (i.e., often but not always) want to (1) pursue goods together, rather than separately (2) share goals (3) engage in

complex, long-term, projects, and (4) want to be supported even when we pursue a goal on our own. The broader, value-promoting, motivational profile of admiration helps us appreciate and support those we love and have relationships with in these ways.

First, in relationships we are often pursuing goals which are remote or complex like building a house, working toward a change of career, or trying to work through our internalization of gender norms; or we are engaged in ongoing practices which encompass many different activities, like parenting or trying to integrate into a new community. In these situations, it is not uncommon for one partner to envy the success of another; perhaps they are better able to soothe their child, or find it easier to make small-talk with strangers, or find it easier to outrun their inhibitions.

Admittedly, emulating someone's behavior can be useful. In some situations, we need to fit in, avoid trouble, or fake-it-until-we-make-it. Learning from a partner, and making use of their skills and expertise is central to intimate relationships and of great value when they know the language and we don't, or grasp social nuances we have overlooked, or have a knack for getting baby to sleep, or are more morally self-aware. But emulation is of limited value for several reasons.

The first concerns the long-range and complex nature of many projects. Emulation without understanding may be a hindrance in the long-term. To parent well, or adapt to a new cultural environment, we need to acquire or develop *skills*. In turn, that requires us to attend with care to our circumstances and attempt to act on our own terms. Envy can keep us fixated on some features of an activity (and the goods therein) at the expense of attention to other features in ways which ultimately hold back our ability to act on our own.

Emulation is often ineffective simply because people are different. Our knowledge, abilities, character traits and life history vary dramatically. Intimate relationships thrive because of these differences, and the fact that people bring something different to the relationship. The existence of these differences mean that we are better able to contribute to a shared goal, or to seek a good, if we find our own way of contributing. This could involve emulation, but often it will involve support or indirect contributions. The motivational openness of admiration is advantageous because it has us looking around instead of rushing to act or looking to copy the people around us. Admiration's motivational profile is more like "how can I contribute" rather than the "how can I get" of envy.[25]

Third, proneness to admiration within a relationship can help prevent us from being closed-off from unexpected goods. In narrowing our focus, envy preoccupies us in a way which may feel preferable to uncertainty about what to do, value, or desire (just as anger can furnish us with clear desires for action in a way which might feel satisfying in the moment). But this narrow focus risks introducing a degree of timidity into our lives which may prevent us from recognizing the unexpected or adjacent goods which might suit us better (c.f. Larmore, 2008).

Fourth, emulative envy can undermine joint action. In relationships we are often trying to figure out how to do things together. More so in romantic or familial relationships, but also often with friends.[26] Ideally, this involves mutual deliberation. To deliberate together, we need to be open to someone, to try and occupy a shared practical perspective, to worry whether they have reasons to accept our point of view, and to be dialogically sensitive to the exchange of reasons (Westlund, 2009). Joint action demands we have to focus on people as well as the activity or good we are interested in. Admiration orients us to each other, and enables us to do things together. Envy has us pursuing the same end, separately.

You may object that not everything in relationships is joint action. It is true we can and do have our separate interests and goals. But there is an important difference between having separate interests or valuing different goods, and not making space for other people. In relationships, the people who care for us typically want to help us even if we do not share every interest. This impulse is not simply instrumental; the *activity* of assisting each other, even if it involves getting out of someone's way for a while, is constitutive of care, love, and helps manifest our relational agency in valuable ways even if we fail to achieve what we want. The more we are motivated by envy, the less room we make for other people to help us achieve good things, and so the fewer opportunities for this valued activity of being there for someone in the relationship. Admiration of someone, in contrast, can mean we are more likely to turn toward someone and try to support the things they value.

This point applies not simply when it comes to acting in pursuit of goods but also in the process of giving shape to what we value in the first place. Emulative envy, with its motivational immediacy and focus on the object which we are presumably already primed to value closes us to the ways that people we love help us discover and define our values. When we love someone, we "improvise" with them to give more general values, like a concern with nurturing communities, say, specific form (Bagley, 2015). Relationships have their unique identity partly because of the uniqueness of these improvisations. Even when we do not share a goal, or value the same thing, we should recognize the ways other people help orient us to our ends.

This idea may seem in tension with my earlier thought that there is something self-absorbed about envy insofar as the envious person does not seem to form their own relationship with a good, and instead is oriented toward it via the mode in which someone else possesses it. But this tension is merely apparent. People should form their own relationship to good things, but as loved-ones we play a supportive role in that process. We work with our partners or friends to help them form their own unique orientation to a particular good or value. In some cases, we might share this value, in others we do not, but in relationships we are rarely on our own in figuring out how we proceed. (And this is not the same as being *told* how to proceed, or what to want, or what is good.) Envy, however, motivates in an isolating way and risks obscuring the ways others are ideally present as we strive after what we want.

Finally, you might worry I have overlooked competition. Are not many relationships, like those between friends and siblings, competitive due to envy? Do we not think competition is often helpful or socially important? Recall that emulative envy was positioned by Protasi as central to good competition; "emulative enviers are templates of fair competition" (Protasi, 2021, p. 80). To this I can offer two brief responses.

First, we might think competition is simply misplaced in many loving relationships; that ideal forms of interaction between friends, family members, and lovers are not competitive.[27] Ava might reject the idea that she stands as a competitor to Bryn. They may have shared interests, even work in the same field, but she wants to be viewed as a supportive companion; intimate life, for her, is intended as an escape from the competitive interactions of wider society. This concern takes aim at the conception of the loving relationship in play in Protasi's view. We might deny that relationships are better to the extent that the people within them are striving to be better, or we might reject a vision of love which is anchored in the idea that we are trying to help each other become better people. It is far from clear that the nature and value of relationships like friendship lies in the ways they improve us as individuals; indeed, these relationships might have value while holding us back, morally speaking (Cocking & Kennett, 2000).

Considering the dynamic impact of envy gives us a reason to be wary of its role in making us better within relationships. Recall that experiences of envy are taken by Protasi, quite plausibly, to involve a sense of inferiority or disadvantage relative to someone else. But a close relationship animated by a sense of inferiority between those involved is unlikely to remain stable. Conflict is likely to arise between narratives of equal concern and status (which are associated with close relationships) and felt inferiority. Given the choice, many partners might prefer relationships animated by attempts to foster equality.

Second, when we do value competition in relationships like friendship, we often have what Shai Agmon usefully calls "parallel competition" in mind, for example, situations akin to a 100 m sprint where our situation helps everyone do their best, rather than the agonistic "friction competition" akin to a football game or boxing match where the goal is to overcome the presence of the opponent (Agmon, 2022). In cases of parallel competition, however, it is unclear envy is necessary or even desirable as a motivator. Sprinters in the startling blocks need not envy their rivals, but can admire them instead and try to emulate them or outrun them. Indeed, a common conception of virtuous sportsmanship is that of the athlete who is happy to help her rivals achieve their best, and who competes against them on those terms, rather than the athlete who is happy when a rival struggles to perform (Little, 2018; Simon, 2016).

This suggestion about parallel competition relates to a final point about the dynamic of relationships. We might want to retain the idea that close loving relationships involve the desire to help each other be better, only to reconsider what this involves. Instead of helping each other achieve goods or reach goals, we help each other develop the agential capacities required to be people who can act with autonomy. In Bryn's case, this might involve Ava helping him notice the way his envious tendency clouds his ability to act in ways which bring his desires and abilities into

harmony. In working together to address his envy, they equip him—indirectly—with the ability to be someone who is better able to be motivated to act as he wishes in pursuit of his own ends via the particular means he chooses.

In summary, even in its emulative form envy is an often blunt motivational force which may have us acting now, but which overlooks the ongoing adaptability required for complex projects; neglects the different ways we can share and promote a goal or good; disrupts joint-action; fails to acknowledge the ways in which we are supported and shaped by those that love us, even in pursuit of our solitary ends; and which is not necessary for good competition.

6 | AN OBJECTION

My argument so far may prompt the following objection: do my concerns with emulative envy also apply to admiration? Insofar as we admire people, and are motivated by our admiration, might we also fail to form our own relationship to good things, or end up leaving a partner feeling isolated and neglected, or lose out on some of the more expansive possibilities in a relationship which come from looking outwards rather than inwards to a partner?

This is an important worry. It is exacerbated by the fact that if my argument above is right then admiration seems better suited as a core foundation of an intimate relationship than envy. Admiration feels good, can be reciprocated, and motivates us more pliably than emulative envy. But if admiration is also troubled, these apparent advantages could give admiration hold over us in a more subtle and insidious way.

This worry about admiration is apparent in a Kamila Pacovská's discussion of love and admiration (Pacovská, 2022). Pacovská argues that the desire for admiration can in some cases serve as a strategy to avoid confronting the possibility of being loved. Love involves emotional vulnerability, a lack of control, and the uneasy question of reciprocation in a way that admiration does not and so it can be easier to be admired than loved. Pacovská notes, correctly, that the desire for admiration can become self-centered and narcissistic as a way of avoiding confronting the full extent of who we are or the discomfort of interpersonal exposure.

I think we can agree with the force of Pacovská's analysis without worrying too much about admiration. We can recognize both that Carli's desire for admiration might be a barrier to her experiencing love with Dana, and that Dana's admiration of Carli could in some situations obscure her recognition of Carli's imperfections, without denying that admiration can form part of love and intimacy. In the former case, the problem centers on the desire not on admiration, in the latter case, the problem is that admiration is not fitting in the sense of being excessive or ill-suited to the characteristic of Carli in question. Note that Pacovská's concerns about the desire for admiration apply with equal force to the desire for love itself. There are times when our desire to be loved is what obscures our ability to be vulnerable to others in ways which impede the development of intimacy, but this does not speak against the value of love.

Admiration can be present in a relationship without someone desiring it explicitly, and this is probably the typical case. Dana can admire Carli without Carli carving admiration as such, but in that situation Dana's admiration does animate their relationship and motivate Dana to promote the value of Carli's activities (or of Carli herself if admiration is globalist).

Admiration also typically fares better than envy when it comes to attention, identity, and improvision within relationships. Two people can admire each other without being motivated to become like each other or to pursue directly the goods possessed by the other. Admiration motivates promotion of value in broader ways which leave room for different contributions to shared endeavors and for the separate support of individual pursuits.

7 | CONCLUSION

Emulative envy might be the best form that envy can take, but it is not an emotion we should set about trying to cultivate. The instrumental benefits of emulative envy are minor and we must be careful not to overlook its negative

impact on the person envied or the relationship itself. From those perspectives, admiration is preferable even if it motivates us less directly.

Practically speaking it may also be challenging to address our envy. Protasi suggests it is easier to shift between forms of one emotion rather than between different emotions (Protasi, 2021, p. 110), something she thinks speaks in favor of trying to fine-tune our envious responses to others rather than to get rid of envy altogether. But she offers no argument for this underlying premise. One possible explanation might refer to the kinds of reappraisal involved in cultivating our feelings. Perhaps it is easier to shift our attention away from the *target* of envy, and toward the *object* we envy, than it is to work to change the appraisal altogether. But this is speculative. I have also argued that attempts at nuanced emotion cultivation risk backfiring in ways we might want to avoid.

To me it seems equally plausible to think that working to change our emotional appraisal altogether, by concentrating on our partner or friend and the good things they experience, say, is likely to have greater impact than trying to fine-tune our envy. Even if, temperamentally, we find our emotions always route back toward ourselves, admiration is a feeling which motivates us to promote the good with other people. We can be involved indirectly while also feeling good. Admiration's positive tone might also aid our ongoing efforts of reappraisal as we are more likely to work at emotional change if the results leave us feeling better than before.

There may be a place for comparison and personal striving in life, but admiration and mutual support in promotion of goods, shared or otherwise, is central to our loving relationships. Wise lovers recognize that it is typically better to admire than to envy.[28]

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ENDNOTES

[1] Clearly these are very different kinds of relationship. I am considering them together here for several reasons. For one thing, I think our attitudes toward envy within them are quite similar: we are broadly wary of the emotion. One reason for that is that it seems in tension with norms of equal status. A second reason for treating these relationships together is because they have a range of overlapping shared features which makes definitive characterizations of the difference between friendship and romantic intimacy, say, quite hard to sustain (and perhaps undesirable to sustain c.f. Brake (2012).

[2] This is an assumption I will grant for the sake of thinking about envy, but in everyday life it is often unclear whether the objects of our envy are actually good or not. This lack of clarity adds a layer of complexity to our emotional evaluations and judgments of appropriateness. We might think that cases of uncertainty can exacerbate the potential harmful nature of negative emotions as we feel bad about lacking an object whose value is also in doubt.

[3] Which resembles a point Peter Goldie made about jealousy (Goldie, 2000, p. 235).

[4] Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for this journal who helped me see that in a previous version of this article I was presupposing a more adversarial approach to emotions and emotion cultivation. This section is a response to that worry.

[5] As, for example, I did in Brunning (2020).

[6] If we think that fittingness or appropriateness are best understood as evaluations of emotional *patterns*, then my remarks about the impact of envy, for example, can be understood as remarks about appropriateness in this sense.

[7] The cumulative impact of one person's fitting, or even appropriate, emotions within a relationship might be negative. At times we want people to react in emotionally unfitting ways, for example, with an excess of joy or pride at our achievements, or in inappropriate ways, for example, with indignation even when it would be prudent to stay tight-lipped. From the wider perspective of a life, and of someone learning to manage their feelings, there can be value in occasionally failing to feel what is appropriate to feel. Aside from solidarity with other emotionally imperfect beings these experiences have instrumental value in enabling us to experience, evaluate, and perhaps develop our capacities of *reactive* emotional management as we seek to massage our feelings, bite our tongue, strive to be tactful, or remove ourselves from situations. Coming to have these abilities is useful even if, ideally, we hope to seldom use them.

[8] An anonymous reviewer helped me appreciate this point and I am grateful to them for pushing me to clarify some of the issues around emotion cultivation and fittingness in this section.

[9] Although interesting to think about, I lack the space to discuss whether it is possible that two emotions could be fitting responses to the same situation under *exactly* the same description where that description is very fine-grained. Practically speaking, however, the evaluative aspects of our emotion appraisals might not be very fine-grained, and so we engage with situations under relatively general descriptions. This may be seen as a problem, and something that a supporter of the right mean approach to emotions would want us to avoid by developing the ability to be ever more discriminating in our emotional orientation to the world. I return to this worry below.

[10] This, I take it, is what Iris Murdoch is grappling with in her famous mother-in-law example in *The Sovereignty of Good* (Murdoch, 2001). There, the mother-in-law is able to view her daughter-in-law's behavior in a situation under two different sets of descriptions, or "normative epithets", and faces broader questions about which set to favor (Murdoch, 2001, p. 19). Although both seem fitting, we are encouraged to think it is morally better for her to favor the more generous description which views her daughter-in-law in a positive rather than negative light.

[11] For two different descriptions of this kind of move see Marilyn Frye (1983) on "loving" and "arrogant" perception and Vida Yao on "gracious" attention (Yao, 2020).

[12] This is not to deny that envy might still exist. It is simply removed to a different level as the "we" of the united-lovers is free to envy other individuals or couples.

[13] Thank you to Christopher Megone for raising this point in discussion.

[14] Indeed, Protasi cites approvingly Susan Fiske's characterization of human beings as "comparison machines" who continually compare themselves to others. But if Aaron Ben-Ze'ev is right that, in general, "emotional meaning is mainly comparative" (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000, p. 25), then the ecological argument would have us refraining from any emotional cultivation since addressing the underpinning of one emotion like envy—namely social comparisons—would risk shaping how we experience all other feelings.

[15] In section three, I suggested that our emotion cultivation may have to be more broad-brush than our processes of emotion evaluation, to avoid risks of overshooting the mark. Applied to this example, sometimes it will be less risky to try and avoid envy-eliciting situations, or to talk through one's feelings with a therapist, than it is to aim for the nuanced reappraisal of our emotions within specific situations.

[16] This might be so even if we think the motivational aspect of emulative envy where we feel the urgency of desire to move toward what we want means it has an emotional profile where pain and pleasure can be *mixed*, as in anger, rather than being wholly negative (Dow, 2011). The fact that anger can have a mixed profile does not count against its negative affective qualities.

[17] Here we might draw an analogy with debates around the status of deferring to others epistemically or morally (Davia & Palmira, 2015; Fricker, 2006; Hills, 2009). There, one family of views centers on the idea that deference to others in matters of knowledge or moral understanding is less valuable than arriving at our own position by thinking for ourselves. Although this discussion usually centers on testimony, that is, our receptiveness to what others might tell us, similar concerns apply to our emotional receptiveness. Acting on the basis of our envious sense of inferiority due to a lack is less good, on this view, than acting on our independently formed sense that a good is valuable and something we want to pursue. This is a kind of emotional deference, in which we accept the deliverances of our comparative emotions without independent thought about the value of their objects.

[18] In practice, working out what is going on in case like this will be challenging, since Bryn's love of Ava might be part of why her goals or goods come to matter to him in the first place, and so mean she is "close" to him as a point of comparison, and so make envy more likely. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me.

[19] I think these worries hold, in stronger or weaker form, on different approaches to agency. The general worry is that experiences of envy, especially if common, can interfere with someone acting as autonomously as they might like. If you think our agency can be outsourced to others, or does not require some degree of harmony between our motivational states and more reflective aspects of mind, you might find these remarks less convincing.

[20] The gendered inflection of envy is not discussed directly by Protasi. She explores the role of envy between the male and female characters Richard and Ellis in *Gray's Anatomy*, as well as the envy between the female friends Lenù and Lila in Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend* novels but in ways which do little to explore the connections between experiences of envy and gender norms. Indeed, she is clear that Richard experiences envy of different kinds in two major relationships with women who are successful in his field, but the fact that they are successful *women*, not just successful people, is not explored. These tensions are complex. On the one hand the fact that a man envies a woman may imply he regards her as sufficiently socially "close" for comparison, so envy is better than emotional disinterest; on the other hand, his envy may reveal an underlying gendered competitiveness or dissatisfaction with female excellence.

[21] She would also be unsatisfied with appeals to reciprocity of feeling. It feels wrong to assuage her concerns about his envying her by suggesting that she can just envy *Bryn* when he achieves good things.

[22] You might object, here, and think there is nothing wrong with the desire to be a role-model for someone you love. After all, we typically think this way about children and many friends also talk of each other fondly in these terms. But even if Ava was content to serve in this way, it seems more plausible to think she would rather be an object of fond admiration or respect, rather than the cause of someone's painful envy.

[23] Here I am sidestepping the discussion as to whether admiration is "globalist" in the sense that we admire a *person* rather than something they have done or some aspect of who they are (Archer & Matheson, 2023, pp. 20–23). For the most part I write as if admiration is not globalist, and we admire people in virtue of some achievement or trait. This aligns it more closely to typical experiences of emulative envy where we envy someone along some dimension or in virtue of a good they have. But if admiration can be global, and we just admire people, then this may be a further way that admiration, rather than emulative envy, is a form of attention to people rather than their goods or achievements and so may be a further way in which admiration is aligned with love or other kinds of care.

[24] If Bryn was to envy someone else and strive to become like *them*, his relationship with Ava might be unscathed, although she would still have reason to doubt whether he is related to good things in his own way and still experience loss as he changes over time.

[25] Above I suggested that a relationship with a sustained envier who is motivated to act to achieve what we have might be dissatisfying, insofar as we want to have a relationship with a distinct individual who is different from us. If admiration has the motivational profile Archer suggests, then the emotion is less prone to this worry.

[26] This has the implication that emulative envy might seem more reasonable in relationships where joint action is less common, perhaps like certain dynamics between "frenemies" (a word blending friend and enemy to refer to people who are rivals in some way). I return to the issue of competition below.

[27] This does not mean that those relationships cannot involve moments of competition, as when we play games or sports together. The point is simply that the conception of intimacy and relational equality which animates our understanding of close relationships is one that is non-competitive.

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