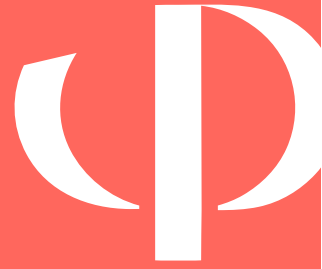


# Feminism and Philosophy



SPRING 2024

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APA STUDIES ON

# Feminism and Philosophy

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BARRETT EMERICK AND AMI HARBIN, CO-EDITORS

VOLUME 23 | NUMBER 2 | SPRING 2024

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## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Barrett Emerick

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE OF MARYLAND

Ami Harbin

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

In this issue readers will find two clusters followed by a standalone paper. The first cluster grew out of a dedicated panel at the Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy conference at Oakland University in 2022 and is a symposium honoring the groundbreaking work of Phyllis Rooney. The second cluster is a symposium critiquing *The Philosophy of Envy* by Sara Protasi. The standalone paper is by Alexis Shotwell. We are grateful to have the opportunity to help celebrate all of this important work in *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy*.

In "Metaphors of Reason and Changing Narratives in the History of Philosophy," Chloe Armstrong draws together efforts to expand the availability of under-accessed and marginalized texts from the history of seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophy with feminist work attending to gendered metaphors of reason in the history of philosophy, including those efforts from Phyllis Rooney, Genevieve Lloyd, and others. Armstrong argues that canon expansion projects offer opportunities to critically engage metaphors of reason from historical perspectives. She surveys three authors, Christine de Pizan, Margaret Cavendish, and Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz, to demonstrate how their accounts provide resources for contesting dominant conceptions of reason in the history of philosophy.

In "Feminist Epistemology and Social Epistemology: Another Uneasy Alliance," Michael Doan considers Rooney's 2003 chapter, "Feminist Epistemology and Naturalized Epistemology: An Uneasy Alliance," and takes guidance from Rooney's critique of naturalized epistemology in pursuing his own analysis of another uneasy alliance: feminist epistemology and social epistemology. Investigating some of the background assumptions at work in prominent conceptions of social epistemology, Doan considers recent analyses of *epistemic bubbles* to ask how closely such analyses are aligned with ongoing research in feminist epistemology.

In "On the Necessity of Embodiment for Reasoning," Heather Douglas builds on Rooney's and others' efforts to shift from reason to *reasoning*, returning to the work of Rudolph

Carnap and John Dewey in the 1930s. Douglas discusses their understandings of reasoning, in part to show the necessity of embodiment for reasoning, and to highlight how reasoning is not just about solving problems, but also detecting and delineating them. Douglas concludes with a reflection on Artificial General Intelligence, and whether—keeping in mind the lessons from Dewey, Carnap, and Rooney—we should expect any data processing system to be able to detect problems, and thereby to be capable of that aspect of reasoning, on its own.

In "Reasoning Well: A Response to Armstrong, Doan, and Douglas," Phyllis Rooney responds to the contributions from the other authors in the collection, highlighting in particular the throughlines of thematic connection among the papers, including centrally their reflections on uneasy alliances, what should be the starting points for reasoning, and what it means to reason well collaboratively.

In "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Envy (Sometimes)," Sara Protasi begins by giving a precis of her book *The Philosophy of Envy*, summarizing some of her motivation in writing, and the argumentative structure of the book. She notes that one aim of this work is to better understand what envy is so that "we can make more nuanced assessments of its value, and we can develop more efficacious strategies to cope with or inhibit its detrimental features, as well as to harness its motivational and epistemic power." Later, she responds to the contributions from Chaplin, Osler, and Tanesini.

In "How Competitive Can Virtuous Envy Be?" Rosalind Chaplin focuses on and unpacks the competitive nature of envy. Specifically, she argues for an expansion on Protasi's view, and that what Protasi calls "emulative envy" can be adversarial while remaining both nonvicious and nonhostile.

In "Self-Envy (or Envy Actually)," Lucy Osler explores some of the ways in which someone can be envious, not of other people, but of other versions of themselves. For instance, someone might envy their past or future self, or an imagined version of themselves. This fact helps us to recognize another way in which envy and imagination might play a role in someone's life.

In "Emulative Trait Envy Is Not a Virtue," Alessandra Tanesini argues that Protasi's account of emulative envy is significantly different than admiration. As a result, we have good reason for resisting Protasi's claim that emulative envy can be virtuous.

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In a final, standalone paper for the issue, "Challenging Straightness," Alexis Shotwell argues that all those who care about human well-being should be working against straightness, in the sense of dismantling it as one among many social forces that harm people. Shotwell articulates the senses in which those who benefit from straightness ought to betray it, and those who are oppressed by straightness ought to work together to abolish, dismantle, or destroy it. She outlines six approaches to targeting the ways straightness harms and benefits people, and underscores collective practices of embodying these practices inspired in part by the care work of activists in the context of AIDS.

*Editor's note: In Volume 23, no. 1 of this publication, please note the following addition to page 25 of Miranda Young's article, "Narrative Care: A Political Method of Survivor Self-Making and Communal Critique":*

Young adds that the concern she develops is indebted to Kelly Gawel's work. Gawel critiques the naturalization of caring affects and dispositions in care ethics by examining Saidiya Hartman's critique of the role that white empathy played in garnering moral outrage against slavery. See Kelly Gawel, "Radical Care: Seeking New and More Possible Meetings in the Shadows of Structural Violence," *Krisis* 43, no. 1 (2023).

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## ABOUT APA STUDIES ON FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY

*APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy* is sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of Women and Gender. The newsletter is designed to provide an introduction to recent philosophical work that addresses issues of gender. None of the varied philosophical views presented by authors of *APA Studies* articles necessarily reflect the views of any or all of the members of the Committee on the Status of Women and Gender, including the editor(s) of the newsletter, nor does the committee advocate any particular type of feminist philosophy. We advocate only that serious philosophical attention be given to issues of gender and that claims of gender bias in philosophy receive full and fair consideration.

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## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

**1. Purpose:** The purpose of *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy* is to publish information about the status of women in philosophy and to make the resources of feminist philosophy more widely available. *APA Studies on Feminism and Philosophy* contains discussions of recent developments in feminist philosophy and related work in other disciplines, suggestions for eliminating gender bias in the traditional philosophy curriculum, and reflections on feminist pedagogy. It also informs the profession about

the work of the APA Committee on the Status of Women and Gender. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be around ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA guidelines for gender-neutral language. Please submit essays electronically to the editor. All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. References should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

**2. Where to Send Things:** Please send all articles, comments, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editors: Ami Harbin, Oakland University, at [aharbin@oakland.edu](mailto:aharbin@oakland.edu), and Barrett Emerick, St. Mary's College, at [bmemerick@smcm.edu](mailto:bmemerick@smcm.edu).

**3. Submission Deadlines:** Submissions for spring issues are due by the preceding November 1; submissions for fall issues are due by the preceding February 1.

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## ARTICLES

### *Metaphors of Reason and Changing Narratives in the History of Philosophy*

Chloe Armstrong  
LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY

In this discussion I draw together two important movements in the study of history of philosophy. First, I focus on efforts to expand the available texts, narratives, and topics in the history of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy. The aims and outcomes of such projects vary—from circulating works by marginalized authors to detailing intersecting narratives.<sup>1</sup> I examine canon expansion through a different lens, specifically characterizations of reason and argumentation found in non-canonical texts. The second strand of research comes from feminist work that attends to gendered *metaphors* of reason in the history of philosophy. Scholars such as Atherton (1993), Bordo (1987), Lloyd (2002), Rooney (1991), and Schiebinger (1991) trace intellectual developments and influences of such metaphors. Rooney and Lloyd argue that gendered metaphors and imagery of reason maintain conceptual dichotomies between reason and unreason, masculine and feminine, and dynamics of embattlement and domination. These dichotomies have a lasting impact on available understandings of reason and reasoners and, in some cases, shape participation in philosophy insofar as it is a discipline centered around reason.<sup>2</sup> Lloyd emphasizes that "The maleness of the Man of Reason is no superficial linguistic bias. It lies deep in our philosophical tradition."<sup>3</sup> However, in the context of canon reformation, "our philosophical tradition" is up for discussion and revision, reinvigorating questions about the availability of gendered metaphors of reason in history of philosophy extending to today.

I argue that canon expansion projects offer opportunities to critically engage metaphors of reason and reasoning from historical perspectives, as well as contemporary narratives about history. However, accounts of metaphorical meaning from philosophy and cognitive science suggest that

metaphors can convey meaning and facilitate understanding even when they draw on contingent associations and false assumptions. For example, metaphors of war are meaningfully used in cancer treatment contexts in the absence of war or battle experiences—and in some instances even in virtue of misconceptions about battle.<sup>4</sup> I draw the initial conclusion that ongoing attention should be paid to the available associations used to interpret metaphors in their original contexts, and in the context of contemporary studies of the history of philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

I focus on interactionist accounts of metaphor to explain why metaphors present distinctive interpretive challenges for texts in the history of philosophy.<sup>6</sup> These same features of metaphor can be formed by or contribute to gender binaries and dynamics, a point argued for in Phyllis Rooney’s “Gendered Reason: Sex Metaphor and Conceptions of Reason” (1991). I turn to Rooney’s treatment of gendered metaphors of reason before examining how the works of non-canonical authors offer resources for acknowledging and critically engaging gendered metaphors of reason in historical narratives. I survey three authors: Christine de Pizan (1364–1430, an Italian-born philosopher that spent most of her life in France), Margaret Cavendish (1623–1673, an English philosopher and royalist living abroad during the English Civil War), and Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz (1648–1695, a Catholic philosopher in Mexico City). From these authors, I consider depictions of reason as a forge refining gold, a spade to prepare the foundation of a city, a mirror that reflects reality, a philosophical interlocutor, an architect to plan and initiate tasks, and a sword. These metaphors contrast characterizations of reason as a dominant and embattled authority warring against other parts of the mind. Thus, I argue that metaphors of reason are elements of canon expansion projects worthy of attention, both in service of ongoing efforts to render fuller accounts of the history of philosophy, and to support strategies to reflect on gendered metaphors of reason in historical narratives. Before turning to those considerations, I discuss reason, and the works of Pizan, Cavendish, and Cruz, in the context of canon expansion.

## 1. REASON, DISAPPEARING INK, AND CANON REVISION

In “Cutting Through the Veil of Ignorance: Rewriting the History of Philosophy,” Hagengruber notes that our knowledge of the history of philosophy is “always partial. . . . Each generation only partially knows its own tradition because each see the history of philosophy as framed by contemporary categories, philosophical as well as cultural. The history of philosophy as a whole is thus a record of inclusions and exclusions, of forgetting and rediscovering.”<sup>7</sup> Histories are partial when they are incomplete. However, they are also partial when they are constructed out of the affinities of those that do the constructing.<sup>8</sup> Hagengruber describes history of philosophy as a record of inclusions and exclusions, which applies to who’s in and who’s out in the narratives, as well as who is in or out of philosophical institutions. Examining those mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion offers up complex histories of participation. For example, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, although many universities did

not admit women, universities were not the sole or central organizations supporting philosophy. Nor does philosophy have to be done in a university context to be taken to be canonical today—Descartes was not a professor by trade, nor was Leibniz. In Europe, philosophizing was happening in monasteries and convents, private salons, through pamphlets, public sermons, intellectual societies and academies, philosophical networks of correspondence via letters, networks of care, and royal courts.<sup>9</sup> These different contexts offered opportunities for participation beyond universities, though that participation is not always reflected in traditional philosophical canons (and patterns of participation vary). O’Neill describes the phenomenon of “disappearing ink” to characterize many works of philosophers available at the time but excluded from philosophical study today (“extant but lost”).<sup>10</sup> Pizan, Cavendish, and Cruz are all examples of prolific thinkers whose work was not included, until more recently, in Anglo-history-narratives.<sup>11</sup> I have selected these figures for the purpose of this discussion because they have been marginalized from traditional philosophy canons in English despite participating in philosophical discussions of their time, their texts appear in many contemporary canon expansion projects, and each offers philosophical theories of reason alongside metaphors of reason.

More generally, reason is likely to remain a central theme across proliferating narratives in early modern canons. Shapiro characterizes a canon as “a *causal account* of the intellectual historical development of philosophy around answers to a set of *philosophical questions* that are centrally constitutive of the discipline presented in a set of important distinctively *philosophical works*.”<sup>12</sup> Canon shifts are thus changes to the questions, causal story, and works included in a canon. Shapiro considers two examples of potential shifts, first, understanding early modern philosophy within the history of science, and second, framing the canon using themes of “consciousness, ownership of thought, rationality, education, and habit.”<sup>13</sup> Both contexts would likely center discussions of reason and rationality, which supports ongoing attention to metaphors of reason in historical narratives. I focus on metaphors evoked to describe and characterize reason, and not directly on theories of reason, which have received more attention in the secondary literature. Insights from philosophical theories of metaphor recommend examining metaphors of reason alongside theoretical claims about reason and for their own sake. To appreciate why, I turn to details of cognitive processing of metaphors next.

## 2. METAPHOR

Metaphor is a linguistic and cognitive phenomenon in which one subject is portrayed and understood through another, signaled by non-literal language, for example:

- a. The chair plowed through the meeting agenda.<sup>14</sup>

In this example a primary subject (the chair’s behavior at a meeting) is understood through another subject (plowing)—the secondary subject. Characteristics associated with the secondary subject are applied to the primary subject—e.g., features of plowing such as aggressively moving through a medium (e.g., soil) with speed and force can be applied

to the behavior of the chair working through the agenda—perhaps with speed and persistent attention to tasks. The aspects of metaphors important for this discussion are that they are interactive, need not draw on accurate information or descriptions to be effective, and can augment understanding of both the primary and secondary subjects. I will briefly say more about each of these features.

According to Black’s interaction account of metaphor, the primary and secondary subjects in metaphors are active together (interact) at multiple levels, influencing how metaphors operate in cognition:

Suppose I look at the night sky through a piece of heavily smoked glass on which certain lines have been left clear. Then I shall see only the stars that can be made to lie on the lines previously prepared upon the screen, and the stars I do see will be seen as organized by the screen’s structure. We can think of a metaphor as such a screen and the system of “associated commonplaces” of the focal word as the network of lines upon the screen. We can say that the primary subject is “seen through” the metaphorical expression.<sup>15</sup>

The clear lines on a lens (in Black’s metaphor about metaphor) are the properties or relations raised to salience by the secondary subject that are then used to understand features or relations of the primary (the stars). Which features or relations of the secondary subject become salient is responsive to which primary subject it is paired with.<sup>16</sup> Using Black’s metaphor, the slits in the lens will change depending on what is being viewed (the stars in the sky, versus the top of a mountain). Moreover, metaphors are conceptually productive and generative: “[t]he metaphor selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the primary subject by implying statements about it that normally apply to the secondary subject.”<sup>17</sup> Thus a. *the chair plowed through the meeting agenda* raises to salience aggressively moving through a medium, which can yield further observations about the chair’s behavior in relation to the agenda—for example, that the chair is addressing daunting tasks which require further working and manipulation to be productive (as tough soil might).

Black refers to the salient features of a secondary subject as a “system of associated commonplaces.”<sup>18</sup> Surprisingly, the features or relations made salient by the secondary subject need not be true of that subject, just *available* conceptually to the person cognizing the metaphor. Thus, metaphors of war in discussions of arguments (winning an argument, defending or attacking a position, entrenched views, shooting down points, going after fatal flaws)<sup>19</sup> or in discussions of cancer (battling cancer, winning the fight against cancer) are comprehensible without familiarity with, or accurate beliefs about, war. Wackers and Plug observe that battle metaphors for cancer encourage the idea that losing a battle is the result of a failure of effort<sup>20</sup> even though many wars are lost despite ample effort. Salient features for metaphorical meaning do not have to be true, but available to the person interpreting the metaphor.

Metaphors can have distorting cognitive effects when the associations are false, but also when aspects true of the subjects are highlighted at the expense of other relevant features. For example, consider the claim, b. *My neighborhood is a food desert*. “Food deserts” are areas with limited access to nutritional food, especially fresh produce. This phrase offers a metaphor, characterizing neighborhood food access through features of a desert. This term has been criticized for characterizing food access in neighborhoods (the primary subject) as morally neutral geological phenomena (desert), which suppresses economic and political factors in food access.<sup>21</sup> This metaphor is also criticized for the depiction of the secondary subject—deserts—as places with limited resources despite creatures and cultures that find ample nourishment in deserts.<sup>22</sup> This latter criticism exemplifies how metaphors shape how we think about secondary subjects too: specific aspect of deserts (limited water sources) are emphasized and abstracted to something more general (limited access to resources). In Black’s metaphor, the clear slit in the lens not only determines how we view the stars, but how we view the lens itself over repeated viewings—in some cases distorting our understanding of it.

Metaphors present unique challenges for studying historical texts because systems of associated commonplaces will be available to some readers and audiences but not others—especially when hundreds (or more) of years separate them. Moreover, we should distinguish how a metaphor functions in its original context(s), and how it might function in contemporary ones as associated commonplaces shift or are missing. Thus, canon-reformation projects are relevant both for interpreting and understanding metaphors in their original time and places as more and different texts are included, and thinking about how those metaphors shape contemporary thinkers as they read and engage the canon. While philosophers often offer definitions, examples, explanations, and arguments for their accounts of reason, they do not unpack the metaphors deployed in describing reason and reasoning as often.

There is a further problem, however, because associated commonplaces can draw on persistent and oppressive dynamics. Rooney argues that in the history of Western philosophy, reason is regularly portrayed via images and metaphors that exclude or derogate an element cast as female and feminine while exalting male and masculine elements.<sup>23</sup> Examples include Aristotle’s description of the rational and irrational parts of the soul as husband and wife, Augustine’s association of man with reason and women with reasonable appetite, Kant’s description of lapses in reason in terms of the feminine charms of the senses, and Locke’s warning of the misleading influence of eloquence over judgment cast as the beauty of “the fair sex.”<sup>24</sup> The relevant patterns regarding gendered metaphors of reason include a set of binary nodes in opposition, male and female, with a relationship between those two nodes, mediated by notions of marriage, sexual reproduction, romantic desire, biological sex, or binary gender.<sup>25</sup> The dynamic between these nodes is then further associated with reason: reason is aligned with a male node, and unreason with a female node. The “proper” relation between the male and female nodes occurs when the male node is the locus of activity,

control, and authority. Lapses in reason are associated with activity of the female node—wily charms, contrary impulses, or shadowy interference. The activity of reason when properly functioning includes the denigration, extrusion, domination, or control of the female node, with related images of battle or struggle.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. IMPACTS OF GENDERED METAPHORS OF REASON

Rooney draws our attention to several problematic aspects of metaphors of reason that use oppositional dynamics between binaries to articulate the proper functioning of reason. First, it encourages a conception of reason as a unified faculty in opposition to other faculties, threatened by the operations of unreason, with proper functioning through domination. The distortion of these concepts construes reason as a unified, dominant, oppositional, sovereign, faculty of thought and action. There is an accuracy concern about this view (though that is not Rooney's concern specifically) as well as an epistemic concern that metaphors are not a reliable means to encode associations.<sup>27</sup> These presuppositions are cognitively limiting precisely because metaphors draw on associated commonplaces, and selectively reorganize our understanding of primary and secondary subjects. Without assurances that these mechanisms offer reliable processes for cognition, or are beneficial or just, a unified dominating authority should not be built into a conception of reason in virtue of the available metaphors.<sup>28</sup> If metaphors shape how we deploy concepts, and what inferences we are likely to make in connection to those concepts, metaphors have an impact on our cognition.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Rooney notes that some metaphors become root metaphors—pervasive and difficult to recognize, but fecund in generating many instances of metaphors of their type.<sup>30</sup> She argues that gendered metaphors of reason are root metaphors, in philosophy, where reason and reasoning is a central organizing activity. This renders gendered metaphors and the conceptions of reason especially pressing.<sup>31</sup>

However, tracing the impact of a metaphor is challenging and complex, especially historical contexts. For example, Lennon connects Malebranche and Arnaud's derogatory use of the term *oracle* (against one another) to changing conceptions of reason, "the charge of being an oracle . . . is the charge of failing to fulfil the demands of the seventeenth century's new conception of reason."<sup>32</sup> The new Cartesian conception of reason is characterized by applying one's intellect to discover self-evident truths. Framing Lennon's observations in terms of our discussion of metaphor, the associated commonplaces of *oracle* include ambiguity, conveying but not generating knowledge, and femininity. *Oracle* knowledge is cast as feminine because historically women were oracles (e.g., Delphic oracles) and oracular knowledge was associated with witchcraft.<sup>33</sup> However, Lennon notes that it is difficult to assess the impact of these associations on philosophers that deployed these terms.<sup>34</sup> Instead, Lennon identifies access to scientific societies and experimental equipment and training, and literacy as stronger factors shaping participation in philosophical discussion at the time. The operation of this metaphor is clear, but the impact less so.<sup>35</sup>

Rooney makes a case for the contemporary impact of gendered metaphors on conceptions of reason and gender. In addition to portraying reason as unified, dominating, embattled authority under threat from other faculties, metaphorical implementation of gender binaries renders misogynistic inferences more available, blurring the "literal and metaphorical claims about women and rationality" where "misogynistic views about women's (literal) lesser rationality are adopted more easily or readily."<sup>36</sup> This influences how philosophers conceive of their minds when doing philosophy:

We need to be clear about how *gender* is working in these recurring gender/battle images. There are two gender battles at issue. The more immediate textual one is not a battle between men (or masculinity) and women (or femininity), but the battle *within men* between their "masculine" rational aspects or parts and their "feminine" irrational aspects or parts. It is the defensive struggle within men against what they perceive or construct as inferior "feminine" tendencies within themselves. To the extent that women might also aspire to the "man of reason" ideal, they too, presumably, would battle their "feminine" aspects, though, even in sexism-infused cultural contexts, these metaphors might not work in quite the same way for them.<sup>37</sup>

What can be done in response to root gender metaphors of reason? It is tempting to point to personifications of virtue, reason, the liberal arts, and philosophy as women (either in word or image) as instances that counter the association of women and unreason.<sup>38</sup> However, Rooney notes that such images not only fail to address gendered metaphors of reason, but they also bolster them when, for example, mother nature is the "passive objects of male vision" and "we see where the voice of power and reason is located."<sup>39</sup> Such personifications do not portray women as authoritative reasoners. Moreover, theoretical accounts of reason do not automatically mitigate the associated commonplaces of metaphors of reason, for example,

Hume's position cannot be seen to "solve" many of the central concerns raised in this paper. There is still a strict division between reason and the passions, and they still function in a type of opposition or battle. And he does not explicitly dissociate reason from maleness and the passions from femaleness. To suggest that Hume solves the gender issue here is akin to suggesting that feminism is simply about the battle over who gets to "wear the trousers" in the household!"<sup>40</sup>

However, there are other strategies for critically engaging metaphors, and I will next discuss how canon expansion projects can provide resources to support those strategies.

### 4. LESSONS FOR AND FROM HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

I began this discussion by considering the contours of inclusion and exclusion in participation in seventeenth- and

eighteenth-century philosophy and philosophy canons. Rooney notes that the exclusion of women, and othering-patterns of inclusion, are written into tradition:

There is a special way in which the exclusion of women is written into our traditional texts in philosophy, where that tradition is projected as essentially a conversation among men. We can ask why a particular philosopher chose the sex metaphor that he did, a question that looms large with the repeated use of such a metaphor. We recall Black's claim that a metaphor works if there is a "system of associated commonplaces" (about a secondary domain) share among writer and readers, where "the important thing for the metaphor's effectiveness is not that the commonplaces shall be true, but that they shall be readily and freely evoked." The metaphors under discussion present women or the "feminine" as the other of reason, and the other of philosophical discourse.<sup>41</sup>

At least one of the factors is the available texts and that narratives built from them. She notes that "the continuing feminist struggle to create a world that encourages women to their full expression in words and action must be supported by nothing short of the remythologizing of voice and agency and the remythologizing of reason, emotion, intuition, and nature."<sup>42</sup> I submit that canon reformation and the expansion of available texts offer resources remythologize voice, agency, reason, emotion, intuition, and nature—both in terms of the texts and narratives.

One step Rooney recommends towards "uprooting" some of these metaphors requires recognizing and analyzing them, their influence, and offering alternatives.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, I have excerpted texts from three philosophers outside the Anglo-American canon that offer literal and figurative alternative views to reason as a warring dominating authority. First, Pizan introduces the metaphor of a forge refining precious gold to grapple with the hostile and gendered aspects of philosophical discourse. She also offers several different metaphors for reason, including a personification of reason as a woman that is neither passive nor objectified. She presents a constructive picture of rational inquiry, identifying reason as an arbiter of truth but not a dominant authority, as she builds a city for and of ladies. The imagery of building and architecture reappears in Cavendish's account of the rational aspects of matter. I place this metaphor in conversation both with other thinkers of her time (Descartes and More), and contemporary metaphors of philosophical discourse and argumentation as engineering (MacLachlan). Lastly, I include some of Cruz's discussion of discursive reason as a sword, alongside her emphasis on empirical applications of reasoning in the kitchen (and elsewhere). Cruz offers a view of reason as a source of intervention and knowledge without dominating authority, as well as an endorsement in the use of metaphor to aid understanding.

#### 4.1 CHRISTINE DE PIZAN<sup>44</sup>

Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* begins with despair. In the narrative, Christine is reading the work of philosophers

(especially Aristotle) and grappling with how claims about women's limited capacity for rationality and virtue undermines her experience of herself and her relation to philosophers. She emphasizes how incongruent their claims are, despite their authority, with her own experiences, and wonders why God made her a woman, if what these authors say about women is true. Amidst this despair, a woman—Lady Reason—appears to Christine holding a mirror which reflects the nature and measure of anything in its surface. She offers a metaphor for philosophical discourse that highlights beneficial outcomes of hostile disagreement:

Have you forgotten that it is in the furnace<sup>45</sup> that gold is refined, increasing in value the more it is beaten and fashioned into different shapes? Don't you know that it's the very finest things which are the subject of the most intense discussion? Now, if you turn your mind to the very highest realm of all, the realm of abstract ideas, think for a moment whether or not those philosophers whose views against women you've been citing have ever been proven wrong. In fact, they are all constantly correcting each other's opinions, as you yourself should know from reading Aristotle's *Metaphysics* where he discusses and refutes both their views and those of Plato and other philosophers."<sup>46</sup>

Lady Reason emphasizes that philosophers are often proven wrong, and disagreement is a persistent means of valuing the subjects of debate and debaters. Lady Reason, Lady Rectitude, and Lady Justice appear to Christine and explain that they will help her to build a place for women—a city of ladies. The city is inhabited by mythologized and historical women and their many intellectual contributions and achievements. Throughout the building of the city, Christine discusses and contests various philosophical claims about women. Lady Reason helps Christine build the foundation and moat, and rectitude and justice complete the houses and fill the city with women.

In this vignette, reason, rationality, and argumentation receive various treatments. Reason as a virtue is personified as a woman, not as the object of male agency and authority, but instead in dialogue with Christine and other women, and a source of wisdom. Reason also possesses a mirror that reflects the natures of things, confirming notions of reason as an arbiter of truth.<sup>47</sup> Later, intellect is described as a tool or a spade for laying a foundation for a building. It thus offers a diverse range of images and functions to consider in connection with reasoning.

Lady Reason introduces a metaphor for philosophical discourse to reframe the negative aspects and benefits of discourse, debate, and hostility. The forge metaphor appears in an earlier work, *The Romance of the Rose* (written by multiple authors 1230–1310), in which nature—personified as a woman—forges living creatures to counteract death.<sup>48</sup> In *City of Ladies*, Lady Reason introduces the forge as a place where glory is secured, and refined, by engaging in and being the subject of debate. Imagery of gold being *beaten* and *fashioned* replaces notions of a battle with the productive context of a forge. This metaphor also includes male associations via heat-references—in accordance with

Galenic theory of physiology in which men are hot and women are cold.<sup>49</sup> Thus this metaphor not only reframes hostile philosophical discourse as something productive that bestows value, but also casts it as a more specific example of discourse—gendered discourse. Later in the discussion, Christine unpacks this metaphor:

I began to excavate and dig out the earth with the spade of my intelligence, just as she had directed me to do. The first fruit of my labors was this: 'My lady, I'm remembering that image of gold being refined in the furnace that you used before to symbolize the way many male writers have launched a full-scale attack on the ways of women. I take this image to mean that the more women are criticized, the more it redounds to their glory.<sup>50</sup>

This metaphor raises to salience gender-related concepts ("many male writers")—as well as notions of embattlement ("full-scale attack")—for the purpose of helping Christine to cast this discourse as male and while also offering alternative methods of inquiry and exploration through the building of a city and populating it. The imagery of building and architecture also appears in the work of Margaret Cavendish.

#### 4.2 MARGARET CAVENDISH

In 1666, Cavendish published a philosophical treatise, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, alongside a work of utopian fiction, *Description of a New World Called the Blazing World*. In *Observations*, Cavendish describes nature as both material and having rational capacities.<sup>51</sup> Rational aspects of matter are thoroughly mixed with other animate and inanimate aspects of matter, so that every piece of matter has rational elements alongside sensory and inanimate ones. To explain the relation that they have to one another and the role they play in explaining the behavior of matter, she introduces imagery of architects, laborers, and materials:

as in the exstruction of a house there is first required an architect or surveyor, who orders and designs the building, and puts the laborer's to work; next the laborer's or workmen themselves; and lastly the materials of which the house is built: so the rational part in the framing of natural effects, is, as it were, the surveyor or architect; the sensitive, the laboring or working part; and the inanimate, the materials: and all these degrees are necessarily required in every composed action of nature.<sup>52</sup>

The rational aspects of matter, as architects instigate and plan behaviors of matter ("orders and designs the building") and initiate the actions of the sensitive parts of matter ("puts it to work"). According to Cavendish, all aspects of nature have this rational component. As a proponent of monarchy, she often advocates for unified authority and central political power—so it is noteworthy here that though the rational aspects of matter are *in charge*, she does not offer a metaphor of sovereignty.

Cavendish is not the only philosopher in this period to offer architectural metaphors of rationality—Descartes does so

in "Discourse on Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking for Truth in the Sciences" to emphasize the importance of engineering houses and cities (knowledge) as they grow. This can be integrated with other philosophers of the time that draw on the metaphor of rationality as an architect or surveyor—planning and intervening. Henry More also depicts reason as an architect "in every particular world, such as man is especially, his own soul is the peculiar and most perfective architect thereof, as the soul of the world is of it."<sup>53</sup> Together these texts form potential contrasts—different applications of the image of the architect to rational degrees of all matter, knowledge, and the human soul. Moreover, this metaphor can be connected to contemporary discussions of philosophical discourse. MacLachlan writes,

Good philosophical critique pushes an argument to the point it collapses, but battle is not the only or the most apt image for what we are doing: rigorous philosophers are more like engineers, stress-testing one another's systems for the friendly, collaborative purpose of ensuring their stability for common usage. In this metaphor, drawing on rudeness rather than rationality for strategic points is akin to dropping dynamite in order to claim a building's not up to code.<sup>54</sup>

In discussing practices of rudeness and criticism in philosophy, MacLachlan devises an engineering metaphor for philosophical activity to supplant battle imagery. She points to the benefit of reflecting on that imagery: "it invites us to do conceptual work, creating new metaphors and paradigms for our most basic activities, such as the engineering stress-testing metaphor for argument critique (rather than combative warfare)."<sup>55</sup> Connecting MacLachlan's work to Pizan's and Cavendish's not only offers alternative narratives regarding metaphors of reason and modes of philosophical arguments to gendered metaphors of reason and embattlement, but it also invites reflection on our conceptions of rationality and reason.

#### 4.3 SOR JUANA INÉS DE LA CRUZ

Cruz offers shifting metaphors of reason and understanding in her works, with a recurring image of a sword. In her poem "Let us Pretend I am Happy" she explains that reason is a sword that protects its wielder from its edge: "Discursive reason is a sword/quite effective at both ends:/with the point of the blade it kills/the pommel on the hilt protects."<sup>56</sup> In other places she highlights defensive and aggressive applications of reason via sword imagery, that warns of harms to the wielder: "To such men, I repeat, study does harm, because it is like putting a sword in the hands of a madman: though the sword be the noblest of instruments for defense, in his hands it becomes his own death and that of many others. . ."<sup>57</sup> In fact, arguments were used to publicly criticize and admonish Cruz by Church authorities. Cruz and Pizan offer metaphors to characterize the harms and benefits of reason and discourse. Cruz advocates for reasoning and philosophizing about everyday and familiar objects, including chemistry in the kitchen:

Well, and what then shall I tell you, my Lady, of the secrets of nature that I have learned while cooking?



I observe that an egg becomes solid and cooks in butter or oil, and on the contrary that it dissolves in sugar syrup. . . . But in truth, my Lady, what can we women know, save philosophies of the kitchen? It was well put by Lupercio Leonardo that one can philosophize quite well while preparing supper. I often say, when I make these little observations, "Had Aristotle cooked, he would have written a great deal more."<sup>58</sup>

Mirroring her emphasis on the application of reason across contexts and subjects, she emphasizes the benefits of metaphor in aiding understanding, in appealing to one subject to understand another:

I can say with certainty that what I do not understand in one author on a certain subject, I usually understand in another author who treats what appears to be a very distant subject. And in turn these very authors, once understood, can unlock the metaphorical examples employed in still other arts: as when the logicians say, to compare whether terms are equal, that the middle term is to the major and minor terms as a measuring rod is to two distant bodies; or that the argument of the logician moves like a straight line by the shortest path, while that of the rhetorician moves like a curved line by the longest path, but both end at last at the same point; or when it is said that the Expositors are like an open hand, while the Scholastics are like a closed fist.<sup>59</sup>

Cruz's emphasis on the insightful aspects of metaphor contrasts with some of her contemporaries, including Cavendish, who offer critical comments on metaphorical and figurative language in natural philosophy. For example, Cavendish criticizes both Van Helmont's use of metaphor, and the specifics of his metaphor for chemical change "[Van Helmont] speaks of the *Vertues and Properties that stick fast in the bosom of Nature*, which I conceive to be a Metaphorical expression; although I think it best to avoid Metaphorical, simlizing, and improper expressions in Natural Philosophy, as much as one can. . . . But to speak properly, there is not any thing that sticks fast in the bosom of Nature, for Nature is in a perpetual motion."<sup>60</sup> Cavendish criticizes metaphors generally for being inexact, however, criticizes the aptness of this particular metaphor, as nothing would "stick fast in the bosom of Nature" according to her account of nature and natural change.<sup>61</sup> Cruz emphasizes the generative aspect of metaphor in aiding understanding, while Cavendish cautions against using metaphor to express clear ideas. Cruz's writings offer the opportunity to explore different facets of her metaphors for discursive reason (a sword that protects but in the wrong hands can be destructive for the wielder), her description of reason in the kitchen, and lauding metaphors as means of understanding.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Cruz's metaphor of reason as a sword focuses attention on the benefits and harms that reason can bestow on the wielder, and though a sword is a battle weapon, warring parts of the mind are not part of this imagery. Cruz, like

Pizan, considers the benefits and harms of reasoning and discursive debate, but also the generative capacity of metaphors in aiding understanding. Pizan offers a gendered metaphor for philosophical debate, via forge imagery, as part of a commentary on the status of women. Pizan's imagery of reason personified as an authoritative source of wisdom, cast as mirror, and as a spade, offers alternatives to battle metaphors, and contributes to an originating conception of reasoning. Images of fabricating, building, and architects reoccur in Cavendish's account of the rational aspects of matter too, offering additional points of connection to planning and engineering imagery from Descartes, More, and MacLachlan. Extensions of and changes to gendered metaphors and embattlement imagery, alternatives to gendered metaphors, the aptness of specific metaphors, and the role of metaphors in philosophizing appear in the texts I have included above. A fuller analysis of the important connections and differences among these examples contextualized in the corpus of works by these authors is something I have not addressed here.

I have emphasized how, according to interactionist accounts of metaphor, metaphors shift in response to primary-secondary subject pairing, shape how both the primary and secondary subjects are understood, and can encode false, contingent, or partial features of secondary subjects in service of yielding insights about the primary subject. Through these features, metaphors have the capacity to onboard assumptions about reasoning—and the associated imagery (including gender)—that are unintended, limited, and unacknowledged. Rooney (1991) focuses on establishing patterns of gendered metaphors of reason and their impact on inquiry. Through texts from canon reformation and new narrative projects, I have examined metaphors of reason as distinct from their theoretical counterparts in discussions of reason and rationality, offered a range of metaphors of reason to highlight differences in metaphorical characterizations of reason, and traced metaphors and images—such as forges, architects, and engineers—thematically across texts and time periods. Canon-reformation projects contribute to efforts to expose and engage metaphors of reason that draw on embattled binaries, and I sketch some directions from Pizan, Cavendish, and Cruz. The central lesson I draw from Rooney's work is that metaphors should remain an ongoing part of how we conceive of, and reconceive, historical philosophy narratives as they shape and are a part of the legacies of reason and reasoners.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Phyllis Rooney, Ericka Tucker, Mark Phelan, Sydney Keough, Javiera Perez Gomez, Yoon Choi, Jennifer Hockenbery, Karen Carr, Betsy Schlabach, and Monica Rico for feedback at earlier stages of this project. This work also benefited from fellow panelists Michael Doan and Heather Douglas, organizers, and participants at the 2022 CSWIP meeting: *Aftermath*, and discussion at the Wisconsin Philosophical Association 2023 meeting at Marquette University.

## NOTES

1. For example, Project Vox offers online resources "to highlight philosophical works from marginalized individuals traditionally excluded from the philosophical cannon." In 2019 the American Philosophical Association Blog spotlighted Ruth Boeker's syllabus "The Human Mind in Early Modern Philosophy" featuring woman

- philosophers and letter correspondences, and pedagogical and philosophical collaboration. Lisa Shapiro and Marcy Lascano's (2021) anthology of early modern philosophy makes accessible a wide range of non-canonical European philosophers, including Aton Amo, Margaret Cavendish, Anne Conway, Anna Maria van Schurman, Francis Hutcheson, and Émilie du Châtelet. These efforts diversify the range of thinkers and texts beyond those of Descartes, Locke, Hume, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant. The detailed aims and outcomes of each of the projects differ. Project Vox focuses on works of marginalized authors, while Shapiro and Lascano are "not aiming to replace one canon with another" but rather "leverage those familiar works and figures to open up multiple, intersecting histories of philosophy that highlight sets of philosophical questions raised in the past that are still very much with us today" (Introduction, x). Others include Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*; Waithe's four-volume series, *A History of Women Philosophers*; and Atherton, *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*. Such efforts were also made in early modern Europe, e.g., Gilles de Menage's 1690 *The History of Women Philosophers*.
2. Rooney frames the effects as barriers inhibiting the voice and agency of women ("Gendered Reason," 77).
  3. Lloyd, *Feminism and History of Philosophy*, ix.
  4. For empirical studies on the impact of battle metaphors and cancer in treatment contexts, see Annas, "Reframing the Debate on Health Care Reform by Replacing Our Metaphors"; Hauser and Schwarz, "The War on Prevention"; Semino et al., "An Integrated Approach to Metaphor and Framing in Cognition, Discourse, and Practice"; Wackers and Plug, "Countering Undesirable Implications of Violence Metaphors for Cancer through Metaphor Extension."
  5. I offer two examples that tease out the connotations of historical metaphors, one drawn from Lennon's study of the term "oracle" ("Lady Oracle") and Christine de Pizan's imagery of reason as a forge.
  6. In Section 2, I draw on theories of metaphor from Black, *Models and Metaphors*; Bowdle and Gentner, "The Career of Metaphor"; Camp, "Metaphor in the Mind" and "Perspectives and Frames in Pursuit of Ultimate Understanding"; Mio, "Metaphor, Politics, and Persuasion"; and Wolff and Gentner, "Structure Mapping in Metaphor Comprehension."
  7. Hagengruber, "Cutting Through the Veil of Ignorance," 34.
  8. Kuklick ("Seven Thinkers and How They Grew") discusses the Anglo-American canon, noting that early modern philosophy canons vary regionally. Waithe ("Sex, Lies, and Bigotry: The Canon of Philosophy") examines how biases shaped historical canons.
  9. Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?*
  10. O'Neill, "Disappearing Ink."
  11. Green and Broad ("Fictions of a Feminine Philosophical Persona") contrast Pizan, who received patronage from royal courts, with Cavendish whose work received critical and sometimes dismissive reception.
  12. Shapiro, "Revisiting the Early Modern Philosophical Canon," 367, my emphasis added.
  13. Shapiro, "Revisiting the Early Modern Philosophical Canon," 367.
  14. Adapted from Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 26.
  15. Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 41.
  16. Contrast *snowflake* in "A child is a snowflake" and "Youth is a snowflake." Paired with *child*, the salient feature of a snowflake is its individuality—conveying that every child is unique, while in the latter example it is the ephemerality of snowflakes projected onto youth. *Snowflake* does not offer one lens through which to view different subjects metaphorically—it yields different *lenses* depending on the pairing. Further discussion in Bowdle and Gentner, "The Career of Metaphor," 197.
  17. Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 44.
  18. Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 44.
  19. Rooney ("Philosophy, Adversarial Argumentation, and Embattled Reason") and Lakoff and Johnson (*Metaphors We Live By*) offer further treatment of these examples.
  20. Wackers and Plug, "Countering Undesirable Implications of Violence Metaphors for Cancer through Metaphor Extension," 55.
  21. Brones ("Karen Washington: It's Not a Food Desert, It's Food Apartheid") interviews Karen Washington who recommends an alternative metaphor, food apartheid, to highlight political, racial, and socioeconomic factors that shape food access, and the importance of just interventions.
  22. In other words, deserts are not necessarily food deserts. Keene, Wilbur, Segrest, "Food Sovereignty."
  23. Rooney, "Gendered Reason," 78–90.
  24. These examples are not meant to establish these patterns but illustrate them. Rooney also discusses examples from Pythagoras, Plato, Bacon, Descartes, Hume, Rousseau, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Pierce.
  25. Rooney terms gender-coded metaphors of reason *sex metaphors* that "draw upon some aspect of a male-female dynamic, such as a voyeuristic act, a sexual act, or a relationship, or a marriage situation" ("Gendered Reason," 78). According to Rooney, sex metaphors include binaries and dynamics through which several concepts (sex, gender, gender-presentations, sexual orientation, romantic orientation) are associated with one of the two nodes. This is a feature of the metaphors, and metaphorical constructions, and not necessarily the concepts themselves or features of the world.
  26. Though this discussion focuses on gender, the most salient dynamic between the metaphor nodes is one of domination, and that can and should be extended to examine other metaphors of domination dynamics including imperialism, racism, oppression of animals, and ableism. Rooney touches on the expansive aspect of this project as well ("Gendered Reason," 89; "Philosophy, Adversarial Argumentation, and Embattled Reason," 210–11).
  27. Rooney comments on this *distortion*: "when I speak about 'less distorted' conception of reason or reasoning I mean conceptions that are more empowering of all sentient creatures, that are unifying rather than divisionary, and that get us into greater connection and understanding with all aspects of our human through an experience" ("Gendered Reason," 101, fn. 26).
  28. Rooney ("Gendered Reason") examines how such binaries shape discussions of *akrasia*.
  29. Fraser ("The Ethics of Metaphor") argues that metaphors influence our inferential dispositions, and as a result can enact and sustain conditions of hermeneutical injustice, silencing some agents. I think there is a good case to be made that Rooney's discussion of metaphors of reason point to a hermeneutical injustice in philosophical discourse in some instances. I have not taken this point up more explicitly here because such a determination will depend on the interests of the excluded participants and the mechanisms of hermeneutical marginalization at play.
  30. Rooney, "Gendered Reason," 81.
  31. Rooney draws on the dynamics of domination in later work ("Philosophy, Language, and Wizardry"; "Philosophy, Adversarial Argumentation, and Embattled Reason") to examine the impact of that conception on participation in philosophy.
  32. Lennon, "Lady Oracle," 39.
  33. Lennon, "Lady Oracle," 45.
  34. Lennon, "Lady Oracle," 52.
  35. Green and Broad ("Fictions of a Feminine Philosophical Persona") connect conceptions of reasoning to popular conceptions of philosophical personas. The impact of metaphors on personas is a promising approach to investigate metaphorical impact more generally, especially when failing to adhere to a persona undermines an author's authority.
  36. Rooney, "Gendered Reason," 94.
  37. Rooney, "Philosophy, Adversarial Argumentation, and Embattled Reason," 227.
  38. Irigaray (*Speculum of the Other Woman*) argues that symbolic women are treated and received in ways that suppress, downplay, or negate womanly aspects of the personifications. Thorgeirsdottir ("The Torn Robe of Philosophy") contrasts the portrayal of Philosophy in Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*

and “the silencing of womanly features of Philosophy,” with Lady Reason in Christine de Pizan’s *City of Ladies* (88–89).

39. Rooney, “Gendered Reason,” 84.
40. Rooney, “Gendered Reason,” fr 19, 100. Garrett (“Hume as a Man and a Women’s Philosopher”) and Lloyd (*The Man of Reason*) discuss Hume’s account of reason, and implications for women reasoners. Cartesian accounts of reason receive discussion, in Atherton, “Cartesian Reason and Gendered Reason”; Detlefsen, “Cartesianism and Its Feminist Promise and Limits”; O’Neill, “Women Cartesians”; Broad, “Early Modern Feminism and Cartesian Philosophy.”
41. Rooney, “Gendered Reason,” 95.
42. Rooney, “Gendered Reason,” 96.
43. Rooney, “Gendered Reason,” 100.
44. Christine de Pizan is categorized as a medieval philosopher and not a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century philosopher. However, historical texts available to early modern philosophers are relevant for considering historical intellectual narratives. I refer to “Christine” when I am discussing the main narrator of *City of Ladies*, and I use the convention “Pizan” to refer to the author. Green and Broad (“Fictions of a Feminine Philosophical Persona”) discuss why “Christine” “de Pizan” and “Pizan” are all candidates for referring to Christine de Pizan, though not without complication.
45. The term *creuset* appears in French translations; for example, see de Pizan, *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames*, 39.
46. de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 70–71.
47. Though not the sovereign of the city—Lady Reason explains that though the three women work together, Lady Justice is the ultimate arbiter of the city.
48. Illuminated manuscripts of *Romance of the Rose* (1500s) featured nature as a woman hammering human infants on an anvil in an act of creation. For example, British Library, Harley 4425, fol. 140r, Full manuscript page: <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&I1ID=28560>. Whether this conception of philosophical discourse ultimately benefits Pizan or women thinkers warrants further consideration.
49. Galen also associates heat with perfection, and cold with imperfection. *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* 14.6–7, Tr. M.T. May.
50. de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, 90.
51. Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 23–24.
52. Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 24.
53. More, *The Immortality of the Soul*, 217.
54. MacLachlan, “Rude Inquiry,” 192.
55. MacLachlan, “Rude Inquiry,” 195.
56. Shapiro and Lascano, *Early Modern Philosophy*, 573.
57. de la Cruz, *The Answer/La Respuesta*.
58. de la Cruz, *The Answer/La Respuesta*, 96.
59. de la Cruz, *The Answer/La Respuesta*, 87.
60. Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 279.
61. Though Cavendish is critical of this metaphor, she develops many metaphors throughout her philosophical works, including nature offering lessons in chemistry to experimental philosophers from cooking and baking (*Observations*, 105–06).

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## Feminist Epistemology and Social Epistemology: Another Uneasy Alliance

Michael D. Doan

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

When I first became aware of Phyllis Rooney's writings more than a decade ago, my attention was immediately drawn to a chapter entitled "Feminist Epistemology and Naturalized Epistemology: An Uneasy Alliance."<sup>1</sup> As I was relatively new to feminist epistemology at the time, this chapter helped me reflect on what had been drawing me into its orbit, and why I was finding it increasingly difficult to pull myself back into more familiar conversations. Like Rooney, I was engaging specific questions around social positionality, cognition, and motivation as part of a broader project that draws on epistemological research that could be described as feminist, or naturalistic, or both.<sup>2</sup> With several philosophers ready to endorse the idea that feminist and naturalized epistemologies are closely aligned research programs, I was impressed by Rooney's insistence on scrutinizing this proposed alliance more closely, and I readily sympathized with her feelings of uneasiness.

### 1. ONE UNEASY ALLIANCE

Rooney's central claim in her chapter is that, "in some important senses of the designation 'naturalistic,' feminist epistemology exhibits more naturalistic tendencies than 'regular' naturalized epistemology does," which suggests that "naturalists who are not already engaged in feminist projects have much to learn from feminist epistemologists."<sup>3</sup> To help motivate this claim, Rooney develops an internal critique of naturalized epistemology—or, more to the point, of epistemologists who call themselves "naturalists." Her basic point is that many naturalists continue to harbor a number of traditional assumptions about knowledge, knowing, science, and epistemology that are at odds with significant impulses motivating naturalized epistemology as a research program. These assumptions are problematic, "not because they pay too much attention to science, but because they pay too little," giving us reason to characterize them as "non-naturalistic."<sup>4</sup>

For example, it is not uncommon for those working under the banner of naturalized epistemology to assume that knowledge and knowing are paradigmatically about *individuals* acquiring and justifying *beliefs*; that beliefs are distinct, isolable "inner" entities amenable to measurement in the lab; that cognitive science gives an accurate representation of how "we" actually arrive at our beliefs; and that scientific representations of cognition form (or will form) a relatively coherent, uniform account that is ultimately reducible to neuroscience, or some other foundational cognitive science.<sup>5</sup> Many naturalists are understandably drawn to research in the cognitive sciences that takes assumptions of these sorts for granted, which helps to ensure that they continue to remain in the background, insulated from empirical scrutiny and potential disconfirmation. As Rooney points out, this is an important way in which "traditional assumptions about gender differences in reasoning capacities have worked

their way into philosophical and scientific conceptions of rationality and cognition," as well as a partial explanation of why such assumptions often remain unchallenged.<sup>6</sup> Would-be naturalists, then, "need to achieve a more critical and reflexive understanding of the assumptions and questions they bring to science, and a better understanding of the ways in which some of the 'prior' questions and expectations, many rooted in the epistemological tradition, might be ill-adapted to the very fields of science from which they now seek input."<sup>7</sup>

What does it mean to be a naturalist epistemologist, anyway? As Rooney astutely observes, the designation "naturalist epistemologist" is a great deal more confusing than is typically acknowledged and it is not at all clear to whom it refers. Is it enough to be *committed* to the continuity of epistemology and science in some shape or form? For example, James Maffie's naturalists are united by a "shared commitment" to naturalized epistemology as a project or research program.<sup>8</sup> Yet as Rooney emphasizes, naturalists of this sort need not be engaged in *doing* naturalized epistemology and, in fact, usually are not. "These naturalists seem quite comfortable maintaining some distance from the actual work of building specific conversations and continuities between epistemology and science," notes Rooney, whereas "feminist epistemologists/philosophers of science are already significantly engaged in such conversations."<sup>9</sup>

Is it enough, then, to be *directly engaged* in the scientific study of cognition? For example, Barry Stroud's naturalists include anyone engaged in "the scientific study of perception, learning, thought, language-acquisition, and the transmission and historical development of human knowledge."<sup>10</sup> Yet as Rooney points out, Stroud's description picks out *scientists* as those who are doing naturalized epistemology rather than philosophers. Besides, being involved in the production of epistemologically relevant scientific research does not automatically qualify one for evaluating the relevance of any given research finding. "Of the potentially innumerable findings produced by all of the various cognitive sciences, how are epistemologists to select those that they will find significant in developing an epistemology that is to be a part of, or closely allied with, science?" asks Rooney.<sup>11</sup> This question is all the more pressing given the way that traditional assumptions about gender differences in reasoning capacities continue to work their way into scientific conceptions of reasoning and cognition. Philosophers who are ill-equipped to reckon with the background assumptions lurking behind specific findings in the cognitive sciences run the risk of entertaining those findings as empirical givens, as though they do not already incorporate earlier norms of epistemology.

## 2. FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY AND SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

I find Rooney's critique of naturalized epistemology useful in thinking through what appears to many to be an even less controversial alliance: that between feminist epistemology and social epistemology. Consider, for example, the way that Elizabeth Anderson and Heidi Grasswick characterize the relation between the two. In "Feminist Epistemology:

An Interpretation and a Defense," Anderson describes feminist epistemology as the "branch" of social epistemology that "investigates the influence of *socially constructed conceptions and norms of gender and gender-specific interests and experiences* on the production of knowledge."<sup>12</sup> Echoing this manner of aligning feminist and social epistemological research, Grasswick suggests that, "by far the majority of work in feminist epistemology is best understood as a form of social epistemology."<sup>13</sup>

But perhaps these delineations are unduly neat and tidy. Rooney encourages us to slow down and examine the background assumptions at work in prominent conceptualizations of social epistemology, inviting us to subject research in this field to an internal critique similar to the sort she raises for naturalized epistemologists. We might wonder, with Rooney, whether certain assumptions operating within the research of social epistemologists may be at odds with the critical spirit animating the field. Rooney also reminds us to be on the lookout for who is and is not exercising critical self-awareness with respect to such framing assumptions, and to consider whether feminist epistemology might not exhibit more thoroughly socialistic tendencies than "regular" social epistemology.

Take, for example, a recent paper by Elizabeth Anderson entitled "Epistemic Bubbles and Authoritarian Politics."<sup>14</sup> I see this paper as one instance within a genre of social epistemological writings that have emerged during the Trump era, which take seriously the suggestion that the United States is "a nation more divided than ever," epistemically as well as politically.<sup>15</sup> Anderson starts from the plausible premise that political discourse in the US has become seriously distorted by "epistemic bubbles,"<sup>16</sup> and that such bubbles are expressive of increasing group polarization along partisan lines. Not only do Democrats and Republicans disagree about values, but about factual matters, too, including such politically salient factual claims as "human activity is causing climate change" and "carrying concealed weapons makes people safer." Yet it is not mere disagreement over matters of fact that motivates Anderson's concern over partisan epistemic bubbles; it is, rather, the "failure of a group to update its beliefs in an accuracy-directed response to new information."<sup>17</sup> The epistemic bubbles inhabited by political parties become "politically consequential," in her view, insofar as they shape political discourse in ways that threaten "sound policymaking and democracy itself."<sup>18</sup> For example, since climate change is a problem facing everyone, one party's refusal to acknowledge associated risks poses a threat to us all. Hence the motivation for Anderson's project is to provide an improved account of how epistemic bubbles form and operate so as to better support ongoing efforts to burst them.

As Anderson points out, two prominent models of how epistemic bubbles work (viz., Cass Sunstein's "group polarization theory" and Dan Kahan's "cultural cognition theory"<sup>19</sup>) converge in denying that Democrats and Republicans differ in their tendency to form bubbles, since several studies have shown that "individuals with different partisan and ideological identities do not differ on average with respect to relevant cognitive characteristics."<sup>20</sup>

Notably, both Sunstein's and Kahan's models attempt to explain the formation of epistemic bubbles on the basis of universal cognitive biases operating at the level of individuals. Since individual variations in degrees of bias are distributed evenly across partisan groups, both models predict the Democrats and Republicans are equally vulnerable to entrapment.

Arguing against this joint assertion of partisan symmetry, Anderson suggests that "social epistemology needs to get more social, by locating critical features of epistemic bubbles *outside* people's heads, in the norms by which certain groups operate."<sup>21</sup> She defends the claim that there is, in fact, significant asymmetry in vulnerability to epistemic bubbles across party lines, for the rise of populist politics among Republicans has brought about a consequential shift in group-level epistemic norms that are invisible to psychologists focused on individual-level cognitive biases. In addition to getting "more social," then, Anderson suggests that social epistemology needs to "get more political, by considering the impact of populist political styles on what people assert and believe."<sup>22</sup>

By deploying us-versus-them narratives that position "elites" as betrayers of "the people," populists seek to delegitimize elite leaders and institutions, steadily sowing mistrust in anyone not belonging to the populist party or movement, coupled with excessive faith in those who espouse the party line. Insofar as Republicans adopt populist social norms of joint information processing, they will tend to exhibit cognitive biases as a *group* that party members may not also exhibit as individuals, and those biases will tend to trap them in an epistemic bubble. For example, given that populism elevates the "common sense" of the people over the deceitful manipulations of academics and scientists, groups adhering to populist norms will tend to downplay the relevance of empirical evidence when advocating for policies that express shared intuitions and sentiments. Critiques of populist policies that insist on data-driven decision-making can easily be dismissed as the machinations of corrupt "fake news" reporters and "deep-state" operatives, all of whom have been bought off by an illegitimate opposition composed of out-of-touch coastal city-dwellers, "woke" liberal "snowflakes," and the unwashed mobs of illegal migrants and despised minorities whose interests they are said to represent. Besides, does it really matter whether Trump's call to "Build the wall!" will result in higher wages for US citizens or prove effective in curbing illegal border-crossings, when further militarizing the border affirms who the *real* Americans are and names their enemies in a single stroke? Slowly but surely, populist epistemic and discursive norms ensure that empirical discussion is usurped by trolling, mudslinging, and the trotting out of conspiracy theories, all of which underscore the untrustworthiness of anyone other than real Americans.

In summary, Anderson argues that Republicans are more vulnerable to entrapment in epistemic bubbles than their Democratic counterparts insofar as the rise of populism within the GOP has introduced epistemically dysfunctional group-level norms. Unlike Sunstein and Kahan, whose proposals focus on addressing individual-level cognitive biases, in proposing remedies for epistemic bubbles,

Anderson trains her attention on how Democrats might work with and around populism to better get through to Republicans. For example, she suggests that addressing Midwestern farmers as *property owners* who could turn a profit from siting wind turbines on their farms—rather than as *Republicans* whose gas-guzzling Ford F-150s are ruining the planet—might help Democrats steer clear of the usual identity-expressive trolling. The thought here seems to be that Democrats are already on the right (because empirically better-informed) side of the relevant political issues. Since Democrats are less vulnerable to epistemic bubbles than their Republican counterparts, it is up to them to learn how the epistemic populism of the right works better than populists themselves. Only then will they be able to out-manuever their political rivals and, in so doing, save everyone from imminent disaster. "Ultimately," writes Anderson, "to stop populist epistemic bubbles or their discursive equivalents, we must find ways to defuse populism."<sup>23</sup> Beyond simply outsmarting Republicans, then, she recommends adopting a sympathetic stance towards populist voters who "are moved by despair over the declining prospects of less educated white males," and developing "an economic agenda focused on improving their material prospects, without excluding others."<sup>24</sup>

### 3. ANOTHER UNEASY ALLIANCE

As mentioned earlier, I see Anderson's work on epistemic bubbles as one instance within a genre of epistemological writings that have emerged in the wake of the Trump presidency. Following Rooney's approach, I want to ask this: How closely aligned is this shared way of doing social epistemology with ongoing research in feminist epistemology? Recall that Rooney's work helps us to see the extent to which the research of naturalists expresses and protects a variety of non-naturalistic assumptions, and that these assumptions help shape thinking about gender and cognition in ways that feminists ought to recognize as troubling. Following Rooney's lead, I want to draw attention to certain assumptions operating within the work of Anderson and like-minded social epistemologists—assumptions that I take to be at odds with the critical spirit animating the field. Whereas Rooney is concerned about naturalists who continue to harbor traditional assumptions about knowledge, I am concerned about social epistemologists whose research uncritically reflects liberal-centrist common sense in ways that strengthen reactionary populism, rather than defuse it. My concern, in short, is with what I call the "NPRization of social epistemology."<sup>25</sup>

What exactly is the NPRization of social epistemology? Well, consider what it's like to listen to the morning news as someone who does not identify as a Republican. As someone who has done a fair bit of listening myself, it strikes me that one of the chief functions of NPR-style journalism is to reassure Democrats that they are not only generally *better-informed* than their Republican counterparts, but that they are, by that dint, *morally and politically better*, and so have a special role to play in carrying the country into the twenty-first century. Reporting during the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly illustrative in this regard. Consider, for example, the countless interviews with nurses, doctors, and public health specialists concerning how best to "reach across the aisle" to those who refuse

to mask up in close quarters, get vaccinated, and so forth. Entire manuals could be written detailing the tactics Democrats are supposed to employ to avoid coming across as too conceited and didactic; the kinds of gut-wrenching testimony that might help to build intimacy and trust where previously there had only been mutual suspicion and hostility; not to mention the honesty and restraint that is needed to admit that someone else is simply a lost cause. I think it would be fair to characterize the attitude such reporting is meant to instill as *saviorist* in orientation. After all, it serves to constantly reinforce the notion that NPR listeners generally, and Democrats specifically, are already well equipped to rescue the country from the epistemic, moral, and political backwardness of everyone else.

What does it mean to be in the grips of a saviorist mentality, epistemologically speaking? To begin with, it is important to distinguish saviorism from merely holding a belief one thinks to be true (say, that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective) and challenging somebody who claims otherwise. The crucial difference lies in the nature of the relationship between the parties involved in the exchange and in how the one doing the challenging conceives of their relative standing. It is not the mere fact that I am challenging what I take to be your mistaken beliefs that qualifies my approach as saviorist in orientation. After all, it would be irresponsible of me to simply ignore the fact that your beliefs are not only false, but dangerously so; and in the event that I am the one whose erroneous views are proving harmful, I would expect you to correct me respectfully in turn. Quite unlike a respectful, reciprocal exchange between partners in a shared endeavor, saviorist exchanges are essentially patronizing in character insofar as they involve influencing an out-group, purportedly for the good of all involved, based on the perceived epistemic superiority of the group of which one is a part. Exchanges of this sort are especially problematic when they take place in the context of ongoing domination, exploitation, and resource extraction targeting the out-group in question—as tends to be the case in relations between residents of major US cities and the rural farming communities on which they depend for food, raw materials, waste disposal sites, and the like. Why do these background power dynamics make saviorist attitudes especially problematic? First, because attitudes of this sort are typically *made possible* by relations of power that already reflect and express the degradation and instrumentalization of entire groups of people; second, because they are not only encouraged by but *serve to reinforce* such structurally unjust power dynamics; and third, because they depend, in part, on the *mystification* of those dynamics, insofar as they involve papering over the systematic domination of lands and of peoples with endless chatter focused on political leanings and partisan identities in what is presumed to be a bifurcated world where only one of two parties can truly know best.

Now, it would be inaccurate to claim that all philosophical research on epistemic bubbles, echo chambers, group polarization, and the like is similarly caught up in promoting a saviorist attitude.<sup>26</sup> But I do want to argue that Anderson's work fits the bill, largely because of the way that it uncritically reflects a kind of liberal-centrist

common sense already familiar from so much NPR-style journalism. First, Anderson assumes that epistemic bubbles qualify as “politically consequential” only insofar as they shape political discourse in ways that threaten “sound policymaking and democracy itself,” by which she means, more specifically, constitutionally enshrined institutions of representative democracy.<sup>27</sup> For example, the January 6 attack on the US Capitol can also be traced to a kind of epistemic populism that poses a direct threat to the continuation of the US as a liberal-democratic polity. Yet this also suggests that epistemic bubbles that negatively impact things other than liberal-democratic institutions fail to qualify as “politically consequential,” including all the ways in which people across the globe are harmed by the normal operation of those very same institutions.

Second, Anderson assumes that in the context of the US, politically consequential epistemic bubbles reflect and express polarization around partisan identity first and foremost, which is to say that they are rooted in the group-specific epistemic practices of Democrats and Republicans, respectively. For example, everyone living in the US has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, yet group polarization along party lines has repeatedly thwarted efforts to pass the sort of legislation required to secure appropriate funding for preventative measures, testing, and treatment. Yet while partisan polarization is clearly a relevant source of epistemic bubbles that are political consequently *in one sort of way*, it is far from obvious that partisan polarization is the only or most salient source. I am reminded here, for example, of Charles W. Mills's extended inquiry into the nature and origins of “white ignorance,” a form of group-level cognitive deficiency that is “linked to white supremacy.”<sup>28</sup> As described by Mills, the phenomenon of white ignorance cuts across such superficial and fleeting identity markers as political party affiliation and even extends beyond those self- and socially identified as “white,” afflicting anyone whose cognitive makeup is causally influenced by white domination.<sup>29</sup> How might our thinking about the epistemic dimensions of responses to pandemics and ecological catastrophes begin to shift as we remove the blinders of partisan politics? What if, instead of looking down our noses at the MAGA crowd, social epistemologists started to reckon with our own co-implication in accepting several hundred COVID-related deaths a day as the cost of “returning to normal”? Who and what is ignored, and with what politically salient consequences, when we only recognize conventional modes of politics as consequential, ignoring all affiliations and identities other than the narrowly partisan?

Notice that Anderson needs to rest on assumptions of both types in order to motivate her proposed remedies for epistemic bubbles. That is, it only becomes plausible to characterize Democrats as epistemically superior in some global sense once it has been taken for granted that conventional politics is the only game in town, and that politically consequential epistemic bubbles do not reflect group identities other than “Democrat” and “Republican.” Yet I want to suggest that both assumptions are questionable, for reasons I suspect will be readily apparent to both feminists and non-feminists. For one thing, when Anderson argues that social epistemology needs to get

“more political,” she would seem to be working with a notion of “the political” that does not take account of feminist expansions and reworkings of the concept that have emerged over the past several decades. To name just one significant contributor to this critical lineage in feminist political philosophy, Iris Marion Young has long insisted that “the political” encompasses power relations of many different types, whether or not the relationships in question are embedded in or mediated by public institutions.<sup>30</sup> For Young, then, “politics” is not to be understood in the narrow, conventional sense that includes such constitutionally sanctioned activities as running for public office, voting for one’s preferred candidates, and engaging with other elected officials in highly ritualized settings, such as the US House and Senate. Rather, “politics” refers broadly to all forms of “public communicative engagement with others for the sake of organizing our relationships and coordinating our actions more justly.”<sup>31</sup> If the political is fundamentally about relationships of power, and politics about how we go about organizing those relationships through public communication, then we can expect epistemic bubbles to be politically consequential in a host of ways that are bound to be overlooked by social epistemologists committed to overlooking critical feminist insights in political philosophy.

Of course, Anderson is aware of this literature and usage of “political” and so should be read as using the term to refer to overt or formal political efforts. But, granting that, there is good reason to pause before embracing her proposed remedies for populist bubbles. As Anderson herself points out, the flame of reactionary populism has been fueled by the sentiment that city-dwelling “elites”—including everyone from the Clintons, to the college-educated “creative class,” to academics, and so on—are constantly looking down on “the people,” whom they conspire to manipulate and betray for nefarious ends. How can a saviorist epistemology do anything other than continue pouring fuel on this very fire? How could it serve to buttress anything other than the kind of “progressive neoliberalism” that, as Nancy Fraser reminds us, created the very material and social conditions that gave rise to reactionary populism in its Make America Great Again guise?<sup>32</sup> What are the all-too-familiar political consequences of reassuring NPR listeners that they are the ones who pay closer attention to science, more reliably propose empirically informed policies, and really ought to be having some “difficult but necessary conversations” with that Trump-supporting uncle they not-so-secretly despise?

#### 4. FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY AND SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Feminist epistemologists tend to be centrally interested in doing epistemology in a way that “transforms the self who knows,” conjuring up “new sympathies, new affects as well as new cognitions and new forms of intersubjectivity,” in Sandra Bartky’s eloquent phrasing.<sup>33</sup> This is critically important work, not only because it tends to be more consistently naturalistic than research conducted under that banner, but also because it helps to generate new and better ways of relating to ourselves and others as knowers and, in so doing, contributes to shifting political relations no less than epistemic ones. A saviorist social

epistemology can do neither of these things, since it affirms already operative group-level norms as the lesser of two evils, assuring certain knowers that it is not they, but *the others* who really need to start knowing otherwise. Ironically, saviorism helps to entrench the very social conditions that made it seem like a promising remedy in the first place, ensuring that the ruling class can oscillate comfortably between progressive neoliberalism and reactionary populism for the foreseeable future.

If there is an alliance to be forged between social epistemology and feminist epistemology, I think we have much to learn from Rooney about which terms of alignment are and are not worth entertaining. It is not enough to insist, as Anderson does, that social epistemology needs to get “more social” and “more political,” as both can evidently be done in ways that reinforce the political status quo and bring negligible epistemic gains. Much as naturalists are faced with the challenge of selecting which scientific findings to treat as significant in developing a successor epistemology, socialists must confront the challenge of selecting which group-level norms to evaluate in light of the impact of which political styles and with political consequences of what sorts. Insofar as feminist epistemologists are self-conscious about their own framing assumptions and also expose them to empirical scrutiny, Rooney is right to point out that we exhibit more thoroughly naturalistic tendencies than some card-carrying naturalists. If we are also to exhibit more thoroughly socialist tendencies than “regular” social epistemologists, we had better get “more social” and “more political” in ways that involve a similar willingness to expose and—in so doing—begin *transforming* ourselves, making possible those new forms of intersubjectivity that will help transcend our current political predicament.<sup>34</sup>

It is this last point that I want to dwell on in my closing thoughts, not only because it helps me to better appreciate Rooney’s contributions to feminist theorizing, but also because it helps bring to the fore why feminist epistemology is not just another branch or form of social epistemology—at least, not for the time being. In another paper, entitled “What Is Distinctive about Feminist Epistemology at 25?” Rooney observes that feminist epistemology continues to elude those neat characterizations and hasty generalizations that are so often deployed by those who are hostile towards it in order to circumscribe or contain it. Yet as Rooney quickly adds, feminist epistemology also continues to elude attempts to identify it too readily with mainstream directions in epistemology—including such projects as naturalized, social, and pragmatist epistemology—which are often deployed by those who acknowledge the contributions of feminist epistemologists in guarded, highly limited ways, while nevertheless exhibiting some of the moves to define and contain that are so obvious in overtly hostile reactions. “What makes feminist epistemology distinctive,” argues Rooney, “is that it can still be distinguished from non-feminist or mainstream epistemology, and significantly by the latter’s seeming inability to meaningfully appreciate and incorporate feminist epistemological insights and developments.”<sup>35</sup> In her efforts to give such insights and developments their due, Rooney focuses on four, elaborating each in response to misplaced criticisms of feminist theorizing. After reviewing these four, I want to



close by adding a fifth, thinking with and building upon Rooney's work.

First, it is often claimed that feminist epistemology is too historically and politically *situated* to count as epistemology proper, whereas real epistemology generates accounts of knowledge and related concepts that are completely ahistorical and apolitical. Yet as Rooney points out, while mainstream epistemology actively or passively distances itself from a commitment to uncovering the epistemic and epistemological fallout of particular aspects of its own history and politics, this "does not make mainstream epistemology less historically and politically situated, and certainly not in a way that renders it less problematic as an epistemological orientation."<sup>36</sup> Feminist epistemology is historically and politically situated, as is the case with any epistemological project or direction. Insofar as it remains distinct from mainstream projects, it is because feminist epistemologists purposefully seek to uncover their own situatedness and render themselves accountable for the effects of their intellectual labor.

Second, it is often claimed that feminist epistemologists seek to inject their particular political values, interests, and biases into their work, whereas real epistemologists are politically neutral knowers of knowledge who strive to insulate their thinking from contaminating influence. Yet since the ideal of political neutrality is as chimerical for non-feminists as it is for feminists, Rooney suggests that it would be far more illustrative and productive for everyone to start with the question "Which types of political awareness, commitment, or intervention enhance epistemology and which detract from it?"<sup>37</sup> By shifting the question in this way, Rooney levels the field of play while putting into question many of the assumptions undergirding research in non-feminist approaches to epistemology. "Given that, historically, many epistemologists developed views and theories that (unwittingly or not) reinforced unjust political hierarchies," she wonders, what politically problematic institutions and relations do mainstream epistemologists risk continuing to reinforce through their attempted disavowals of "the political," and "what is it about feminist examinations of the epistemic and epistemological fallout of that history that is *epistemologically* problematic?"<sup>38</sup>

Third, it is often claimed that feminist epistemology focuses on peripheral or applied questions and topics only, whereas the central or core concepts and questions are left to epistemology proper. Yet it is simply not true that feminist epistemologists have been unconcerned with many of the key concepts of epistemology—such as belief, justification, reason, and evidence—though feminists have contributed a great deal to understanding the significance of these concepts in relation to epistemic, moral, and political considerations that are typically ignored. Besides, the question of what constitutes "the central or core concepts and questions in the field" continues to be a matter of substantive debate. By putting into question an overly narrow preoccupation with defining the concept of knowledge, and by bringing to light the many rich, underexplored questions swirling around such concepts as attending, understanding, remembering, imagining, and knowing well, feminist epistemologists have helped clarify

what all is at stake in our decisions about what to count as basic concepts and starting points. "[W]hat we take to be the core or constitutive concepts of epistemology matters," notes Rooney, "since such determinations presume in favor of some epistemic goods or values (and related norms of epistemic practice and conduct) over others."<sup>39</sup> Considerations such as these also help us to think more clearly about the relationships between epistemic, moral, and political normativity.

This brings us to a fourth area where feminist epistemologists have made significant contributions. It is often claimed that feminist epistemologists confuse or obscure the distinction between moral or political normativity and epistemic normativity, whereas this distinction remains an important and carefully monitored one in epistemology proper. Yet as Rooney points out, it is one thing to contend that philosophical theorizing about knowledge needs to take account of moral and political concerns; it is quite another to contend that epistemic normativity somehow reduces to moral or political normativity. Feminists who are committed to examining epistemic normativity—that is, feminists who are committed to doing epistemology—are, of course, not in favor of doing away with the very notion. Instead, feminist work in epistemology is concerned with linking core concepts in the field with moral and political values in ways that shed new light on why and how striving to become good attenders, rememberers, imaginers, and knowers is something that should matter to us—with why, in other words, epistemology is a field of inquiry that genuinely matters, in the sense that *knowing well* is inseparably bound up with *living well*. By drawing attention to the question of what knowing well requires, feminist epistemologists remind us of why it might be important to know how to grow food, as well as how to buy it off a shelf; to not only reflect on which actions are likely to harm other beings and ecosystems, but to be capable of significantly altering our ways of being in the world with others; to focus less on what propositions Jones knows concerning which cats are on which mats, and more on how to acquire the skills of attention and care that Jones will need to promote the flourishing of all the furballs he finds in his midst.

Whether it is a matter of reflecting on their own historical and cultural situatedness, on the specific interests, concerns, and values they bring to their research, or on the questions they start from, the concepts they examine, and the methods they deploy, part of what distinguishes the work of feminist epistemologists is their heightened *epistemological reflexivity*, which Rooney characterizes as "a form of second-order or metaepistemological reflection."<sup>40</sup> Indeed, from Rooney's perspective, epistemological reflexivity stands out as the single thread running through all of these other distinctively feminist tendencies. What does reflexivity of this sort look like? "On an individual level," she explains, "we as epistemologists promote epistemological reflexivity when we bring to our endeavors better understandings of *ourselves* as politically and historically situated knowers of knowledge(s). Such understanding involves owning up to the assumptions, interests, values, and situated questions that frame our epistemological inquiries, including those interests and values that seem to be dictated by an impersonal ahistorical

'tradition'.<sup>41</sup> As we have seen, it is precisely this sort of reflexivity that is lacking in prominent strands of naturalized and social epistemological theorizing.

I agree with Rooney that part of what distinguishes feminist from non-feminist epistemological research is the promotion and practice of metaepistemological reflection. I also agree with her that both naturalists and socialists have much to learn from the examples of feminists who own up to how who, what, when, and where they are in the world informs the shape and character of their research. But it seems to me that feminist epistemologists challenge us to do more than undergo a yet more extensive arc of reflection and responsibility-taking. When Bartky evokes the notion of doing epistemology in a way that "transforms the self who knows," I take her to be pushing beyond a recommendation that philosophers confess their social locations at the outset of writing or giving a talk. Rather, Bartky is speaking to a practice of *personal* transformation that is inseparably bound up with broader movements for *social* transformation—a practice that involves striving to know well not in some timeless sense, but in a sense that is maximally sensitive to the particular demands of *this* place, at *this* moment on the "clock of the world."<sup>42</sup> In other words, part of what makes feminist epistemology so elusive and difficult to define is that it is a way of doing epistemology *in and as movement*—not only self-conscious of its historical situatedness and possible efficacy, but actively striving for the creation of new social forms through which knowing and living well become concretely possible for all. To borrow a phrase from Alexis Shotwell, feminist epistemology is at its most distinctive when it is animated by an erotic desire to know *and be* "otherwise," not merely to better understand and take ownership of oneself.<sup>43</sup> This desire finds expression in the work of more feminist philosophers than can be named and acknowledged here. It courses through Marilyn Frye's efforts to distinguish "loving" from "arrogant" perception<sup>44</sup> and María Lugones's invitation to "world travel."<sup>45</sup> It animates Susan Babbitt's musings on the transformative experiences of LeRoi Jones and the dreaming of "impossible dreams,"<sup>46</sup> while propelling Sue Campbell's reflections on the moral and political achievement that is coming to re-remember our own personal pasts.<sup>47</sup> It is easily recognized in Lorraine Code's efforts to breathe fresh life into the notions of the instituted and instituting social imaginaries,<sup>48</sup> not to mention in Kristie Dotson's generative thinking on the work of coming to grips with and transcending the limitations of entire epistemological systems.<sup>49</sup> Insofar as it continues to carry another world in its heart, feminist epistemology will continue to rest uneasily with any effort to align it with—let alone subsume it within—the still emerging field of social epistemology.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My sincerest thanks to Phyllis Rooney, Kirstin Borgerson, Stephanie Kapusta, Letitia Meynell, Rich Campbell, Cory Aragon, Barrett Emerick, and Ami Harbin for their invaluable feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. I am grateful to the audiences at CSWIP 2022: Aftermath, the Dalhousie Philosophy Colloquium Series, and the 40th International Social Philosophy Conference for engaging me in helpful discussions on these topics.

**NOTES**

1. Rooney, "Feminist Epistemology and Naturalized Epistemology."
2. Doan, "Climate Change and Complacency"; Doan, "Responsibility for Collective Inaction and the Knowledge Condition"; Doan and Sherwin, "Relational Solidarity and Climate Change."
3. Rooney, "Feminist Epistemology," 207, 208.
4. Rooney, "Feminist Epistemology," 217.
5. Rooney "Feminist Epistemology," 217.
6. Rooney, "Feminist Epistemology," 205.
7. Rooney 2003, 219. For a more detailed account of how assumptions about gender differences in reasoning capacities tend to be intertwined with assumptions about the nature of reasoning simpliciter, see Section III of "Feminist Epistemology and Naturalized Epistemology" (Rooney, "Feminist Epistemology," 221–35), as well as an earlier paper of Rooney's entitled "Rationality and the Politics of Gender Difference."
8. Maffie, "Recent Work on Naturalized Epistemology"; Maffie, "Recent Work on Naturalized Epistemology."
9. Rooney, "Feminist Epistemology," 206, 221.
10. Stroud, "The Significance of Naturalized Epistemology," 71.
11. Rooney, "Feminist Epistemology," 215.
12. Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology," 54, original emphasis.
13. Grasswick, "Feminist Social Epistemology."
14. Anderson, "Epistemic Bubbles and Authoritarian Politics."
15. Jamieson and Cappella, *Echo Chamber*; Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*; Boyd, "Epistemically Pernicious Groups"; Boyd, "Group Epistemology"; Nguyen, "Escape the Echo Chamber"; Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"; Baumgaertner and Justwan, "The Preference for Belief"; Furman, "Epistemic Bunkers."
16. Anderson defines an "epistemic bubble" as "a relatively self-segregated social network of like-minded people, which lacks internal dispositions to discredit false or unsupported factual claims in particular domains. Due to factors internal to the network, members are liable to converge on and resist correction of false, misleading, or unsupported claims circulated within it" (Anderson, "Epistemic Bubbles," 11). Notice that Anderson's definition blurs a significant distinction charted earlier by C. Thi Nguyen, namely, that between "epistemic bubbles" and "echo chambers" (Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"). For Nguyen, both are social epistemic structures that exclude some relevant voices and evidence, but whereas epistemic bubbles accomplish this exclusion through omission, echo chambers do so through the active discrediting of outsiders.
17. Anderson, "Epistemic Bubbles," 11, original emphasis.
18. Anderson, "Epistemic Bubbles," 12.
19. See Sunstein, *On Rumors*; Sunstein and Vermeule, "Conspiracy Theories"; Kahan and Braman, "Cultural Cognition and Public Policy"; Kahan, "Cultural Cognition as a Conception of the Cultural Theory of Risk"; Kahan, "The Politically Motivated Reasoning Paradigm, Part 1"; Kahan et al., "Culturally Antagonistic Memes."
20. Anderson, "Epistemic Bubbles," 12.
21. Anderson, "Epistemic Bubbles," 12.
22. Anderson, "Epistemic Bubbles," 12.
23. Anderson, "Epistemic Bubbles," 27.
24. Anderson, "Epistemic Bubbles," 27.
25. For readers outside the United States, among others who may not be familiar with the term, NPR is an acronym for National Public Radio, a nonprofit media organization that serves as a national syndicator for more than a thousand public radio stations across the US—including WDET 101.9 FM in Detroit, the local station with which I am most familiar. NPR is widely recognized as among the most trusted sources of news and commentary by self-identified liberals residing in the US, alongside the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), to name a few.

26. Notice, too, that I am not equating having or promoting a saviorist attitude—let alone doing epistemology in a saviorist mode—with, say, making normative claims about knowledge. After all, my concern with the NPRization of social epistemology is meant to highlight a particular way of doing social epistemology, which is based on a specific set of assumptions about US society and politics and addresses a specific type of audience. My thanks to Stephanie Kapusta for pushing me for greater clarity on this point.
27. Anderson, "Epistemic Bubbles," 12.
28. Mills, "White Ignorance."
29. Mills, "White Ignorance," 22.
30. See, e.g., Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*; Young, *Responsibility for Justice*.
31. Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 123.
32. Fraser and Jaeggi, *Capitalism*, 193–215.
33. Bartky, "Sympathy and Solidarity" and *Other Essays*, 71–72.
34. My thinking about non-saviorist approaches to addressing epistemic bubbles and echo chambers dovetails with the work of Katherine Furman, who emphasizes the importance of creating less hostile epistemic environments in view of our shared tendency to "bunker down" epistemically (Furman, "Epistemic Bunkers," 203). As mentioned earlier, I take it that saviorist attitudes are essentially patronizing in character, insofar as they involve influencing out-group members, purportedly for the good of all involved, based on the perceived epistemic superiority of the in-group of which one is a part. Since creating a less hostile epistemic environment can be yet another tactic deployed for the sake of influencing others in questionable ways, I suggest that more thoroughgoing attitudinal changes are sometimes necessary to make genuinely trusting, solidaristic relationships possible.
35. Rooney, "What Is Distinctive about Feminist Epistemology at 25?" 344.
36. Rooney, "What Is Distinctive," 349.
37. Rooney, "What Is Distinctive," 354.
38. Rooney, "What Is Distinctive," 354.
39. Rooney, "What Is Distinctive," 360.
40. Rooney, "What Is Distinctive," 355.
41. Rooney, "What Is Distinctive," 356, original emphasis.
42. Boggs and Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*.
43. Shotwell, *Knowing Otherwise*.
44. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*.
45. Lugones, "Playfulness." My thanks to Letitia Meynell for helping me see the relationship between adopting a saviorist attitude toward others as knowers and perceiving them arrogantly, in Frye's sense (Frye, *The Politics of Reality*).
46. Babbitt, *Impossible Dreams*.
47. Campbell, "Dominant Identities"; Campbell, *Relational Remembering*; Campbell, *Our Faithfulness to the Past*.
48. Code, *Ecological Thinking*.
49. Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression."

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## On the Necessity of Embodiment for Reasoning

Heather Douglas

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

What constitutes reasoning? Phyllis Rooney's work on reason and reasoning brings important attention to what reasoning is, what it requires, and how to do it well.<sup>1</sup> In particular, there are important understandings about the nature of reasoning, on its task directedness, and on the need for choices to frame the tools it uses and the problems it tackles, which her work brings to the foreground.

Much of Rooney's work from the 1990s focuses on how gender has played a problematic and distorting role in philosophical discourse on reason and rationality.<sup>2</sup> Too often in the history of these debates, reason was construed as a tool best employed by men, and set in opposition to feminized understandings of emotion and embodiment. Reason was and often still is viewed as being unemotional, disembodied, and unlocated, as an ideal that seems at odds with human embodiedness. Rooney's papers provide both an assessment of the thin ground for such construals and a program for rethinking rationality and reasoning in ways that do not rely on such outdated tropes.

More recently, Rooney has called for a shift from reason to *reasoning*, a call that draws from insights from her earlier work.<sup>3</sup> Such a shift helps clarify what a focus on reason obscures, and what is required for reasoning to work. Reason has not only been construed as ideally disembodied but also as both formulaic (a formula for which there is only one right answer) and individual—something best done by the isolated reasoner. In contrast, I will emphasize here that reasoning is necessarily embodied, emotionally or valuationally informed, tied to particular locations,

and requires choices of skills and framing of problems that should not be ignored. [Delving into the sociality of reasoning, as Helen Longino<sup>4</sup> among others has done, is beyond the scope of this paper, but is also deeply important.] None of this undermines reasoning's potency or importance, but as Rooney has argued, some of these old tropes about reason have to go.

In this essay, I will contribute to the effort of shifting from reason to reasoning by looking back to two philosophers from the 1930s who, each in their own way, embraced the embodiment and locatedness of reasoning: Rudolph Carnap and John Dewey. I will discuss their understanding of reasoning so that we can see how efforts to remove reasoning from embodiment and pragmatic choice, and to make it somehow universal and disembodied, are doomed to fail, and distract us from what constitutes good reasoning. The erasure of embodiment for reason is neither possible nor desirable.

Furthermore, we will see that reasoning is not just about the solving of problems, but the detection and delineation of problems as well. A full account of reasoning to solve problems also requires an account of the detection of problems. While many of the tests for intelligence (IQ tests, Turing tests, etc.) have a predefined task for which successful completion allows for clear evaluation, reasoning and intelligence are crucially needed for task definition and delineation. Just because that is harder to measure does not mean it should be ignored in discussions of what reason is, and what intelligence requires.

Both the lack of a universal reasoning structure and the need for 1) problem detection and definition, 2) the development of tools to address the problems, and 3) the careful use of those tools have important implications for our current understanding of reasoning. I will argue that embodiedness is essential to this fuller understanding of what reasoning requires, and that embodiedness is particularly important for the detection of problems to which our reasoning tools might be applied. This point has important implications for debates about the ethics and responsible development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). If reasoning requires embodiment and locatedness, AI cannot be generally intelligent, because it cannot perform the crucial task of problem detection. AI can only function when we define the problem it is to address. This means that the threats from AI arise not from some moment of singularity when AI will surpass us, but from the inherent limitations of AI, from how humans fail to understand those limitations, and from an attempt to use AI for purposes for which it is not apt. Like deploying a logic ill-suited for a particular purpose, deploying an AI system beyond its capacities is a crucial ethical and epistemic risk. In pursuit of this line of argument, AGI is shown to be an inapt and likely incoherent idea.

But before we get to that conclusion, we need to start the project of scoping what good reasoning, rationality, and intelligence requires to show that embodiment is necessary. To show this, I will start with Carnap, then turn to Dewey, and finally draw conclusions for AI.

## 1. CARNAP'S LOGICS AND THE PRINCIPLE OF TOLERANCE

Philosophers in the early twentieth century held a plurality of views on reason and on the requirements of good reasoning. Even as formal logic, which seemed to offer a formulaic and universal system of reasoning, was being developed, not everyone who used this new tool thought it was so universal or formulaic. One of the preeminent formal philosophers of the twentieth century, Rudolf Carnap, recognized the need for pragmatic choice at the heart of logic, even before one could begin formal (analytic) reasoning practices. Carnap's insights on the nature of logic (or logics) is particularly relevant for thinking about supposedly "pure" formal reasoning practices, which seem to eschew embodiment and are often held out as somehow above the messy entanglements of the world.

Initially, the tool of formal logic seemed to offer a route to universal and formulaic reasoning. Frege thought that the laws of logic were "the laws of truth" and that they were "boundary stones fixed in an eternal foundation that our thinking can overflow but never displace."<sup>5</sup> I suspect it is this sense of the centrality of formal logic Rooney has in mind when she talks of formal paradigmatic examples "proffered as capturing something like the 'essence' of reason or rationality."<sup>6</sup> While she has pointed out the drawbacks of taking these as exemplars of reasoning (and I agree with her concerns), I also want to point out that Carnap would argue that even these exemplars cannot begin, cannot even get off the ground, without already making pragmatic choices about the structure of the logic to be used, choices that need to be shaped by the problem one is trying to solve. Carnap rejected Frege's understanding of logic as some eternal and fixed foundation. Instead, he saw the inherent flexibility and choices we needed to make to construct any given logic.

Carnap came to this view in the 1930s, as he realized his earlier work in the *Aufbau* could not articulate the one true logic with which to do scientific philosophy.<sup>7</sup> Instead, his view shifted to one centered on his "Principle of Tolerance." Because there is no one true logic, one needs to decide what one's starting point will be and to decide what rules will govern inference within the logical system one develops. Choices must be made, and there is no eternal truth or universal fact of the matter about what the right choice is, even in the rarefied terrain of formal logic. Carnap argued for permissiveness in the proliferation of systems of logic, depending on what problems one wanted to solve or what tools one needed. As he wrote: "it is not our business to set up prohibitions, but to arrive at conventions," conventions central to communication and the pursuit of shared projects.<sup>8</sup> Carnap viewed "the construction of a logical system as an engineering task," which meant that the suitability of the logical system will be evaluated by its ability to help with the practical task towards which it is put.<sup>9</sup> Philosophers can construct logics as tools, for their own work and for others, but the evaluation of the logic is based on whether it is useful for the task at hand, not whether it captures some universal form of Reason.

Thus, for Carnap, there was no such thing as a universal logic. Similar lessons could be drawn for mathematical systems, which frustratingly could not be reduced to the formal logic of the day.<sup>10</sup> Even in systems of exacting precision (such as mathematics and logic), one cannot escape the need for pragmatic choices which inform which logic might be a useful tool for guiding reasoning. One needs to know the problem one wants to address with a formal logic system in order to either choose which to use or to construct one for the purpose.

In short, even with the most formal reasoning systems possible, a universal reasoning process or structure is not available. We must know the problems we want to tackle and then find or craft tools to help. As Rooney emphasizes, all reasoning is situated in particular contexts and aiming at particular problems. But how do we know the nature of the problem at hand? Pragmatist John Dewey's work provides needed illumination to this essential aspect of reasoning, which encompasses not just the solving of problems, but the detection of them.

## 2. DEWEY'S LOGIC OF INQUIRY

Pragmatist John Dewey was centrally concerned with reasoning and the conditions—particularly educational and social conditions—for reasoning well. His theory of logic was not based on the formal logical structures of interest to Carnap and often taught in philosophy courses today, but rather on what was needed for good practices of inquiry more generally. Thus, his theory of logic (or reasoning or inquiry) encompassed the task of problem detection, not just problem solving. Both are needed for good reasoning and good inquiry.

Crucial for Dewey was that reasoning was never undirected, but always motivated by the felt need of a problematic situation. "Practical needs in connection with existing conditions, natural and social, evoke and direct thought."<sup>11</sup> We engage in reasoning when we *feel* the need to solve a problem. The existing condition that evoked and directed thought was what Dewey called a "troubled, perplexed, trying situation."<sup>12</sup> For Dewey, such a situation included both the foreground and the background of a context, the events that evoked perplexity, and the facts that were relevant to its unpacking.<sup>13</sup> Thus while the perplexity was something experienced by a person, the full situation needed to be discovered through inquiry. Once one notices that one is in a problematic situation, effort and reasoning are needed to define the problem. The definition does not automatically pop out of the presence of a feeling of difficulty or perplexity, but is a central part of the practice of inquiry.

Once one feels the presence of a problem, defining a problem well is a substantial part of inquiry. Dewey described inquiry as a process where continually returning to the definition of a problem was often needed. Indeed, the final resolution of a problem often occurred in tandem with (or nearly so) the final revisions to the problem definition. Problem definition is thus a central and continually revisable aspect of inquiry. In everyday contexts, we are each well aware of the importance of problem definitions for our efforts at problem solving: we

often find in the midst of attempting to solve a problem that we did not initially have the problem properly defined. When this happens, we need to revise our understanding of the problem in the midst of our efforts in order to get at a solution. Further, Dewey argued that one knows that a problem is resolved when the sense of perplexity vanishes and the course ahead is clear. And that often happens just after one finally gets the problem definition right, nearly at the close of the process of inquiry.

Thus, for Dewey, the practices of inquiry and the exercise of reason require situatedness, embeddedness, and embodiment. One needs to be able to *feel* perplexity and its resolution for reasoning to be engaged and to be completed. "Persons do not just think at large, nor do ideas arise out of nothing."<sup>14</sup> Detecting a problem instigates inquiry (a reasoning practice) and requires feeling the presence of a problem. One must feel perplexed or thwarted by interactions with the world or one must feel that something is a problem in one's life in order to have one's attention directed to the need for inquiry. This requires embodiment and physical experience, and in some sense, suffering. The feeling of being thwarted, of having a difficulty that needs to be addressed, can be a mild or severe sense of suffering, depending on the nature of the need that is not being fulfilled. It can range from a source of irritation under one's clothes (Is that a bug bite or a tag that needs to be removed, or something else?) to full-on existential crisis (What am I to do with my life?). There is a sense of scale central to whether inquiry and reasoning is actually needed and engaged, where small perplexities may be ignored (What was that bird I just saw? Oh well, never mind) whereas larger perplexities may feel more pressing (What am I going to do about the tensions within my family?), and some perplexities (What is the meaning of life?) we may recognize as too big to tackle at the moment (or ever). Our feelings, arising from our embodiment, thus drive and direct our reasoning practices. They are crucial to problem detection and the decision to expend effort on problem solving. They are thus also crucial to reasoning.

The lived experiences we have shape deeply how we reason, how we define problems, and how we imagine solutions. There is no disembodied general reasoning—felt and lived experience is necessary for reasoning to find a focus (the problematic situation), to work through the process of inquiry, and to come to a close, in the end of the feeling of perplexity. There is no divide between reason and emotion in such an account. Dewey's main threats to good reasoning and inquiry are not emotionality or embodiedness but dogmatism and "the Procrustean bed of habitual belief."<sup>15</sup> We need to be continually flexible, empirical, and experimental in our practices of inquiry and use of reasoning. Success or failure of reasoning depends on lived experience to direct attention, to define problems, and to settle on solutions. If our selected solutions fail, and fail in sufficiently substantial ways (another problem of judgment and scale), we will begin inquiry again.

Carnap understood that one could construct different logics, and one's choices in setting up the formal systems should shape a formal system to one's needs and to the problems one had. Dewey's account of inquiry expands

the frame, to include the challenges of detecting and defining problems. He showed that inquiry and reasoning need to be an embodied and engaged-with-the-world kind of practice, not something that can be settled before experience or without having actual experiences. The works of Carnap and Dewey are a useful corrective to the idea and ideal of a universal reason, one that shows that feminist philosophers such as Rooney who criticize an opposition between emotion and reason are precisely correct. Without emotion, there is no possibility for reason to operate properly. This insight has important implications for current debates about reasoning and artificial intelligence (AI).

### 3. PROBLEM DETECTION AND AI

Despite the clear necessity of pragmatic choice, of local embodiment in a context driving decisions about what a problem is and how one might begin to construct tools for addressing that problem, philosophers (and others) seem prone to neglect this aspect of reason. Conceptions of rationality in decision theory, for example, attempt to compress rationality into simplistic practices of weighing pre-determined senses of probabilities along pre-determined lines, and to make claims for the universality of such formalized systems. But Carnap would insist that we recall there are no universal formal systems that the world or reason imposes on us from the start. We must choose how to frame a problem, how to craft tools to address the problem, and what will count as a good (enough) solution to that problem when we are reasoning.

One current example of this impulse to erase the importance of embodiment is found in the debate around Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). While many philosophers and computer scientists have raised concerns about AGI and its potential threat to humanity,<sup>16</sup> and some have raised doubts about its technical feasibility,<sup>17</sup> I want to suggest disembodied AGI cannot meet minimum standards for being generally intelligent.<sup>18</sup> The literature on defining artificial intelligence focuses on AI's ability to solve already defined problems.<sup>19</sup> Whether discussing AI or AGI, the issue of detecting and framing problems remains out of focus. Even "zero-shot" reasoners are still given a particular task to perform.<sup>20</sup> Although the complexities of "intelligence" are well known to AI researchers, most definitions of what would count as AGI do not include discussions of problem detection or the complex decision of where to direct one's attention and reasoning efforts.<sup>21</sup> The problem to be solved, the task, is still specified by humans and given to the AI system.

Given its importance in inquiry and reasoning, the ability to detect and define (and redefine as needed) problems should be seen as a minimum requirement for "general intelligence." If Dewey is correct about how inquiry and reasoning work, the need to return repeatedly to problem definition is essential. Solving the wrong problem is no help at all, and being able to redefine the problem in the process of inquiry is crucial to both successful reasoning and worthwhile reasoning. Yet this minimum requirement is ignored in the usual tests for intelligence, such as the Turing Test (where there is no requirement for problem detection, just passing as a human conversant) or passing standardized tests (where the problems are pre-established). Our usual

tests for intelligence leave something important out of the frame, something which requires emotional embodiment. Our tests for intelligence do not encompass a key part of human reasoning, the ability to detect, define, and redefine problems. When pursuing AGI, we are still held captive by the illusion of disembodied reason.

Most proposed AGI systems would not have a body, nor would they have emotions, but they would be able to process all the data in the world.<sup>22</sup> The problem with considering such a system generally intelligent is that being able to process data, even a perfect data set processed perfectly, does not detect problems. At most, it can potentially detect errors, but whether those errors are problems requires a judgment regarding what is a problem. We give AI particular tasks, particular goals of prediction, and then train it within a particular domain, aiming to solve problems we set. AI has proven remarkably successful when directed to perform particular tasks, whether to predict the next word in a sentence, to predict a particular fold of a protein, to predict whether a tissue slide has cancer, to predict what color a pixel should be, etc. But note that we are setting the task, and thus the problem, to be solved, and we set the bar for an adequate solution. AI requires humans to shape its problems, and thus its tasks, and what should count as success or failure. This is also how what seem like general systems (like chat bots) are trained. For AI to become generally intelligent, it would need to be able to detect problems on its own to be solved.

If we take the lessons of Dewey, Carnap, and Rooney seriously, we should not expect any data processing system to be able to detect problems on its own. There is no one universal logic, or data processing system, that can address all problems, much less detect and frame them, according to Carnap. Framing the problem is needed before one decides which formal language might be helpful for addressing the problem. And detecting, framing, and solving problems requires that one be able to *feel* that something is a problem, according to Dewey. One must *feel* that one has been thwarted by one's experience in the world. For this, one must be able to be thwarted in experience, and to notice it, and then to feel perplexed by it. Without a body that could experience being thwarted, AI has no chance at being able to detect a problem on its own. An AI system might be able to detect an error, but whether such an error is a *problem* is something that would require human judgment. As Rooney has noted, embodied human reasoning is required. AI is not able to learn how to perform problem detection from the world, because it lacks the embodiment that imposes suffering, both emotional and physical, that teaches us what is a problem, that trains us to have a sense of perplexity. Without this ability, AI should not be said to be generally intelligent.

Could an AI system come to learn what is a problem on its own? We could give AI a body, with sensors. But this would not be enough for the good judgment needed for problem detection, as good judgment requires an assessment of the scale of problems, and which ones are worth the effort of pursuit. We would also need to give AI the ability to feel, to have emotions, so that it could learn when a thwarting of its purposes in the world was a minor inconvenience,

not worth its attention or effort, and when it was a serious problem requiring attention and inquiry. This is a difficult judgment for humans to make, and requires years of experience and the honing of judgment (done with others) in order to weigh when an experience indicates a problem worth pursuing or not. The feeling of perplexity indicating a problem would need to be shaped by that experience.

Should we make AI embodied and capable of suffering, including emotional suffering, to gain the perspective needed for assessing the weight of problems, in order to produce the ability for problem detection and definition? I think it would be deeply unwise, for a number of reasons. First, such capacity for suffering would undermine one of the key attributes of AI that is thought to be so valuable—its dispassionate disposition. AI is able to process a lot of data without getting distracted or drawn into a particular concern, focused solely on the tasks we give it. Its ability to do so, and do so well, misleads us as to its strengths as a reasoner. Only within the frame of problems we set for it does it reason well. And so we think it might reason better than us generally (the threat or promise of AGI). But as I have argued, the thing that makes it an effective and rapid data processor also works against its ability to reason generally, to be generally intelligent. Give it both emotions and an ability to suffer, and this capacity for dispassionate assessment of all inputs will diminish. Attention will be drawn towards things that reduce its suffering, or towards things that cause its suffering, with the intent of eliminating them. (Indeed, if we are perceived as a source of its suffering, we may become a target for elimination.)

Second, depending on how well-tuned the AI would be to detecting things that are actual human problems, this could mean an AI that helps detect the sources of human problems or an AI that attempts to solve "problems" that are entirely beside the point. It would be quite challenging to create technically apt suffering in AI, such that the problems the AI detects would line up with the problems humans actually have. We would also need AI to be empathetic to the suffering of others. A merely selfishly focused suffering AI would be no help at all at detecting human problems (and might be a threat).

Third, a capacity for suffering would also impart some moral standing to AI, because it would then be sentient. While many philosophers question whether animals have rights, it is generally accepted that animals capable of suffering are due some moral consideration by virtue of that fact. AI capable of suffering would also be due that moral consideration, something that would decrease its utility for human endeavors. Suffering AI could no longer be considered a mere tool to be used by humans.

Fourth, creating suffering AI would increase the number of entities in the world that can suffer, and would thus likely increase the amount of suffering in the world. This is particularly likely given how poorly we attend to the suffering of nonhumans in practice, and how many excuses we give to inflict suffering when it serves our interests. We would likely have to spend a great deal of time and effort to ensure that the kind of suffering AI experienced was actually helpful for tuning it to be able to detect actual

human problems (given the second reason noted above), thus increasing the suffering of AI. A path that increases overall suffering in the world should give us serious pause.

In sum, we should not create more suffering in order to help detect and frame human problems with AI. Instead, we should pay more attention to what humans say their problems are.

Without embodiment and suffering, humans will continue to have to tell an AI that *this* is the problem to be solved. We set the tasks or problems. When so directed, AI can be very effective, for good or ill. But the tasks we direct AI to do, on which problems we want it to focus, should be carefully selected to be amenable to the strengths of AI. Success or failure at a task needs to be clear, multiple goals which may be at cross-purposes should not be present, and continual assessment of whether the AI is functioning well to fulfill its particular purpose needs to be in place. We should be very concerned (as many already are) with which tasks AI is set to solve, how it is constructed to solve those tasks, and what counts as success or failure. The horrific uses of AI to perpetuate racial bias or suppress vulnerable populations should never be thought as the necessary result from the application of reason, but rather the problematic failure of human choices when developing a new tool.

This analysis suggests that a central threat from AI arises from forgetting the importance of embodiment for detecting problems, of the need for complex judgment for which formal tools are going to be helpful, and of the need for human judgment in weighing sets of related goals (some of which are likely to be in tension with each other). Being clear with ourselves on what is needed for effective reasoning helps us be more aware of the strengths and limits of AI. Even if AI is excellent at processing large data sets, we should not think AI capable of detecting problems or making good judgments. We fall into this trap when we think that our embodied selves are handicapped by being embodied, that this is merely a source of limitation in our reasoning. Yes, our bodies must be cared for, fed, given sleep, and have limited data capacities. But the body also provides the source of experience in the world that enables us to feel what is a problem and when we need to attend to it. We should never think that because AI lacks embodiment, it can do this work better than us. It cannot even begin this crucial aspect of reasoning.

Because disembodied AI is not capable of being generally intelligent, it should only be deployed in narrowly constrained contexts, where we are confident that we have defined the problems that need to be addressed well and that the AI system will do well in addressing those specific problems successfully. Success or failure needs to be simple and well-defined, and assessable in practice, so that the AI can be trained or fine-tuned as needed. This means that AI needs to be deployed very carefully.

In sum, current disembodied AI cannot be generally intelligent. Disembodied, nonsuffering AI cannot become AGI because it lacks the crucial capacity of problem detection. Humans will have to tell any AI what constitutes a problem or a task worthy of attention. Further, creating AI

with the capacity to suffer so that it might gain the ability to detect problems would likely undermine the strengths of AI, create more suffering overall, and not help detect and address human problems. We must embrace the embodied reasoning of humans for this crucial feature of general intelligent behavior. Embodiment, location, and emotion are crucial aspects of intelligence and of reasoning; they are needed to tell us where to look and to get us to attend to particular things, to see and feel something as a problem, and to pursue it as such. The very idea of AGI ignores the lessons of Carnap, Dewey, and Rooney, that there is no reasoning, including formal reasoning, that is not already shaped importantly by judgments about what the problem is that needs to be addressed, and that embodiedness and locatedness is needed for those judgments.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

If problem detection and definition are central aspects of general intelligence, we cannot have artificial general intelligence (AGI) without placing it in bodies that can suffer, and suffer in particular through engagement with the world and physical experience. I have argued that we should not want to do that, as it would undermine the strengths of AI and generate substantial ethical problems. Presuming we do not embed AI in such physical systems, general intelligence cannot be achieved by AI. In our discussion of AI, we should not be concerned with the achievement of AGI but rather how we develop and deploy AI, with close attention to what we have trained it to do, what its strengths and inherent limitations are. The danger of AI centers on us attempting to use it in inapt ways and on us placing it in charge of things it should not be in charge of, because disembodied AI cannot be and will not be generally intelligent.

More broadly, philosophers should attend to the lessons of Rooney's critiques of reason and recognize that good theories of reasoning start with embodiment, situatedness, and choices. Dewey's "logic of inquiry" emphasized this. Carnap's Principle of Tolerance, even for our most formal reasoning systems, captured this. There is no escape to some transcendent form of Reason or reasoning. The idea that there could be, and that we should want it, is revealed to be merely a way to try to exert unearned authority or to attempt some universal standing where there should be none.

We thus should reject the problematic illusion of perfect, formal, disembodied reason. AI cannot approximate it, as it cannot even detect and define problems. We must depend on our imperfect, limited, embodied, and emotional selves to engage in reasoning. But this is less bad news than it sounds, as Rooney's work and the work of other feminist scholars makes clear. The sociality of human reasoning practices, when structured well, is central to those reasoning practices working well.<sup>23</sup> The social nature of science and work in social epistemology generate an understanding of inquiry as a distributed and embodied process, with exchanges of reasons, debate, criticism, and argument making our reasoning better, together. Divergences among choices in inquiry made by different people produce the conditions for criticism and debate that generate the robustness of knowledge. Whether we are



collaborating with data collection, developing new tools for inquiry, or critiquing each other's work, there is always the back and forth of reasons, the responses that are collective reasoning. Some of this back and forth is always about defining the problem well. It is this social, embodied work that makes the products of human reasoning reliable.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, thanks very much to Phyllis Rooney for her body of philosophical work. And deep thanks to Michael Doan and Ami Harbin for organizing a special session at CSWIP in October 2022 in honor of Phyllis's work, for shepherding this collection to completion, and for their comments on this work. Thanks as well to Matt Brown, David Danks, Barrett Emerick, and Emily LaRosa for helpful comments and assistance in the development of this paper. Reasoning together with these folks has been a joy.

#### NOTES

1. Rooney, "Gendered Reason"; "Recent Work in Feminist Discussions of Reason"; "Rationality and the Politics of Gender Difference"; and "Remarks at the Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy Conference."
2. Rooney, "Gendered Reason"; "Recent Work in Feminist Discussions of Reason"; and "Rationality and the Politics of Gender Difference."
3. See Rooney, "Rationality and the Politics of Gender Difference," 25; Rooney, "Remarks at the Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy Conference."
4. Longino, *The Fate of Knowledge*.
5. Quoted in Ricketts, "Frege, Carnap, and Quine," 190.
6. Rooney, "Remarks at the Canadian Society for Women in Philosophy Conference."
7. Carnap, *Der logische Aufbau der Welt*.
8. Quoted in Richardson, "Carnapian Pragmatism," 296.
9. Richardson, "Carnapian Pragmatism," 300.
10. Gödel, "Über formal unentscheidbare Sätze der Principia Mathematica und verwandter Systeme I."
11. Dewey, *How We Think*, 187.
12. Dewey, *How We Think*, 201.
13. Brown, "John Dewey's Logic of Science," 269.
14. Dewey, *How We Think*, 193.
15. Dewey, *How We Think*, 271.
16. Reviewed in Chalmers, "The Singularity."
17. E.g., Crane, "Computers Don't Give a Damn."
18. The arguments here were inspired by Carnap, Dewey, and Rooney, but seem as well to be in a similar vein as Smith, *The Promise of Artificial Intelligence*.
19. E.g., Goertzel, "Artificial General Intelligence"; Wang, "On Defining Artificial Intelligence."
20. Kojima et al., "Large Language Models Are Zero-Shot Reasoners."
21. Monett, Lewis, and Thorisson, "Introduction to the JAGI Special Issue 'On Defining Artificial Intelligence'."
22. As noted in Goertzel, "Artificial General Intelligence," some AGI approaches do think some embodiment is needed (pp. 21–22) but the focus is more on sensorimotor learning possibilities than on emotionality and its attention direction capacity.
23. Longino, *The Fate of Knowledge*.

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## Reasoning Well: A Response to Armstrong, Doan, and Douglas

Phyllis Rooney  
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

It is a distinct honor to have my work recognized in this special cluster of papers, and I sincerely thank Chloe Armstrong, Michael Doan, and Heather Douglas for their thoughtful attention to my work in feminist philosophy. It is always gratifying to know when and how our research contributes to the philosophical thinking of others, and this feedback, in turn, informs our continuing reflections on our specific issues and topics. This is certainly the case for me on this occasion.

Feminism-informed critiques of traditional (Western) understandings of *reason* and *rationality* have been central in much of my work. These critiques do not overlook the value of *reasoning* as a significant human practice,

however, nor do they dispense with a fundamental philosophical question about what it means to *reason well* in a range of contexts. On the contrary, they draw renewed attention to this question by inviting consideration of the enhanced forms of reasoning elicited in innovative developments in feminist philosophy, critical race philosophy, and related areas centrally focused on social justice. Among other things, these papers by Armstrong, Doan, and Douglas provide for me a critical reminder of some fundamental facts about human reasoning that are evidenced in many areas of inquiry, and especially in feminist philosophy. These include the fact that we *reason together*, and that this collaborative effort is advanced by multiple understandings, perspectives, and interactions that include—but go well beyond—simple assertions of agreement or disagreement in beliefs and positions that have framed many traditional accounts of reason and rationality. These papers (and especially in the connections among them that I will emphasize) help me to reflect further on what it means to *reason well* as we reason together. They thus connect centrally with my ongoing projects on feminism and reason.

Armstrong pays particular attention to my early (1991) paper, “Gendered Reason: Sex Metaphor and Conceptions of Reason,” in which I argue that the persistent use of gender metaphors in Western philosophy helped to establish a symbolic association between a “masculine” Reason that is opposed to, or distanced from, capacities, modes, or entities (emotion, instinct, body, nature, for example) that were regularly cast as female or “feminine.” These historical associations, as she notes, contributed to a sense of Reason as embattled, as oppositional and divisive. Armstrong argues, however, that we need to introduce a further consideration in our examinations of historical patterns. We must also examine metaphors of reason in the work of “non-canonical” (and typically overlooked) figures in that history, specifically in the work of women philosophers such as Christine de Pizan, Margaret Cavendish, and Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz. To the extent that we speak of “our philosophical tradition” (a phrase that I’ve used on more than one occasion) without taking account of important qualifications that feminist historians of philosophy have introduced, we risk reinforcing a canonization that, instead, requires critical scrutiny. (I will return below to Armstrong’s examination of other metaphors of reason proposed by these philosophers.)

Among other things, Armstrong reminds us of the various uneasy alliances that we often navigate when we do feminist philosophy, including when we re-read the history of philosophy. Most of us were trained in, and have strong alliances with, established areas, topics, and methods of traditional (not specifically feminist) philosophy. Yet we also find that we sometimes need to push uneasily against these same alliances by engaging questions about the exclusions that those same traditions engendered. These uneasy places provide fertile philosophical ground for new thinking and new reasoning, including new reasoning about reasoning.

Doan pays particular attention to the productive role of uneasy alliances, drawing on my examination of an “uneasy

alliance” between feminist epistemology and naturalized epistemology.<sup>1</sup> As I argue there, a feminist critical perspective helps us to uncover some of the problematic assumptions (about “natural” gender and race disparities in rationality, for instance) that often informed scientific studies of cognition, studies that naturalists in epistemology maintain need to be incorporated into philosophical accounts of reason and knowledge. An uneasy alliance between feminist epistemology and social epistemology also needs to be examined, Doan argues, despite the fact that feminist epistemology is regularly identified as a form of social epistemology in that both emphasize the ways in which social practices and communities influence the development of knowledge. He is especially interested in the social epistemic contours of “epistemic bubbles,” as these are understood to drive divisive partisan politics (in the United States in recent decades, certainly, but also elsewhere). His primary concern is with the normative political orientation that frames proposed solutions to these seemingly intractable divisions (he focuses particularly on a paper by Elizabeth Anderson). He continues, “I am concerned about social epistemologists whose research uncritically reflects liberal-centrist common sense in ways that strengthen reactionary populism, rather than defuse it.” Critical feminist insights in political philosophy are called for here, Doan maintains, especially those that focus on multiple politically salient divisions and also emphasize the role of social and personal transformation in bringing about progressive political change—something not theorized in traditional accounts of liberalism. Feminist extensions thus also include epistemological examinations of the new cognitions, new sympathies, and affects that socially and politically informed transformations of subjectivity and intersubjectivity encourage.

In introducing additional feminist insights into social epistemological examinations of political realities, Doan underscores at least two important dimensions of feminist philosophical thinking. First, it draws critical connections among different areas or subareas of philosophy: it connects epistemology with moral and political philosophy, and also, in this case, with feminist theorizing about the self, subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Second, it draws particular attention to “framing assumptions,” to the starting or core concepts and questions that direct specific philosophical investigations. In connection with epistemology, in particular, he refers to my more recent paper in which I argue that an adequate accounting of what is new and distinctive about feminist epistemology requires taking *knowing well* (rather than *knowledge*) as a foundational concept for epistemological reflections.<sup>2</sup> Doan maintains that a fuller exploration of “the relationships between epistemic, moral, and political normativity” also summons rich but underexplored questions about related concepts such as *understanding (well)*, *imagining* and *attending (well)*. Of course, *knowing well* and *understanding well* also require *reasoning well*, and this, along with a critical focus on framing concepts and questions, takes us to central considerations in Douglas’s paper.

Douglas directs her attention to the ways in which “outdated tropes” linked to gender metaphors and to sexist claims about (actual) women’s supposed lesser

rationality<sup>3</sup> played a “problematic and distorting role in philosophical discourse on reason and rationality.” She is primarily concerned with associated projections of reason as unemotional, disembodied, and unlocated. This is something that, she argues, is very much at odds with the kinds of theoretical engagements with human embodiment and locatedness that are required when we investigate the many practices and processes of *reasoning* that we humans undertake. Two philosophers from the 1930s prove to be particularly useful in thinking through these questions. Rudolph Carnap and John Dewey “each in their own way, embraced the embodiment and locatedness of reasoning.”

In his later work Carnap rejected the idea of one true logic (reminiscent, we might add, of the idea of one true reason) in favor of an acknowledgement of a proliferation of systems of logic that are appropriate in different contexts—depending on the problems that need to be addressed or solved. Even in formal reasoning contexts (in mathematics, for instance) “pragmatic choices” are required, both in defining the problem and in formulating tools—precise steps in reasoning, for instance—for its resolution. Such attention to starting points, to the reasoning required for “the detection and delineation of problems,” was also of central concern for Dewey, not least when he turned his primary attention to the resolution of ongoing social, educational, and political difficulties. Of particular interest here, Douglas notes, is Dewey’s understanding of the emergence of problems, concerns, and questions. They arise out of lived experience, often out of situations and feelings of confusion and perplexity. Thus, in contrast to outdated tropes that pit reason against feeling or emotion, good reasoning or good practices or inquiry directed to the detection and definition of problems (also) require attending to the affective dimensions of embodied, lived uneasiness. “The definition does not automatically pop out of the presence of a feeling of difficulty or perplexity, but is a central part of the practice of inquiry [and reasoning].”

Douglas maintains that these reflections on the “necessity of embodiment for reasoning” have notable implications for current discussions about the possibility of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). Though she does not explore them in this paper, her examination also has implications for further reflections on the theoretical innovations (and new reasonings) developed in feminist philosophy. For a start, both Carnap and Dewey underscored the productive and creative roles of perplexity and difficulty as prompting new thinking and reasoning. This, as we have noted, has certainly been the case with feminism-informed “uneasy” alliances that have propelled new philosophical developments, though these were forms of perplexity not quite anticipated by Carnap or Dewey. Dewey’s work, especially, underscores some further considerations. We are encouraged to rethink philosophical starting points, particularly as they are expressed in the articulation of core philosophical concepts, questions, and problems. We are encouraged to inquire about whose lived experiences and perplexities (including social and political ones) animate those questions and problems. And we are encouraged to reflect on the forms of reasoning that are already encoded in particular delineations of problems, given that these forms of reasoning are also circumscribing possible solutions.

Are there metaphors of reason that might better capture these dimensions of philosophical reasoning, given that these considerations represent what, to my mind, is especially distinctive about feminist philosophical thinking across a range of areas? That is, metaphors that foreground the directionality of reasoning, the fact that reasoning is typically about moving from problems to solutions (or from questions to answers). That is, metaphors that take account of the fact that social and political problems arise out of lived experiences (including cognitive-affective experiences) that are often communally shared and require communal and collaborative thinking and action for their resolution. In effect, metaphors that also highlight the fact that solutions or answers are often about achieving greater justice, and that more or less success in such achievement depends on the formulation of problems that more or less accurately represent the lived realities (or truths) of injustice.

Armstrong notes that I stressed (in my 1991 paper) that one of the best ways of “uprooting” metaphors (metaphors of gendered Reason, in that case) involves offering alternatives. In her examination of the works of Christine de Pizan, Margaret Cavendish, and Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz, Armstrong is especially on the lookout for “figurative alternative views to reason as a warring dominating authority”—as the latter featured in many canonical understandings. She discusses a variety of metaphors that arise in the texts of these three philosophers. We can engage these (broadly including images, similes, analogies, or allegories as extended metaphors) as alternative imaginings that generate new thinking about reasoning in its many dimensions and expressions.

Pizan includes an image of reason as a forge for the refining of gold, or as having mirror-like qualities to reflect the nature of things—this latter capturing notions of reason as an arbiter of truth. Armstrong pays particular attention, however, to Reason operating in a constructive role, with architectural, construction, and design imagery recurring through these works. In her *City of Ladies*, Pizan “presents a constructive picture of rational inquiry . . . as she builds a city for and of ladies.” The “imagery of building and architecture reappears in Cavendish’s account of the rational aspects of matter.” Though Inéz de la Cruz symbolizes discursive reason as a sword (characterizing some of the harms of hostile discourse, reflecting her experience of admonishment by Church authorities, perhaps), she also emphasizes the “empirical applications of reasoning in the kitchen (and elsewhere).” Building and architectural metaphors of reason are not absent in the work of “canonical” male philosophers, however. Armstrong notes that Descartes drew attention to the “right conduct” of Reason in the construction of knowledge, and Douglas remarks that Carnap viewed (in his words) “the construction of a logical system as an engineering task” directed toward the completion of particular goals, including practical ones.

Construction images direct attention to the goals of reasoning as well as to the collaborative aspects of reasoning together. In her *City of Ladies*, Armstrong continues, Pizan has “Lady Reason” build the foundations and mote (setting the foundational concepts and questions,

in a related discourse), and then “Lady Rectitude” and “Lady Justice” help complete the city and fill the city with women. Cavendish explores the “rational aspects of matter” in the context of her discourse on “experimental philosophy,” and she explores an analogy with the construction of a house which requires surveyors and architects working with laborers and also with various materials. Inéz de la Cruz draws comparisons between philosophical reasoning and engaging in everyday activities involving familiar objects, likening insights achieved by cooking (directed toward the construction of a meal, we might add) with insights achieved by philosophical reasoning: “And seeing these minor details, I say that if Aristotle had cooked, he would have written a great deal more.”

As I hope will be clear by now, I am especially appreciative of this opportunity to think and reason with Armstrong, Doan, and Douglas, as we think through our shared philosophical interests. Among other things, their contributions enable me to think anew about my earlier ideas, and to incorporate their responses into my ongoing thinking about central questions. Prominent among these is the question about what it means to *reason well*, particularly when we take account of innovative developments in feminist philosophical thinking. Armstrong’s “alternative” metaphors and imaginings of reason encourage us to rethink reasoning as a collaborative practice that aims toward the construction of more just worlds—and not just in terms of gender justice. Douglas’s emphasis on the starting points for reasoning, on the articulation of problems and questions, directs our critical attention to foundational concepts, to basic terms and the implicit assumptions they often carry. Words matter, including those used in what have often been seen as “throwaway” metaphors. We get to appreciate feminist philosophy anew in terms of the “uneasy alliances” (Doan) and embodied “perplexities” (Douglas) that it has fostered, which, in turn, support innovative developments in philosophical thinking and reasoning. Doan’s use of the term “thinking with,” along with his specific engagement with social epistemology, reminds us that knowing and reasoning are, in important ways, social and communal endeavors and that our understanding of *reasoning well* must take account of that.

*Argumentative reasoning* is an important form of reasoning that underscores the social nature of reasoning. Argumentation is a set of practices that includes presenting arguments to others, responding to the arguments of others, modifying arguments in light of others’ responses, which may then elicit further responses. Argumentative reasoning provides an important framework for examining questions about terminology and metaphors (questioning the argument-as-war metaphor, for instance), about starting places (in careful consideration of initial assumptions and premises), and about the types of social-epistemic interactions that presentations and responses in argumentative contexts encourage or inhibit. As Catherine Hundleby and I have examined, argumentative reasoning that incorporates insights from feminist epistemology can support models of *reasoning for change*, reasoning that helps to bring about progressive change.<sup>4</sup> All of this takes us back to reconsidering philosophical reasoning

and, in particular, to reconsidering the role of adversarial argumentation as a standard practice in our discipline.<sup>5</sup> We are encouraged to think and reason anew about what it means to *argue well* in philosophy, that is, to argue and reason in a way that encourages new voices and perspectives, and that helps to illuminate the workings of various forms of injustice, when that is a necessary step toward dislodging them and thereby promoting progressive change in philosophy and beyond.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would also like to sincerely thank Ami Harbin and Barrett Emerick for their encouragement and their feedback on an earlier draft of this essay.

#### NOTES

1. Rooney, “Feminist Epistemology and Naturalized Epistemology.”
2. Rooney, “What Is Distinctive about Feminist Epistemology at 25?”
3. My main focus in Rooney, “Rationality and the Politics of Gender Difference.”
4. Rooney and Hundleby, “Introduction: Reasoning for Change.”
5. Rooney, “When Philosophical Argumentation Impedes Social and Political Progress”; Hundleby, “Aggression, Politeness, and Abstract Adversaries.”

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## *Précis to The Philosophy of Envy Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Envy (Sometimes)*

Sara Protasi  
UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND

When I was younger, I envied my mother’s beauty: her voluptuous breasts, her straight nose, her wavy hair, her

deep voice. I felt ugly in comparison. In high school, I envied my best friend's self-assuredness, her sexual experiences, her daring outfits, her ease interacting with boys. I felt insignificant in comparison. Later on, I envied fellow graduate students who seemed to know what they were doing and who seemingly never struggled to turn in A-level papers. I felt stupid in comparison. The list of my envies easily stretches to the present: I envy academic women without children, and colleagues who teach at more prestigious institutions; I envy more talented dancers; I even envy my partner, albeit more occasionally. At some point in the future, I will probably envy my children, as well.

Do I feel embarrassed in confessing my envy to the world? I do. But I know all too well I am not alone: everyone feels envy.

Envy can be so intense that it tears apart a relationship, or so fleeting we barely notice it. It can be narrow and focused on one object or trait, or so all-encompassing and existential as to involve wanting to be the envied person.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding these differences, it always feels hard to confess, and this feature of envy, and the related tendency envy has to hide itself even from the agent who feels it, stems from its essential characteristics. Envy can be defined as an unpleasant response to a perceived inferiority or disadvantage vis-à-vis a similar other with regard to a domain of self-importance.

Thus, the first reason why envy is difficult to admit is because it reveals *that* we are comparing ourselves to others, even though in many settings and contexts we are told we should not engage in comparisons (I will say more later on whether that's a reasonable imperative). But envy is much harder to admit than other comparison-based emotions (such as pride and scorn), and that is because in this comparison we perceive ourselves as coming up short: we see ourselves as lacking, as inferior, as less than someone who is similar to us in many respects. Our perceived shortcomings sting and wound our self-esteem. A third reason why envy may be embarrassing to acknowledge is that it can reveal that we care about things we might prefer to pretend we do *not* care about (such as positional goods or objects of conspicuous consumption). Finally, the fourth and perhaps most important cause of our hesitation to confess envy is that it has a bad reputation from a moral perspective. Francois de La Rochefoucauld famously wrote that people often boast about their sinful passions, but envy is such a cowardly and shameful emotion that no one admits to feeling it. Envy is considered a mortal sin in the Catholic tradition and is condemned by all religions. And it is so antithetical to *kalokagathia* that no ancient or modern hero has ever been portrayed as characterized by it, even though there are sympathetic, if at times tragic, representations of jealousy (Medea, Othello), shame (Ajax), or pride (Mr. Darcy) (not to mention arrogance—hubristic heroes are a dime a dozen).

So envy is embarrassing and thought to be immoral and base. And yet here I am, confessing my envy. I am comforted by the knowledge of the extensive empirical evidence showing that social comparison is essential to our psychology—we are “comparison machines.”<sup>2</sup> We

are constantly, habitually, inadvertently, and unavoidably comparing ourselves to people who are similar to us in ability, talent, values, and aspirations. Social comparison plays three crucial roles in human psychology: it provides information needed to assess and improve ourselves; it protects our self-esteem; and it helps us fit into social groups.<sup>3</sup> Thus, emotions stemming from social comparison judgments are common and functional. Anthropologists have not discovered a culture devoid of envy.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, and crucially, there's increasing consensus in psychology and philosophy that envy is not all bad. A bit controversially, I interpret Aristotle has having already argued in favor of this view in the *Rhetoric* (II.10–11), where we find a discussion of a noble kind of envy (*zēlos*), which is focused on the good we lack, and which motivates us towards self-improvement and pushes us to be excellent. This original intuition that envious feelings are not necessarily bad, and can be functional and even conducive to flourishing, is the original impetus of my book.

In *The Philosophy of Envy*, my overarching argumentative strategy is to develop an original taxonomy of envy as an emotion, drawing from evidence in the social sciences (especially but not exclusively social psychology) and from philosophical accounts. I believe that once we know more about envy's varieties, we can make more nuanced assessments of its value, and we can develop more efficacious strategies to cope with or inhibit its detrimental features, as well as to harness its motivational and epistemic power.

The first two chapters of the book are devoted to ontological questions: what envy is and how it differs from jealousy—an emotion often confused with it especially by speakers of certain languages, including English—and what varieties of envy there are. I defend an original taxonomy of four kinds of envy. The remaining three chapters of the book are about the normative implications of this taxonomy in the domains of ethics, loving relations, and politics. The brief concluding chapter tackles axiological questions, while the historical appendix contains an opinionated review of several accounts of envy in Western philosophy.

Here is a more detailed chapter-by-chapter overview.

Chapter 1 draws from extant views in presenting an established distinction between envy and *jealousy*. I first defend the consensus view that envy is about the *lack* of a valued object, while jealousy is about the (potential or feared) *loss* of a valued object, and then introduce the definition of envy which I use in the book: to reiterate, envy is an aversive emotional response to a perceived inferiority or disadvantage vis-à-vis a similar other with regard to a domain of self-importance, which motivates someone to overcome that inferiority or disadvantage. The originality of the chapter lies in the defense of the lack-versus-loss view from several objections, and in bringing together philosophical and empirical sources throughout the discussion.

Chapter 2 lays out my taxonomy, according to which there are four kinds of envy. Because envy is a response to

perceived inferiority, it motivates the agent to overcome such inferiority, which can be done either by bringing oneself up to the level of the envied or by pulling them down to one's level. But what determines whether the agent wants to "level up" or "level down"? There are two models of explanation in the literature: one mostly proposed by psychologists, while the other is discernible in the philosophical tradition. I argue that these models of explanation are compatible and track two variables—*focus of concern* and *obtainability of the good*—whose interplay is responsible for the varieties of envy. *Emulative envy* stems from being primarily concerned with getting the good for oneself, and perceiving oneself as capable of doing so; the typical behavioral tendency is self-improvement. *Inert envy* is the unproductive and self-defeating version of emulative envy: the envier wants to get the good for oneself, but doesn't think that they can do so; the typical behavioral tendencies are self-loathing, sulking, and avoidance of the envied. *Aggressive envy* derives from being primarily concerned with the envied's possession of the good, rather than the good itself, and perceiving oneself as capable of taking the good away from the envied; the typical behavioral tendencies are thus sabotaging and stealing the envied object. Finally, *spiteful envy* is a less productive, yet not totally self-defeating version of aggressive envy: the envier wants to take the good from the envied, but doesn't think that they can do so; the typical behavioral tendency is spoiling the good (it's not self-defeating because the envier succeeds in leveling down, even if they don't get the good for themselves). I present in detail a paradigmatic case for each type of envy, providing an analysis of the phenomenology, situational antecedents, motivational structure, and typical behavioral outputs, and I explain how these cases of envy differ from nearby emotions and attitudes such as admiration, covetousness, and spite.

Chapter 3 focuses on envy's *moral* and *prudential* value of envy in interpersonal relations. In short, I argue that emulative envy is neither morally nor prudentially bad, and can even be virtuous in limited circumstances; that inert envy is very bad prudentially, but (mostly) not morally bad; that aggressive envy is morally very bad, but may bring some genuine prudential gain; and that spiteful envy is both morally and prudentially very bad in the long run, even if it can bring temporary relief. These differences have been overlooked by philosophers and psychologists, and are relevant to a variety of practical applications, especially in counseling and in professional settings.

Chapter 4 looks at envy toward the *beloved*. From Plato and the Fathers of the Christian Church to modern clinical psychologists, the received wisdom is that envy and love are incompatible opposites. Such an opposition is plausible: envy is believed to necessarily involve malice toward the envied, while love is believed to necessarily involve concern for the beloved's welfare; envy feels bad, while (reciprocated) love feels good; envy brings with it *Schadenfreude*, pleasure at others' misfortune, while love brings with it what Germans call *Mifffreude*, joy at others' success. I concede that the experience of envying or being envied in a loving relationship is often fraught. Nevertheless, I argue that envy and love are not incompatible opposites but two sides of the same coin. They thrive under the same

psychological conditions and, as such, often accompany one another. In fact, I argue that love can benefit from emulative envy, and—if it is *wise*—love can tolerate some amount of inert, aggressive, and spiteful envy. Envy is the dark side of love, and love can illuminate envy.

Chapter 5 investigates the implications of my taxonomy for the *public* and *political* sphere. Envy is surprisingly absent in the recent revival of political emotions, and this chapter attempts to change the trend. The first part of the chapter reviews a debate in distributive justice that is dominated by what I call the *Envious Egalitarianism* argument, according to which egalitarianism should be rejected because it is motivated by the vice of envy. I argue that such a debate is misguided for two reasons: it uses a very narrow notion of envy—what I call *uberspiteful* envy—and it is focused only on differences of socioeconomic status. In contrast, I suggest a more contemporary approach that considers the role of envy in all its varieties and with regard to different types of social identity. In particular, I focus on relations between racialized groups in the United States, and introduce the idea of *envious racial prejudice*. I apply my taxonomy to this new perspective, devoting particular attention to the case of Asian Americans and arguing that anti-Asian racism is particularly imbued with envy. I conclude by acknowledging the differences between the private and public sphere, and suggest that in the latter envy is often mingled with resentment, indignation, and particularly jealousy. Thus, I end this chapter by complicating the distinctions between envy, resentment, and jealousy defended in earlier chapters.

The Conclusion contains somewhat impressionistic observations about what envy tells us about human value. I start with the notion of *fitting envy*. This notion implies that envy informs us not just of particular things we care about as individual agents, but also of what types of goodness we care about (and perhaps ought to care about) as a species. Thus, I reject the view that authentic goodness is necessarily noncomparative and nonpositional, and try to develop the implications of the idea that human psychology is deeply shaped by *social comparison*. I suggest that there are two distinct but connected implications. The first is *metaphysical*: what is good for humans is almost entirely dependent on how we relate to and stack against one another. The second is *epistemic*: what is assessed as good relies almost entirely on standards that are relative and dependent on interpersonal comparison.

The final historical Appendix surveys views of envy and cognate emotions in the ancient Greek tradition, in late antiquity and medieval thought, and in the modern era (with a quick dive into the twentieth century) and connects these ideas to the current discussion.

#### NOTES

1. Ingrid Vendrell Ferran, "'I Could Have Been You': Existential Envy and the Self," in *The Moral Psychology of Envy*, ed. Sara Protasi (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 77–92.
2. Susan T. Fiske, *Envy Up, Scorn Down: How Status Divides Us* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011), 13.
3. Fiske, *Envy Up, Scorn Down*.

4. George M. Foster, "The Anatomy of Envy: A Study in Symbolic Behavior," *Current Anthropology* 13 (1972): 165–202; Patricia M. Rodriguez Mosquera, "A Sociocultural Perspective on Envy," in *The Moral Psychology of Envy*, ed. Sara Protasi (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 23–40.

- *Emulative envy* is envy where the good is perceived as obtainable, and the focus of concern is the good (rather than the envied person).
- *Aggressive envy* is envy where good is perceived as obtainable, and the focus of concern is the envied person.
- *Spiteful envy* is envy where the good is perceived as unobtainable, and the focus of concern is the envied person.
- *Inert envy* is envy where the good is perceived as unobtainable, and the focus of concern is the good.

## How Competitive Can Virtuous Envy Be?

Rosalind Chaplin

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

Sara Protasi's *The Philosophy of Envy* (2021) offers an apology for envy and a rich and sensitive discussion of envy's capacity to help us flourish in our interpersonal lives. Like much of the work in philosophy that I most admire, Protasi's book is attuned to the complexities of emotions that we often unreflectively gloss as either all-good or all-bad.<sup>1</sup> As Protasi argues, envy is capable of being a corrupting force, but it is not inherently either prudentially or morally bad, and some of the things that are most valuable to us—foremost among them, love—are deeply connected to envy. In Protasi's view, envy and love flourish in the same conditions, love and envy can coexist harmoniously, and envy can help us attune to what we most value in our lives and relationships. So, against the received wisdom that envy destroys love and love extinguishes envy, Protasi argues that "envy is the dark side of love, and love can illuminate envy."<sup>2</sup> What this means is that we should not take envy to be an emotion that we should always try to work out of our inner lives.

Reading Protasi's book has helped me to think about the many ways in which envy can strain but also help us improve our relationships with those who are most important to us. It has also drawn my attention to features of envy that I had previously underappreciated—foremost among these is the *competitive* nature of envy and the ways in which different competitive contexts can impact how envy manifests. In what follows, I want to explore some further questions about envy's competitive nature and the impact that different competitive circumstances have on how envy manifests as either virtuous or vicious. Ultimately, I want to make a case for an even more extensive apology for envy than the one Protasi explicitly offers (though I hope that what I say constitutes an expansion of her view rather than a challenge to anything at its core).

The conceptual heart of Protasi's book is her division between four different kinds of envy. At the most general level, Protasi understands envy as "an aversive response to a perceived inferiority or disadvantage vis-à-vis a similar other, with regard to a good that is relevant to the sense of identity of the envier."<sup>3</sup> And she further taxonomizes kinds of envy by attending to a distinction between (i) the envier's *focus of concern* and (ii) the envier's perception of the *obtainability of the good*. The envier's focus of concern is what the envier cares about evaluatively and is either the envied *person* or the desired *good*. Finally, the envier perceives the desired good either as *obtainable* or as *unobtainable*.<sup>4</sup> Putting these alternatives together, four basic types of envy result:

A further important part of Protasi's taxonomy is the distinctive action tendencies associated with each type of envy, since these different action tendencies determine the potential virtuousness or viciousness of each type of envy. For Protasi, when we experience *emulative envy*, we are motivated to *self-improve* as a way of achieving the good, and we do not try to bring the envied person down. The reason for this is that the emulative envier cares about getting the good *for its own sake* (a term which, for Protasi, just means "independently from the fact that the envied person has it"<sup>5</sup>). For this reason, emulative envy is capable of being virtuous. In contrast, aggressive, spiteful, and inert envy are not capable of being virtuous in Protasi's scheme. The aggressive envier cares more about the fact that the envied person is in a position of superiority and less about getting the good for its own sake. Consequently, the behavioral tendency of aggressive envy is to *steal* the good from the envied (rather than to level-up). Spiteful envy also has morally problematic behavioral tendencies. Spiteful enviers believe they are incapable of having the good for themselves, and so they aim to *spoil* the good, that is, to destroy the good as a way of bringing down the envied, even if that means that no one (including the envier) gets to enjoy it. Finally, inert enviers do not act aggressively towards the envied because they are focused on the good rather than the person, but they feel incapable of self-improvement as a way of reaching the good and hence have a tendency to *sulk*.

How does all this relate to Protasi's positive thesis that envy can have a positive role in our lives? As noted above, Protasi's considered view is that only emulative envy is capable of being virtuous.<sup>6</sup> Emulative envy is unique, she writes, because with emulative envy "[t]he envier looks at the target like a model, someone to emulate rather than defeat or bring down. Consequently, emulative envy is completely void of malice or ill will."<sup>7</sup> To help us see what emulative envy looks like, Protasi offers a paradigmatic case that should be familiar to those of us working in academia:

Emma is a philosophy professor. She envies her colleague Diotima, because she perceives Diotima to be always a tad more productive or successful than she is. Emma values being an excellent philosophy professor for its own sake: being a philosopher is a defining part of her identity. Diotima is a role model for her: Emma can see

how Diotima’s achievements depend on hard work, not on some innate or mysterious talents. So Diotima becomes a constant spur to do better, to improve herself. Their relationship is cordial, even friendly, and Emma is happy that Diotima is in her department. Diotima provides a sort of moving target that keeps Emma on track. Emma’s envy is emulative.<sup>8</sup>

One might be tempted to understand Emma’s case as a case of admiration (not envy), but Protasi insists (rightly, to my mind) that we should understand Emma’s experience as an experience of envy rather than admiration. Crucially, the reason for this is that Emma’s emotion is a *competitive* emotion, and admiration is not essentially competitive—indeed, this is part of why Emma’s envy is so effective at motivating her to self-improve.<sup>9</sup> Protasi puts this point as follows: “Emulative envy is competitive (like any other envy), even if not adversarial,” and the reason Emma’s envy can be virtuous is that it can be a non-malicious impetus for self-improvement.<sup>10</sup>

I think it is a crucial insight that emulative envy can be virtuous because it can provide an impetus for non-malicious self-improvement. But I am interested in thinking more about the sense in which emulative envy is a *competitive* emotion (like all kinds of envy). And in particular, I am interested in thinking about a sense in which perhaps even emulative envy can be adversarial (at least in the sense of being overtly competitive and aimed out outcompeting its target). If it can be adversarial in this sense, and if it remains nonvicious in some of these adversarial manifestations, then perhaps we can extend Protasi’s apology for envy even farther than she takes it.

Let me note that one of the reasons I am interested in this line of reasoning is that I think it will help Protasi deal more effectively with an objection she considers, viz., that the competitive nature of envy entails that it is always at least implicitly malicious. Consider the following worry raised by Justin D’Arms. According to D’Arms, all envy is at least implicitly malicious because it is in the nature of envy to be extinguished when its target loses their advantage.<sup>11</sup> So, to return to the case involving Emma, the objection goes as follows. Suppose Diotima suffered some misfortune such that she lost her philosophical talent. Then, per the objection, Emma’s envy would be extinguished by Diotima’s misfortune, and her envy is therefore at least implicitly malicious. That is to say, all envy involves at least an implicit desire to bring its target down, and this desire is one that we must judge as malicious.

To this challenge, Protasi responds that emulative envy need not involve this desire at all. She puts her response as follows:

Even if Diotima happened to lose her philosophical talent on her own, Emma’s envy would not be extinguished because its constitutive desire of obtaining the good for herself would not be satisfied but rather emptied of its object: Emma cannot feel emulative envy toward Diotima if Diotima is not worthy of being emulated anymore.

But Emma would still want to get to the level where Diotima had been.<sup>12</sup>

I take it Protasi’s core insight here is that the desire driving Emma’s envy really is not for Diotima to lose her advantage vis-à-vis Emma—after all, Emma’s focus of concern is the good Diotima possesses, not Diotima herself and her relative standing vis-à-vis Emma. In this sense, there is nothing even implicitly malicious in Emma’s envy. However, it nonetheless strikes as correct to say (following D’Arms) that Emma’s envy would be extinguished if Diotima were to lose her advantage. More specifically, because envy is *competitive* and requires a target with whom to compete, Emma’s envy would be satisfied if Diotima were to lose her talents. But as I see it, this is compatible with Protasi’s claim that Emma’s envy is not even implicitly vicious; Emma in no way desires to deprive Diotima of her own talents or bring her down to her level, and her envy expresses no malice or ill will; she would much prefer that her envy be extinguished by her own leveling up rather than by Diotima’s leveling down.

Here is a related but slightly different case, which I hope will bring out ways in which even envy tied to outcompeting the envied can be nonvicious. Consider the following real-life athletic rivalry. In the 1990s and 2000s, the long-distance runners Haile Gebrselassie and Paul Tergat had an intense rivalry coexisting with a longstanding friendship. Both runners held 10,000-meter world records at different times in their careers, but for five consecutive years, Tergat lost to Gebrselassie in every single race in which they both competed. Famously, at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, Tergat almost beat Gebrselassie, but in a dramatic final sprint, Gebrselassie overtook him and finished a mere 0.09 seconds ahead. It is not difficult to imagine Tergat making it his aim to finally defeat Gebrselassie one-on-one, and it seems to me that he would have likely envied Gebrselassie for his superior finishing speed. (Tergat was widely known as a “plodder” relative to Gebrselassie.<sup>13</sup>) All this said, however, it seems to me that even if Tergat did envy Gebrselassie and aim to beat him in this way, his envy was not even implicitly vicious. The two runners pushed each other to improve, they did not have ill will towards one another, and they even regarded one another as very good friends. Given all this, however, we have good reason to think that the desire to beat or defeat the envied is compatible with non-malicious envy. And if this is so, then there may be forms of non-vicious envy that *do* focus on outperforming the envied and not just on leveling up to the envied as a role model.

So, returning to the case of Emma and Diotima, not only can we allow that Emma’s envy is nonvicious even if it would be extinguished were Diotima to lose her advantage, but we can also consider the following adjustment to the case and hold that even the adjusted case features non-vicious envy. Suppose Emma *does* want to outperform Diotima, but she does *not* want to do so via Diotima’s loss of talent. We can imagine a case like this where Emma has this desire to outperform Diotima (to “beat” her), and I think we can maintain the judgment that her envy is nonvicious even in this case (much like Tergat’s imagined desire to beat Gebrselassie—and his envy—was nonvicious). We may need to imagine Emma as being a more competitive



person than Protasi's initial case suggests she is, but I think that imagining her as more competitive in this way does not require us to imagine her envy as malicious. Instead, perhaps Emma's and Diotima's relationship is simply more like the relationship between Tergat and Gebrselassie—competitive in character but nonetheless defined by goodwill. So understood, Emma's envy expresses her competitive urge to "win" via self-improvement, making it prudentially good, and it is nonvicious because she wishes Diotima well and wants her to remain successful.

Let me be clear that in suggesting that non-vicious envy can aim at outperforming (or "beating") the envied, I do not mean to propose a deep revision to Protasi's view. Instead, I mean only to suggest that an even wider array of instances of envy are valuable and nonmalicious, an array that includes instances of envy that *do* involve a desire to outcompete the envied. So not only can we say that because all envy *is* competitive, Emma's envy *would be* extinguished were Diotima to lose her philosophical talents; in addition, we can also say that even if part of Emma's envy is wanting to *surpass* Diotima, that need not mean that her envy is even implicitly malicious. The reason for this is that she does not want to extinguish her envy in a way that involves Diotima's losing her talents, and she wishes Diotima well. Given this, we can accommodate D'Arms's intuition that envy is extinguished whenever the target loses their advantage *without* giving up the view that emulative envy is a genuine form of envy *and* without giving up the view that emulative envy need not be even implicitly malicious. We can also extend emulative envy to cases that include the envier's desire to outcompete (or "beat") the envied—assuming these cases involve the desire to self-improve rather than to steal the good, they are cases of emulative rather than aggressive envy, but they also involve the desire to "win."

Stepping back, we are now in a position better to understand the competitive nature of envy and the ways particular circumstances can influence whether or not emulative envy manifests as partly adversarial. Part of the reason the case of Tergat and Gebrselassie is so readily understood as one in which a more competitive or adversarial kind of envy is compatible with goodwill towards the envied is that Tergat's imagined envy occurs in a competitive context in which Gebrselassie's win must be Tergat's loss, and vice versa. That is, Gebrselassie and Tergat are playing a zero-sum game (a race in which only one can win), and in light of this, Tergat's envy must involve a desire to beat Gebrselassie. Moreover, because the partly adversarial nature of Tergat's envy arises from the competitive nature of their circumstances rather than from Tergat's ill will, his envy is intuitively nonvicious.

I said above that I intended to extend Protasi's arguments rather than to modify anything central to her view, but there are a few parts of Protasi's discussion that suggest she may want to resist the conclusions I have just drawn. In particular, at several junctures, Protasi says that emulative envy involves a tendency *not* to see one's situation as a zero-sum game, and this is connected to the emulative envier's focus on the good rather than the person. She writes: "emulative envy's characteristic tendency to self-improvement *relies upon, and in turn encourages,*

the tendency to look at the situation as a non-zero-sum context, even in cases in which it objectively is."<sup>14</sup> She continues, "from a cognitive perspective, enviers should be encouraged to redirect their concern from the target to the good, by reconceptualizing the good and thinking of the situation as non-zero sum."<sup>15</sup> In other words, Protasi reasons that one can have one's *focus of concern* be the good (rather than the person) only by regarding situations as non-zero sum. And since focusing on the good rather than the person is what distinguishes (potentially virtuous) emulative envy from (vicious) aggressive envy, our strategy as enviers wanting to avoid viciousness should be to regard the good as shareable and the context as non-zero-sum.

However, I think the discussion above shows the envier's *focus of concern* relates to the tendency to self-improve in slightly more complicated ways than this, depending on the competitive context. More specifically, if one is in fact in a competitive context that is zero-sum in nature, then the tendency to self-improve must be associated with the desire to outperform the envied. Or put differently, if the good is nonshareable (e.g., winning the race), successful self-improvement will inevitably imply out-competing envy's target, and the desire to achieve the good will (at least in some sense) imply a desire to outperform or beat the envied. But as I see it, this does not force us to say that enviers such as Tergat maliciously aim at stealing the good from the envied (as would be the case if Tergat's envy was *aggressive*). After all, whether the good is shareable is not up to Tergat, and his desire to win is compatible with having goodwill towards Gebrselassie. In fact, returning to Emma's case, there is even a case to be made that Emma's desire to outperform Diotima is nonvicious despite the fact that it is optional for Emma to conceive of self-improvement under the guise of outperforming Diotima. As long as Emma's competitive desire to improve does not involve wanting to deprive Diotima of her philosophical talents, Emma's envy is arguably nonvicious. And more generally, envy can be overtly competitive while still spurring self-improvement and avoiding a vicious desire to bring the envied down.

Let me end with a few reflections on how these points bear on Protasi's discussion of the relationship between love and envy. One of Protasi's core claims in the book is that love and envy are normatively compatible (*pace* the received view). In particular, she argues that love can benefit from emulative envy, and love can tolerate the presence of some amount of inert, aggressive, and spiteful envy *if* love is wise.<sup>16</sup> According to Protasi, the reason love and emulative envy can coexist harmoniously is that emulative envy does not involve ill will toward the envied, and it is fully compatible with the duties of beneficence that ideal loving relationships prescribe.<sup>17</sup> And the reason wise, loving relationships are compatible with some degree of more malicious forms of envy is that wise lovers are "capable of forgiving and forgetting, of understanding that the beloved is human and thus prone to human psychological propensities such as envy."<sup>18</sup> As a case in point, Protasi points to the example of Cristina and Meredith in *Grey's Anatomy*, who have a friendship characterized by wise love (and the readiness to forgive) and who occasionally feel spiteful envy towards one another in addition to joy in one another's achievements.

Having thought more about how emulative envious sometimes conceive of self-improvement under the guise of outcompeting the envied, I now wonder whether virtuous emulative envy may also sometimes require wise love for its successful management. For, at least intuitively, striving to outcompete a person one loves does put some strain on one's loving relationship. This seems to me to be true even when the desire to outcompete is not even implicitly malicious and occurs against a backdrop of respect and goodwill. But if this is correct, then we might say the following. The reason emulative envy's more competitive manifestations can coexist with love in a flourishing relationship is in fact the same as the reason other forms of envy can coexist with love: love can be wise, and wise lovers are ready to recognize and respond appropriately to the fact that we are all prone to some competitive emotions that put strain on our relationships. So perhaps the competitive nature of envy requires management with wise love even when envy is emulative and aimed at self-improvement.

Protasi ends her book with the following important observation about how we often respond to children who express envy. Often, she notes, when children express envy towards one another, we try to manage away their envy by telling them, "This is not a competition." But Protasi points out that it may not be altogether helpful to respond to children in this way. She writes:

The truth is that our lives are often competitive; that our standards of goodness are almost always comparative; and that envy, jealousy, and other rivalrous emotions are often *appropriate*. Thus, I should let my children feel, and learn from, those emotions. I should teach them how to cope with those unpleasant feelings productively, rather than rushing to make them feel better, to eschew the difficult interactions caused by them.<sup>19</sup>

I think this is an important insight, and I think it should also prompt us to expand our understanding of emulative envy per my discussion above. Sometimes, we simply are in zero-sum competitive contexts, and pursuing the goods we value sometimes simply does require us to outcompete the person we envy. Other times, we find that our competitive nature inclines us to pursue the goods we value under the guise of outperforming the target of our envy. And in the spirit of extending Protasi's apology for envy, I think we can see that these more overtly competitive manifestations of emulative envy need not be seen as incompatible with our having respect and good will for the envied. We can want to outcompete those we wish the best for, and emulative envy can aim at outperforming the envied without being even implicitly malicious. Given this, however, Protasi's account of wise love may be all the more important as we attempt to navigate the role that envy plays in our loving relationships.

**NOTES**

1. To give a very incomplete list of examples, I have in mind the work by scholars like Cherry ("Forgiveness, Exemplars, and the Oppressed"), Fricker ("How Is Forgiveness Always a Gift?"), and MacLachlan ("Practicing Imperfect Forgiveness"), who argue

that although forgiveness has important value, appeals to that value can also be leveraged for oppressive purposes when disempowered groups are pressured to forgive.

2. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 4.
3. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 25.
4. Note that Protasi understands these distinctions in terms of a continuum and hence the divisions between types of envy as being on a spectrum.
5. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 38.
6. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 45.
7. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 45.
8. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 44.
9. As Protasi points out, research shows that envy outperforms admiration in its ability to motivate us to improve (Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 49).
10. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 49.
11. D'Arms, "Envy."
12. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 52.
13. See "Gebrselassie vs Tergat in Sydney: A Race about (Almost) Nothing," *Museum of World Athletics*, April 18, 2021, <https://worldathletics.org/heritage/news/gebrselassie-tergat-sydney-olympics-10000m>
14. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 88.
15. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 93.
16. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 96.
17. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 110.
18. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 111.
19. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 151.

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*Self-Envy  
(or Envy Actually)*

Lucy Osler  
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

*If you look for it, I've got a sneaky feeling that love envy actually is all around.*

When I started reading Sara Protasi's book *The Philosophy of Envy*, I was excited to learn more about an emotion I thought I rarely experienced. In the opening pages, I found myself nodding along as Protasi quotes her mother saying,

"I never feel envy, but I often feel jealousy!"<sup>1</sup> But envy, it turns out, is sneaky, often masking itself in the guise of other emotions, hiding just below the surface. What this meticulously argued book unveils is both a nuanced taxonomy of different kinds of envy and the intimate relationship that envy has to all manner of other emotions, including jealousy, shame, resentment, despair, and love. I now recognize that not only am I more familiar with envy than I supposed, but I experience envy rather often.

This got me thinking about other instances of envy that I experience which I have previously overlooked or perhaps mislabeled. Prompted by Protasi's insightful handling of envy in its varied forms, one question kept coming back to me: Can you envy *yourself*? Envy, as we will see, is typically defined as directed at another person. I will claim, however, that one can indeed experience *self-envy*, even that it is not an uncommon experience. My aim is twofold. First, I want to offer an expansion to Protasi's own extensive documenting of envy by considering a category of envy that has been overlooked due to the assumption that envy must always be other-directed. Second, I want to suggest that contemplating self-envy reveals other emotions that have more than a passing relationship with envy—emotions such as nostalgia, regret, frustration, and grief. I also think that these considerations add more ballast to Protasi's defense of envy as not always a vicious emotion, working to rehabilitate, in part at least, envy's reputation.

Let us start with an overview of some of the key claims in the book.

## 1. THE PHILOSOPHY OF ENVY

Protasi defines envy as "an aversive response to a perceived inferiority or disadvantage vis-à-vis a similar other, with regard to a good that is relevant to the sense of identity of the envier."<sup>2</sup> Envy is depicted as having a tripartite structure: it involves the person experiencing envy (the *envier*), the person towards whom the envy is directed (the *envied* or the *target*), and the object that the envier perceives themselves to be lacking (the *good*). In being an emotion that "necessarily involves comparing oneself to another", envy is a social emotion.<sup>3</sup> It is also a "self-conscious emotion."<sup>4</sup> Experiencing envy reveals us as being in a position of perceived inferiority in light of the other. Envy is not just about the other person; it is also about *our self*. Envy, then, can be categorized with other self-conscious emotions such as pride or shame.

It also has an epistemic dimension—it provides us with knowledge about our values.<sup>5</sup> If I envy my sister's sense of style, this reveals the value I place on personal style. Moreover, it reveals personal style as something I would like to possess myself, something that I take to be relevant to my own identity and sense of who I am. In contrast, I might admire my sister's handwriting while not feeling envious of it, not feeling that my own inferior handwriting reflects on me being an inferior *person* due to my perceived deficiency.

While envy is an emotion involving comparison, we notably do not experience envy in relation to everyone. We envy those we perceive to be in a position of superiority or

advantage, and who are sufficiently similar to us. "We do not envy people out of our league,"<sup>6</sup> Protasi tells us, as their perceived superiority does not painfully reflect on us in the same way as someone who we consider to be in the same "comparison class" as us. Thus, I might envy my sister's style but instead feel admiration or awe of Grace Jones's or Marlene Dietrich's iconic looks.

Phenomenologically speaking, experiencing envy is a painful affair, as it involves feeling oneself lacking in something you care about. It can vary from mildly unpleasant to nearly unbearable. Envy can also motivate us in different ways: it can make us strive to get what we lack, it can cause us to want to get the good away from the envied person, or it can drive us to despair. Protasi provides a framework for guiding us through different varieties of envy. She highlights four variables that impact the character of envy: a focus either more on (1) the good or on the (2) envied person, and the envier feeling (3) more or (4) less capable of getting the good themselves. Protasi uses these variables to outline four kinds of envy:

*Emulative envy*: where the envier is focused on the good (e.g., personal style) and believes themselves capable of obtaining the good for oneself (e.g., through cultivating good aesthetic taste). This motivates the envier to "level up," to emulate the envied person.

*Inert envy*: where the envier is focused on the good (e.g., personal style) and doesn't believe themselves capable of obtaining the good (e.g., believing oneself to lack good taste). This can lead the envier to feel despair and despondency.

*Aggressive envy*: where the envier is focused on the envied (e.g., my sister) and believes themselves capable of taking the good away from the envied (e.g., taking her clothes for myself). This can lead the envier to try and steal the good.

*Spiteful envy*: where the envier is focused on the envied (e.g., my sister) and believes themselves incapable of taking the good away from the envied (e.g., she'd notice if I started wearing her clothes and demand them back). This can lead to the envier attempting to destroy the good, thus "leveling down" the envied.

By distinguishing these different kinds of envy, how they feel, and what responses they likely motivate, Protasi opens the door for defending the claim that experiencing envy is not always the vice it is taken to be. In inert envy, for instance, we can experience an extremely unpleasant form of envy that can lead to despair and depression, but which does not cause us to attack the envied person, even leaving room for us to be simultaneously happy for the envied person's good fortune. Emulative envy might even lead to virtuous actions of attempting to better ourselves. As such, Protasi takes a departure from accounts that posit envy as necessarily desiring to take the good away from the envied other<sup>7</sup> and aims to rehabilitate envy's reputation, stressing its role in revealing what we cherish, and even prompting self-flourishing.

Alongside her taxonomy of envy, Protasi adeptly reveals the way that envy intertwines with, and sometimes even poses as, other emotions. Like many accounts, the difference between envy and jealousy is carefully detailed. Protasi notes that there are many similarities between these two rivalrous emotions, including their tripartite structure, and suggests that these emotions often co-occur. However, like other researchers, she distinguishes these two emotions on the grounds that envy is concerned about the envier's *lack* of something, while the jealous person is instead concerned about *losing* something—"envy covets what jealousy guards."<sup>8</sup> The similarities between envy and jealousy, as well as society's more accepting attitude towards jealousy, often lead people to describe themselves as jealous when they are, in fact, envious.

However, Protasi goes beyond the classic comparison of envy and jealousy. She claims that envy is not only commonly mislabeled as jealousy but that envy often masquerades as other emotions. Most notably, envy commonly presents as resentment or anger. Take, for instance, the rage of Incels directed at so-called "Staceys" and "Chads" who have the sexual success and social power they lack.<sup>9</sup> More provocatively, Protasi also argues that love and envy have a close relationship. She argues that although envy is typically viewed as something that extinguishes love, even antithetical to love, envy and love are "two sides of the same coin." Protasi highlights that envy and love emerge from the same psychological tendencies to engage in social comparison. The same kinds of qualities that we hold in esteem that might arouse love for another can also arouse envy; being impressed by my partner's beautiful writing may be part of why I love them but can also be the source of my envying their easy style. Thus, to attempt to extinguish envy for one's loved one could also harm one's love for them. Indeed, Protasi goes so far as to advocate that emulative envy can be beneficial to one's loving relationships, potentially leading to the "opportunity for growth, both for the relationship and for the lovers."<sup>10</sup>

Given envy's co-occurrence with other emotions, it is perhaps no surprise that envy can fly under the radar, especially when we take into account envy's reputation as a negative, vicious emotion. Protasi notes that people are typically more comfortable acknowledging jealousy, anger, or resentment than envy (as both her mother and I can attest to).<sup>11</sup> It is envy's covetousness that, in part, makes envy difficult to confess. There is an uncomfortable *rawness* about envy. Admitting to nakedly wanting something that another has discloses who we are, what we care about, and that we are (perceived to be) inferior: "Tell me what you envy and I will tell you who you are, or at least what you care about."<sup>12</sup> It makes us vulnerable and, due to its reputation for being vicious, makes others wary. Admitting to being envious risks exposing us to shame.

Compounding this stigma are the cultural, gendered associations of envy. Envy is Medusa, petty schoolgirls, and bitter spinsters. It is famously directed at penises. It is a maligned emotion not just because of its supposedly vicious nature but because it is experienced by the maligned. After all, only people who are "lacking" experience it, and those who lack are regularly reviled.

Envy, then, is not just personal but political. Not only does reviling enviers often work to disproportionately stigmatize the marginalized and vulnerable, but our very sociocultural practices and contexts scaffold what we (ought to) value, thus shaping who, how, and why we feel envy.<sup>13</sup> We might speculate, for instance, that women are more prone to experiencing envy when situated in societies that place them in positions of inferiority and disadvantage, seeding feelings of self-doubt and imposter syndrome, while also pedaling gendered expectations of perfection such as through beauty ideals.<sup>14</sup> Envy is not just about *individual* deficiency but is rooted in *structural* expectations, value-systems, and situated self-perception. Like other emotions, such as loneliness<sup>15</sup> and anger,<sup>16</sup> envy is a feminist issue. While Protasi concludes the book by thinking about envy in political contexts, the inherently political nature of envy, as an emotion about value and comparison, presents important avenues for critical exploration. Not only would pursuing these considerations deepen our understanding of envy, disclosing the sociopolitical and situated nature of this emotion would likely further Protasi's aim of rehabilitating envy by uncovering how society sets certain people up to feel envy more than others.

*The Philosophy of Envy* presents a compelling argument that, even if we don't want to admit it, this maligned emotion is experienced much more often than we might suppose. Indeed, as Protasi herself speculates, in a world of social media, where we are so easily able to compare ourselves to others and unrealistic images and expectations abound, it is easy to believe that we are in an envy-saturated age. These observations prompted me to wonder if the spread of envy goes beyond the forms Protasi considers in her book. Going back to the definition of envy as an aversive response to perceiving oneself to be in a position of inferiority in relation to a similar other, I wondered who could be a more "similar other" than myself. This got me asking, can envy be *self-directed*?

## 2. SELF-ENVY THREE WAYS

Little has been written on self-envy. Envy, as Protasi notes and endorses, is typically defined as *necessarily* involving another person (or persons). If envy is about desiring something that we perceive ourselves as lacking, how could we ever envy ourselves? As such, we might suppose that the very notion of self-envy simply cannot get off the ground.

The most sustained consideration of self-envy is found in the psychoanalytic work of Rafael E. López-Corvo. López-Corvo describes self-envy as a feature of various self-disorders where one part of the self, typically associated with a childlike part, envies another part of the self, typically associated with a more mature and creative part.<sup>17</sup> As an act of revenge, the envious self seeks to harm or undermine the envied self, often resulting in self-destructive behavior. Putting to one side questions about the accuracy of this description of self-disorders, this characterization of spiteful self-envy seems to necessarily presuppose a pathological splitting or fragmentation of self. Ingrid Vendrall Ferran also considers a similar idea in the work of the Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno. The character Artemio, in the 1918 short story "Artemio, heuatontimoroumenos," has

“two rival halves”<sup>18</sup> of his personality, which experience envy with regard to one another and go out of their way to thwart one another’s plans.

I want to consider the possibility of non-pathological self-envy. I outline three ways that we can experience non-pathological self-envy, that is, envy in relation to your *past* self, your *future* self, and *counterfactual* selves. This is by no means intended to be an exhaustive account of self-envy. Instead, it’s an initial case in favor of the concept that also works to reveal other emotions that might harbor or prompt envy.

### 2.1. ENVYING YOUR PAST SELF

I often find myself envying my past self. Instances of this include envying the me that used to bounce out of bed at 5:30 a.m., the me that lived in Copenhagen, and, as much as I wish I didn’t, the me with younger skin.<sup>19</sup> I think about how lucky she had it, how she had these goods that I now lack, some of which she didn’t even obviously value at the time. I sometimes experience an envy in relation to my past self that might be best described as a kind of existential envy—an envy for myself at a particular time, for a particular way that I used to be in the world.<sup>20</sup> A classic case of this is envying myself as a child, when I did not have the burden of being (or attempting to be) an adult in the world. I envy her the simplicity that life held. I also catch myself envying the me experiencing certain things for the first time—falling in love, hearing Holly Herndon’s *Proto*, or eating Biscoff on a crumpet—new experiences that, by definition, I can never experience again.

Just as with other-directed envy, the experience of these envies can vary in intensity, from the relatively fleeting and shallow to the more prolonged and painful. They can also vary across the dimensions of being more focused on the good to more focused on my past self. In cases of existential self-envy, it seems the good and the envied merge together as I envy the very way I used to be in the world. Such experiences can have the tone of spiteful or aggressive envy, leading to me disavowing the value I place on these goods (I don’t really care about being an early riser) or attempting to ruin the memory in some way (it wasn’t *really* that good). But they can also lead to the sulkiness that is the telltale sign of inert envy (I’ll never be like that again) or the stimulation of emulative envy (I did it before so I surely can do it again!).

While I do not think there is an exact cutoff point, it seems that I am more likely to experience self-envy towards a past self the more distant it is to my current self temporally; or, perhaps, towards a me that precedes some kind of transformative experience, such as before a major life event (e.g., marriage, death of a parent or loved one, birth of a child, etc.), that radically changes my orientation in or understanding of the world.<sup>21</sup> Such past selves are more easily experienced as distant from my present-day self and thus able to stand as a target of envy without implying some kind of pathological splitting of the self.

Again, I think it pertinent to note the role that digital technology might play in prompting experiences of (self-) envy. Just as I might find myself envious of others from

being exposed to their photos online, I might find myself envious of my past self when Google Photos bombards me with photos of younger me or when I trawl my own social media pages looking at all the fun things I was doing that weren’t admin or boring chores. Online I am faced with the memories that I felt warranted capturing and preserving, me “living my best life.” Digital technology, in externalizing aspects of my past self, might also work to create the kind of distance or separation between my past and present required for self-envy to take root. This incessant exposure to my past self might be a hotbed of self-envy. I am also increasingly fed endless advertisements for face cream to help me regain my youth, sedimenting the kinds of value that reify youth, potentially working to prompt self-envious feelings towards a younger version of me.

Thinking about self-envy for one’s past self is suggestive for thinking about the relationship between envy and nostalgia. Nostalgia is a bittersweet emotion that involves a longing for times gone past—think Proust and his madeleines.<sup>22</sup> Such experiences often revolve around feeling a longing for some good in one’s past, such as childhood, a past relationship, an old home, or a less creaky body. But this longing comes with a bitter taste; we do not just fondly remember this time as in reminiscing, we feel its absence and our inability to go back to that moment in time and space. I suggest that the bitterness we associate with nostalgia can involve the twinges of self-envy—envy for that past self with goods which we now take to be out of our reach. Just as love can be accompanied by envy, so can nostalgia for one’s past solicit self-envy; they seem to emerge from the same ground of comparing oneself to one’s own past. As we typically experience nostalgia for goods that are not within our control to obtain (as they are bound up with a time that has gone), I suggest that the self-envy that binds itself to nostalgia is often inert envy. This, I think, helps explain why indulging in too much in nostalgia can lead to despondency. Where the sweetness of nostalgia evaporates altogether, this could fuel regret, self-judgment, and self-recrimination for not being the person we used to be.

### 2.2. ENVYING YOUR FUTURE SELF

Sometimes I envy future mes. When hiking up a steep mountain, I envy the me who has already reached the top. I envy the me who has already written this commentary and has managed to do so adroitly and engagingly. I catch myself envying the me who has already made a decision about whether to have children or not. Often, these instances involve envy in relation to goods that are on a path I am already pursuing—projects or decisions that I am currently grappling with. I am prone to experiencing this in moments of frustration, when I feel stuck, that the path ahead of me is blocked, when the effort is burdensome, and in moments of self-doubt about my ability to achieve my goals. I engage in wishful fantasies of already having done the thing and can end up experiencing envy towards this imagined projection of myself in the future; a future me that is me but a little bit better, a little bit calmer, a little bit happier, a little more successful.

One might resent the future self who already has what the current self lacks. In a milder form, I sometimes picture

this future me as a bit smug and self-satisfied, particularly when self-doubt takes hold, which might suggest an imaginative form of leveling down this future me. However, with Protasi's spectrum of envy in hand, I'm inclined to think that this kind of self-envy can also be self-motivating. It can be used to encourage me onwards, to become that future me; particularly when I take myself to be capable of achieving, or at least aspiring to achieve, these goods if only I put in the effort required. As such, these look like cases of emulative envy that take place without the need for a model actualized in another person. Rather, I hold this idealized future me up as worthy of chasing and this can motivate perseverance. We might even cultivate this emulative self-envy as a tool for motivation and self-improvement.

### 2.3. ENVYING YOUR COUNTERFACTUAL SELF

I recently had an experience of, what I am calling, counterfactual self-envy at a gig in Gunnersbury Park. I was listening to delightfully hopeful and tender music amongst a crowd predominantly made up of queer people in their late teens and early twenties. Everyone looked beautiful, creative, and happy (though I know this unlikely to be an entirely accurate interpretation). I found myself crying through most of the set at the kindness and generosity of the performers and the audience. It was a very beautiful experience but also, to my surprise, rather painful. As the gig went on, I realized that what I felt was a kind of *envy*.

On the surface, this seems like a classic case of inert envy. I was envious of these young queer people. I perceived myself as lacking the social space of support, acceptance, and exploration when growing up that I imagined these people to have. Their richness in the things I lack, and which I value and desire, caused me both pain and a certain amount of grief. I certainly did not want to take away these things from the crowd. Indeed, I was struck by the hope I so often have when around such groups.

What I found peculiar, though, was that I did not just, or even mostly, experience myself as envying the rest of the audience. I felt an envy for the me that I might have been had I been born not in 1988 but in 2000, the me that might have known they were queer before they were nearly thirty, for what Ferran calls my "ontological possibilities."<sup>23</sup> I envied this counterfactual me for having the possibilities that I perceived myself as lacking (or not brave enough to follow) when I was growing up. I envied her freedom and confidence. I sincerely do not think that what I was experiencing was as simple as "I could have been you!" but something closer to "I could have been (another) ME!" I did not want to stand in *their* shoes, I wanted to be in my own—but in a different way. It felt self-directed. Like in the case of the self-envy directed at a future self, the target of my envy seems to be better picked out as an imagined me, a me that might have been under different auspices.

Other examples of counterfactual self-envy could include envying the self that took the risky but exciting job offer, the self that jumped into love, the self that decided to have or not to have children. These experiences of envy arise without the presence of any specific person as a trigger but through counterfactual imagination and speculation.

Posting on social media platforms might also lead to an unusual form of counterfactual envy. As mentioned above, people are prone to presenting themselves in their best, shiniest light. I, like many others, present an idealized version of myself, an idealized me that I not only present to the world but that can be thrown back on myself, sometimes leading me to the strange sensation of envying the social media version of myself. A counterfactual version of myself that has not so much taken a different path, taken up different ontological possibilities, but is scrubbed of the complexities, drudgery, and responsibilities of being a whole person in the world.<sup>24</sup> The use of filters can even allow us to "see" different (often physical) counterfactual versions of ourselves,<sup>25</sup> potentially acting as a fertilizer for counterfactual self-envy.

Such experiences can come shot through with regret and grief, emotions that themselves relate to experiences of lost or absent possibilities.<sup>26</sup> Counterfactual self-envy, as I experienced, can be quite painful. But I also think that counterfactual self-envy can be accompanied with a love for this other you, a joy in their bravery, their differences, their opportunities, their way of being; again, we can see love and envy arising from the same soil. I think such cases can also have a similar texture to nostalgia, a bittersweet experience that both mourns something we cannot have or cannot be while also cherishing that possible self, even cheering them on.

### 3. WHAT SELF-ENVY TELLS US ABOUT ENVY

What I have presented is by no means a complete account of self-envy. However, I think these sketches point to additional ways in which envy might wend its way into our lives, intertwined with other emotions. Most obviously, thinking about self-envy shows how envy, as an emotion of comparison, need not relate to another person but can emerge when comparing oneself in the present moment to other versions (imaginary or otherwise) of oneself through self-reflection and self-projection. As such, rather than accepting too readily the received idea that envy must necessarily involve another person, we can further expand our exploration and understanding of envy by considering cases where it is self-directed. Seeing envy as something that can be self-directed sits nicely with Protasi's move to shine a light on envy that is not so obviously spiteful or vicious. Self-envy does not seem to only result in attempts to rid the envied self of the good, though it certainly can, but to inertia, wistfulness, and even self-flourishing.

Less obviously, but I think just as interestingly, many of my examples of self-envy involve acts of imagination. This leads me to think that envy, more generally, often involves imagination. When we envy others, we rarely envy them in all their full actuality, but instead envy an idealized version of them. As I have discussed above, it might be particularly fruitful to consider this in the context of digital technology and social media, where we both are constantly confronted by our selves and others in idealized ways. This once again returns us to critical questions about what underpins and prompts (self-)envy, questions that ask not just what envy is but what values and ideals drive and are manifested in and through it.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

A heartfelt thank you to Zoey Lavalley, Rick Furtak, Alix Beeston, Tris Hedges, and Joel Krueger for entertaining my fledgling thoughts on self-envy and for your extremely helpful (and affirming) insights. Thank you, also, to Barrett Emerick for the kind and careful edits and, last but not least, to Sara for writing such a thought-provoking book.

**NOTES**

1. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 6.
2. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 21.
3. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 21.
4. Salice and Sanchez, "Envy and Us."
5. For accounts of how emotional experience reveals value, see, e.g., Furtak, *Knowing Emotions*; Mitchell, *Emotion as Feeling Towards Value*.
6. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 22.
7. E.g., D'Arms and Kerr, "Envy in the Philosophical Tradition"; Salice and Sanchez, "Envy and Us."
8. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 13.
9. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 130. For an excellent analysis of Incels, rage, and loneliness, see Tietjen and Tirkkonen, "The Rage of Lonely Men."
10. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 111.
11. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 27.
12. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 20.
13. Von Maur, "Taking Situatedness Seriously."
14. Widdows, *Perfect Me*.
15. Wilkinson, "Loneliness Is a Feminist Issue."
16. Lorde, "The Uses of Anger."
17. López-Corvo, "Self-Envy and Intrapsychic Interpretation."
18. Ferran, "'I Could Have Been You', 125.
19. I suspect that ageing is a common cause of self-envy, where we do not simply envy "young people" or "younger bodies," but our own younger bodies, as we used to be. Societal disdain of older women likely works as a driver of this kind of self-envy.
20. For a discussion of other-directed existential envy, see Ferran, "'I Could Have Been You'."
21. For discussions of transformative experience, see Paul, *Transformative Experience*; Callard et al., "Transformative Activities."
22. Trigg, "From Anxiety to Nostalgia."
23. Ferran, "'I Could Have Been You'."
24. Thank you to Rick Furtak for talking through this example with me.
25. Krueger and Osler, "Agency, Environmental Scaffolding, and the Development of Eating Disorders."
26. Mehmel, "Grief, Disorientation, and Futurity"; Millar and Lopez-Cantero, "Grief, Continuing Bonds, and Unreciprocated Love"; Ratcliffe and Richardson, "Grief Over Non-Death Losses."

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*Emulative Trait Envy Is Not a Virtue*

Alessandra Tanesini  
CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

Sara Protasi's *The Philosophy of Envy* (2021) is an excellent example of the kind of clarity that empirically informed philosophy can bring to complex issues. In this book, Protasi presents a sophisticated account of envy as an episodic emotion and as a character trait. She explains how envy differs from other emotions such as jealousy and admiration with which it can be confused. She develops and motivates a principled taxonomy that individuates four types of envy, each of which is associated with different behavioral tendencies. One of Protasi's main goals is to offer a defense of envy as an episodic emotion, which in some instances can be morally permissible and prudentially valuable, and which, when it is emulative, could on occasion be the manifestation of a virtuous character trait.

In this short article, I first briefly sketch out Protasi's account of envy as an episodic emotion (section 1). Subsequently, I explain her account of emulative envy as an emotion and as a trait. I also present her reasons for thinking that this trait can be virtuous because it can be constitutive of a good or flourishing life (section 2). Finally, I raise concerns about Protasi's virtuous trait emulative envy (section 3). I argue that Protasi underplays the normative differences between emulative envy and admiration. However, when these are clearly brought into view, we have strong reasons to conclude that while a disposition to admire the admirable can be constitutive of flourishing, a tendency to emulative envy the enviable cannot be a virtue. The argument rests on the assumption that only motivations that are themselves intrinsically good can be constitutive of flourishing and therefore virtuous.

### 1. ENVY

Envy, like anger or shame, is an episodic emotion. As such it is a response to a triggering situation which lasts for a certain amount of time after which it wanes, perhaps to be rekindled when one reencounters some triggering circumstances. Hence, a person might envy another's wealth in response to seeing an article in a magazine detailing the lavish lifestyle of the rich. Envy has been the subject of bad press in philosophical circles and beyond, since it is usually taken to be a response that is morally unacceptable and often prudentially inadvisable.<sup>1</sup> Edifying literature is replete with envious characters that meet a bad end.<sup>2</sup> In her book Protasi seeks to reevaluate envy to show that it is sometimes useful, and that it can be morally neutral. Further, she claims that a disposition to experience episodic envy can, for some forms of envy, be constitutive of human flourishing.<sup>3</sup>

Protasi defines episodic envy as "an aversive emotional response to a perceived inferiority or disadvantage vis-à-vis a similar other with regard to a domain of self-importance, which motivates to overcome that inferiority or disadvantage."<sup>4</sup> So defined envy is a psychological state or episode that has an unpleasant felt character (which is why it is aversive). It is a response to a triggering situation that elicits a judgment in which the subject compares herself unfavorably to another agent(s) with regard to some quality or property that matters to the subject's self-conception. Finally, it consists of a behavioral tendency to respond to this social comparison judgment by attempting to address the disparity. Hence, for Protasi, envy is a syndrome comprised of affect, judgments, and dispositions to behave.<sup>5</sup>

Episodic envy involves evaluations of its triggering situations. When a person envies another for some good or quality that the other person has, and the subject does not have (at least not to the same extent), the subject assesses the other person (the target of the envy) as possessing something (the good envied). These assessments can be accurate or be at variance with reality. They are accurate only if the envied good would actually be good for the subject, the target has that good, and the subject lacks it.<sup>6</sup> When these evaluations are accurate, and the size of the envious response is proportionate to the significance of the issue, episodic envy is said to be fitting.<sup>7</sup> Otherwise, it is not fitting.<sup>8</sup>

I grant to Protasi that episodic envy can be fitting. That is, it can be a kind of accurate evaluation. Some writers on envy, however, think that even fitting envy should be avoided. There are prudential reasons not to express or act on one's envy, and being seen to be envious is usually disadvantageous since envy is frowned upon.<sup>9</sup> Further, it is often thought that even merely feeling fitting envy is always morally impermissible because of its motivation to close one's disadvantage compared to some other person by whatever means necessary.<sup>10</sup>

### 2. EMULATIVE ENVY AND THE GOOD LIFE

One of Protasi's original contributions to research on emotions lies in her distinctive taxonomy of varieties of envy. The development of this classification enables Protasi to articulate nuanced assessments of the moral and prudential reasons for and against feeling, expressing, or acting on different forms of envy.

Formally speaking, Protasi thinks of episodic envy as a three-place relation between a subject (the envious person), a target (the envied person), and a good (what the target is envied for). She identifies two independent variables on the basis of which to individuate varieties of episodic envy. The first concerns whether the focus of the emotional response is on the target or whether it is on the good.<sup>11</sup> The second is about whether or not the envied good is perceived as obtainable.<sup>12</sup> These two variables generate four kinds of envy: inert envy, spiteful envy, emulative envy, and aggressive envy.<sup>13</sup>

Protasi characterises episodic emulative envy as "unpleasant reaction to the perceived superior standing of a similar other in a domain of self-relevance. It feels less painful than any other kind of envy because it involves the hope to improve one's situation and the confidence that one may be able to do so. The envier looks at the target like a model, someone to emulate rather than defeat or bring down. Consequently, emulative envy is completely void of malice or ill will."<sup>14</sup>

Emulative envy, like other forms of envy, is thus an aversive emotion in response to a comparison with a target who is perceived to have a good that matters to the subject's self-conception but which the subject judges herself to be lacking by comparison. In emulative envy, the focus of the subject's attention is more on the good than on the target, while the good itself is experienced as obtainable. Further, emulative envy is also characterized by a tendency to emulate the target. That is, the subject of emulative envy acts to close the disadvantage by attempting to pull themselves up, rather than trying to push the target down. For this reason, for Protasi, emulative envy is devoid of malice or ill will toward the target.

One might object to Protasi that emulative envy is not envy. It is instead admiration. In response, Protasi offers a careful and empirically informed discussion of the important differences between emulative envy and admiration.<sup>15</sup> First, envy is reserved for targets that are perceived by the subjects to be not too dissimilar from them. When the target is perceived to be vastly superior, only admiration—but not envy—is possible. Second, the focus of admiration is



wholly placed on the target as an admired model. Instead, the focus of envy is always comparative and thus is partly directed to the self who is experienced as inferior to the target. Third, admiration is an affiliative emotion. Emulative envy is competitive even though it is not adversarial (since one holds no ill will against the target). That is, the admirer has wholly positive feelings for the target of their admiration. The envious instead cares that they are (by their own lights) inferior to the target, and thus their attitudes to the target are more ambivalent, since they think of themselves as being in a competition with them.

In my view this characterization of the differences between envy and admiration misses an important normative distinction between these two emotional syndromes. Admiration is reserved for good-making properties or goods that are creditable to the target because they are achievements. Any good or good-making property, irrespective of how it is obtained, can be the focus of a subject's envy. I defend the importance of this normative distinction in section 3 and deploy it to argue that trait emulative envy is not a virtue.

Protasi argues that, because of the absence of any ill motivation toward the target, emulative envy as an episodic emotional response that spurs one to improve out of a competitive spirit, can be prudentially beneficial, and is morally permissible. For example, intense rivalry might help some athletes to achieve their best in sporting competitions. Thus, episodic emulative envy can be prudentially valuable as a motivation that promotes sporting success. Further, sporting rivalries, provided that they are conducted with a spirit of fair play, would seem morally permissible.

Protasi builds on these considerations to defend the even more controversial claim that emulative envy as a character trait can be constitutive of flourishing and can therefore be a virtue. This is the claim that I seek to rebut in section 3.

In order to assess Protasi's view, it is useful to make a distinction between episodic envy as a momentary process triggered by a situation and envy as a "stable emotional trait."<sup>16</sup> Trait emulative envy would then be a stable disposition to respond to situations of perceived disadvantage over obtainable goods in domains of self-importance by experiencing emulative envy. This disposition is, very roughly speaking, the character trait of being a fair competitor. It is a tendency (1) to care that one is at a disadvantage compared to others with regard to some goods that one cares about; (2) to feel optimism that these goods can be obtained; (3) to address the disadvantage through self-improvement.

Protasi is extremely careful to enumerate necessary conditions that must be satisfied if competitiveness is to be a virtuous character trait. First, the good about which one is competitive must be something that is genuinely valuable. Second, one's perception that the good is attainable must be accurate. Third, one must act appropriately on one's emulative envy.<sup>17</sup> Given these demanding conditions virtuous trait emulative envy is hard to achieve, but it is not impossible. Protasi argues that a competitive spirit in life can help one achieve many goods that contribute

to flourishing. But further, in her view, this character trait is not merely instrumental in achieving some goods that make a life good, it is also in itself constitutive of some forms of flourishing.

It seems true that competitiveness can be a spur to the kind of achievement that can be constitutive of a good life. We can imagine a person who loves sport or dance, and whose ability to pursue full time what they love depends on being among the best in their field. Being a top athlete or a top ballerina can be, for some, part of what makes them flourish in life. These are cases where caring that one is better than others, and thus experiencing pangs of envy when one is not, may supply the kinds of incentives that are instrumental to obtaining goods that make a life a flourishing one. Provided that such individual holds no ill will against their competitors, and acts fairly, it would seem that their envy can be fitting, prudentially valuable, and instrumentally good since it is a means to leading a good life. In this regard, I believe, we can agree with Protasi.

What is a matter of dispute is whether the character trait of being a fair competitor (understood as trait emulative envy) can itself be constitutive, at least for some, of a good life. Protasi takes herself to have two arguments for this further claim. The first is that for some kinds of good envy as a trait is the only mechanism in humans that can motivate someone to achieve them. Envy would thus be a necessary means to a good life for some, and in this regard be perhaps thought to be constitutive of it.<sup>18</sup> The second consists in offering descriptions of lives that were made good (or better) by being dominated by intense rivalries.<sup>19</sup> Protasi's example are the two female protagonists of Elena Ferrante's quartet of books.<sup>20</sup>

In what follows I want to argue instead that emulative envy as a character trait cannot be constitutive of flourishing, even though it can be in some cases instrumental to it.

### 3. TRAIT EMULATIVE ENVY IS NOT A VIRTUE

Protasi's first argument for the intrinsic value of trait emulative envy is that it is the only humanly available means to some forms of self-improvement.<sup>21</sup> Setting aside the issue as to whether its alleged unavoidability could make competitiveness intrinsically valuable, I submit that Protasi's claim is not correct. Admiration is a possible alternative motivational force to emulative envy in the cases that matter for leading a good life.

As I suggested above, Protasi ignores a key difference between what is admirable and what is enviable. Any good-making feature or good can be enviable. However, only achievements are admirable. Imagine a subject who compares herself to a target who is in very good health. Good health is an intrinsically good feature for a person. Arguably, it is constitutive of flourishing. Suppose that the subject thinks that the target's good health is due to genetic good luck. In this case, the subject might envy the target's health, but it would not make sense for her to admire the target for their health. However, if the subject thinks that the target's health is due to the target's efforts to exercise and eat well, it is possible for the subject either to admire or to envy the target for their health.

More generally, admiration is reserved for those among the goods possessed by the target that are perceived as achievements. An achievement is a good feature that a person possesses due to their competence and to their efforts.<sup>22</sup> Achievements can be lesser or greater in proportion to the amount of effort or level of competence that they require. The more difficult it is to obtain a good in this manner, the greater the achievement.

These considerations highlight two further significant differences between admiration and emulative envy. First, a subject who admires a target and seeks to emulate them is someone who aims to obtain a given good (health, knowledge, first place in the race) but only in a manner that is creditable to them because it is obtained thanks to one's efforts and abilities. By contrast, the person who envies a target and seeks to emulate them might be content with obtaining the good by morally permissible means even though the eventual success cannot count as an achievement of theirs.

To see the point, consider two subjects Nadia and Mchiwa. Mchiwa admires a scholar for their knowledge. Nadia, instead, envies that same scholar for their knowledge. Moved by her admiration, Mchiwa seek to gain knowledge though studying in order to improve her competence. If Mchiwa were offered a pill that would secure knowledge without much effort, she would refuse it, because gaining knowledge in this manner is not an achievement. What Mchiwa admires, and what she seeks to emulate, is the achievement itself and not merely the achieved goods. Nadia, instead, seeks to gain knowledge and become the equal of the scholar in that regard. She holds no ill will to the target or any other subjects. She also does not wish to obtain any unfair advantage over others. Supposing that her gaining knowledge by taking the pill does not result in cheating another person out of a job, there is no reason for Nadia not to take the knowledge pill. Quite the opposite, her perception of the scholar's knowledge as an enviable feature motivates her to obtain it by any morally permissible means which in our imaginary case involve taking the pill.

Second, Protasi seems to think that admiration is reserved for targets that are vastly different from the subject.<sup>23</sup> If that is her view, it is mistaken. It is possible to admire someone while thinking of oneself as their equal. For instance, a scientist can admire another's achievements while thinking of herself as his equal. Hence, there needs to be no perceived inferiority in admiration. One might seek to emulate a model one admires, and regards as one's equal, by working hard in order to not rest on one's laurels or stop trying to achieve.

These considerations suggest that whenever the envied good is an achievement, admiration is a viable motivational mechanism alternative to envy. It is also one that is preferable to envy when trying to achieve a good life since, as Protasi also notes, it focuses attention on ideals, on long-term gains, while stimulating openness in cognitive processing.<sup>24</sup> Admiration is not suitable when focusing on goods that are not achievements, but often such goods are not obtainable, at least by morally permissible means, and thus are not the proper focus of permissible emulative

envy either. There are exceptions, however. A person might envy another's lottery win. Their envy might motivate them optimistically to purchase lottery tickets every week. I submit that while it is possible that they might one day win, and that winning might be good for them, this kind of strife for what is enviable without being admirable is generally not conducive to leading a good life.

I hasten to add these considerations should not be read to suggest that emulative envy cannot be a motivation that facilitates the acquisition of goods that are constitutive of a good life. A person's envy of another's health might motivate this subject to exercise, become healthy, and lead a better life. Instead, they are intended to cast doubt on the necessity of envy as the motivator of aspiration.

Given that envy is not, *pace* Protasi, necessary for life-enhancing self-improvement, Protasi's case for thinking of trait emulative envy as a virtue rests on her case studies of characters whose lives are good but dominated by intense rivalries.<sup>25</sup> It is hard to assess these cases. I limit myself to noticing that our human emotional lives are often complex. It is possible for one's admiration of another to be tinged with envy, or vice versa. Protasi's examples exemplify this complexity. I submit, but I do not have an argument for this, that these lives go well, to the extent they do, because of the relations of mutual love and admiration that sustain them. They are also marked by envy which, being aversive, might detract from the quality of these lives.

Be that as it may, there is a positive argument why trait emulative envy cannot be constitutive of flourishing. The argument rests on the plausible premise that only motivations (understood as dispositions to be moved by certain kinds of motive) that are intrinsically good can be constitutive of flourishing. Irrespective of the fittingness of the episodic emulative envy which manifests this character trait, the disposition to be motivated by emulative envy is not itself an intrinsically good motivation. Intrinsically good, or virtuous, motivations require that one seeks things which are themselves good in the right way and for the right reasons. Even when focused on genuine goods, some of which are, like health, intrinsically good, even fitting emulative envy might move one to seek to get the good in ways that, albeit morally permissible, are not overall good. For instance, envy might motivate a person to obtain goods in the wrong manner because it encourages the seeking of shortcuts to short-term success to the detriment of long-term achievement.<sup>26</sup>

In conclusion, Protasi's detailed account of the nature, variety, and value of envy is an admirable achievement. In this short article, I have taken issue with her characterization of the differences between envy and admiration and for underplaying the normative aspect of the distinction. Deploying a more normatively robust account of admiration, I have also argued that trait emulative envy, while potentially instrumentally valuable for obtaining things that make lives good, cannot in itself be, even partly, constitutive of flourishing because it is not an intrinsically good motivation.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the audience at the SWIP (Italia) “Libri di Donne” event dedicated to Protasi’s book for their feedback on my presentation and Barrett Emerick for his valuable comments on this paper.

**NOTES**

1. Taylor, *Deadly Vices*.
2. Aesop, *Aesop’s Fables*.
3. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 86. In this she goes beyond D’Arms and Jacobson, “Anthropocentric Constraints on Human Value,” who claim that envy can be a positive motivation to achieving goods which are part of what makes life good.
4. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 3.
5. The view of emotions as syndromes has been developed by D’Arms and Jacobson, “Anthropocentric Constraints on Human Value.”
6. Here, for Protasi, lies the difference between jealousy and envy. The first focuses on goods one has lost to the other person, or goods one could have been expected to have but for the other person’s activities. Envy instead is concerned with goods that one lacks (*The Philosophy of Envy*, 12–17).
7. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 31. See also D’Arms and Jacobson, “The Moralistic Fallacy”; D’Arms and Jacobson, “Anthropocentric Constraints on Human Value.”
8. Protasi tends to restrict her discussion to fitting envy (*The Philosophy of Envy*, 31). I follow her in making this simplifying assumption.
9. Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality*.
10. Cf., D’Arms and Kerr, “Envy in the Philosophical Tradition.”
11. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 38–41.
12. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 41–44.
13. In inert envy, whose characteristic behavioral disposition is sulking, the focus is on the good which is perceived as unobtainable (*The Philosophy of Envy*, 55–61). In spiteful envy, which promotes a tendency to spoil the good, the focus is on the target’s possession of a good that is perceived as unobtainable by the subject (*The Philosophy of Envy*, 63–65). In aggressive envy, which leads to stealing, the good is perceived as obtainable and the focus is on the target (*The Philosophy of Envy*, 61–63). I explain emulative envy in the main text.
14. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 45.
15. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 48–50.
16. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 86.
17. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 86–88.
18. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 90.
19. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, Ch. 4.
20. Ferrante, *L’amica geniale*; Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*; Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*; Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*.
21. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 90.
22. Bradford, “Achievement, Wellbeing, and Value.”
23. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 49.
24. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, 49–50.
25. Protasi, *The Philosophy of Envy*, Ch. 4.
26. This is not to say that it must. It is possible for envy to give rise to achievement. When it does, envy is instrumentally good.

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**Responding to My Very Friendly Critics**

Sara Protasi

UNIVERSITY OF PUGET SOUND

I am truly thankful for these contributions by Rosalind Chaplin, Lucy Osler, and Alessandra Tanesini. Not only do they interpret my views charitably and generously, but they also exemplify different and equally valuable ways of responding to an author. Chaplin aims to provide a friendly expansion, Osler offers a novel application, and Tanesini presents a challenge to my views; all of these are compliments that I receive with gratitude. In the limited space at my disposal, I respond to their critiques, but I hope this is a beginning of a more protracted conversation not only among ourselves but within the larger philosophical community.

**1. ON ENVY AND COMPETITION**

Rosalind Chaplin’s insightful response focuses on a crucial aspect of envy: its competitive nature and how different competitive contexts affects envy’s varieties. She argues that even emulative envy can be adversarial, while remaining nonhostile and nonvicious. In some contexts, such as zero-sum competitive sporting events, envying someone in an emulative way may involve not only the desire to level up with the envied, but also the desire to *outperform* the envied.

To bolster this view, Chaplin draws from anecdotal evidence and intuitions on friendly rivalries and, in particular, a promising case study: the longstanding friendship between long-distance runners Haile Gebrselassie and Paul Tergat. Gebrselassie defeated Tergat in every race in which they competed for five consecutive years. It’s reasonable to suppose that Tergat felt envy. Suppose, furthermore, that his envy was emulative—wouldn’t it be natural for him to *also* feel the desire to finally *defeat* Gebrselassie? Yet, that seems compatible with what we know of their relationship: that they were genuine friends and pushed each other to improve, without ill will.

Chaplin presents her contribution as a friendly expansion of my views, and claims that such an expansion provides me with the means to respond to a worry raised by Justin D'Arms,<sup>1</sup> namely, that all envy is at least implicitly malicious. D'Arms reasons counterfactually: if emulative envy were extinguished when the envied lost their advantage, then that would mean that even emulative envy is malicious at some level. Chaplin agrees with D'Arms that emulative envy would be extinguished in such a situation, but disagrees with him that that extinction shows that emulative envy is malicious, given what we have seen in Tergat and Gebrselassie's case.<sup>2</sup>

I welcome Chaplin's expansion, and I believe that it can be supported also by empirical evidence on the psychology of competition. Competition is a complex phenomenon determined both by individual and situational factors. With regard to the former factors, people tend to be more competitive when they compare themselves to and compete with similar or close others in a domain of self-importance; with regard to the latter factors, competitive concerns are increased in zero-sum, and high-stake contexts, when competitors are close to the top of a ranking (and this applies not only to individuals who are performance-oriented but also those with mastery goals), and when the number of competitors decrease.<sup>3</sup> So, given the scenario described by Chaplin, Tergat and Gebrselassie are *bound* to be very competitive. However, competition research has also shown that competition and cooperation are "neither mutually exclusive nor inverse motivational and behavioral constructs but they can be simultaneous"<sup>4</sup> and, when cooperation and competition are combined, agents reach higher levels of both performance and enjoyment. Furthermore, "trying to excel, to be best [ . . . ] leads to efficient learning and high-level performance and is also associated with intrinsic motivation."<sup>5</sup>

This evidence seems to suggest that competition need not be malicious, thus confirming Chaplin's hypothesis about Tergat and Gebrselassie. I think we could call the type of envy that Tergat might have felt *uberemulative envy*, to mirror *uberspiteful* envy. I coined the latter term to refer to the envy that aims to level down with the envied by spoiling the good *even at the cost of an additional loss incurred by the envier*. *Uberemulative* envy, then, would be the envy that aims to level up and surpass the envied, thus *gaining an additional advantage*.

However, I want to end my discussion of Chaplin's valuable contribution on a note of caution, in part anticipated by Chaplin at the end of her contribution: for envy to remain emulative, the envier needs to remain more focused on the good than on the envied. Beating the rival should still feel like a proxy for, proof of, or perhaps even means to achieving or having achieved the good. If one becomes too fixated on beating the rival, then one risks losing sight of the good and becoming *aggressively* envious. As always, the boundaries between kinds of envy are porous and unstable, and one should engage in self-reflection and in virtue cultivation, particularly within the context of loving relationships. Chaplin is right that even when envy is emulative it requires careful and wise management, and that is especially the case with *uberemulative* envy.

## 2. ON SELF-ENVY

Lucy Osler's delightfully personal contribution is also offered generously as an expansion to my view, but in the end amounts to an original contribution of her own. In this short response, I will focus on the main topic she discusses, namely, self-envy, but I want to say that I particularly appreciated her remarks on the political dimension of envy and its relevance for feminism, a topic which did not find space in my book, and to which I return in the concluding section of my remarks.

Osler outlines three ways in which (non-pathological) self-envy can be experienced: envy for one's past self, envy for one's future self, and envy for a counterfactual self.

I should confess at the outset that I do not have a first-personal experience of any of these. I have no reason to think I secretly feel it and deny it to myself—in fact, I have some evidence that that is unlikely, insofar as I'm very well aware of my other-directed envy. Perhaps the ways in which I experience self-continuity precludes me from perceiving my past or future selves as sufficiently distant.<sup>6</sup> That I am also not a particularly nostalgic person may confirm this. We know from empirical evidence that people differ on the dispositional envy scale,<sup>7</sup> and there are likely many more idiosyncratic differences, some of which may be hard to quantify and thus study in a systematic way. Be that as it may, the topic of self-envy is fascinating and so is Osler's analysis.

I appreciated her attempt to apply my taxonomy to cases of envy for a *past* self. While there may not be a perfect correspondent for aggressive envy, as it is not clear how one can steal the good from one's past self, the examples mentioned by Osler were persuasive. However, I am a little more hesitant with regard to envy for a *future* self. Her vivacious and psychologically astute characterization makes the scenarios she describes plausible, but I wonder how common the experience of future self-envy is. But even if this was a rare phenomenon, I think we could think of what Osler discusses not only in descriptive but also *normative* terms. I am drawing here from her suggestion that cultivating emulative self-envy may be a tool for self-improvement. I wonder: if emulative envy itself motivates someone towards self-improvement, does envying one's future self motivate them towards a *better* kind of self-improvement, one that does not involve the risk, mentioned in the previous reply, to become too fixated on the envied? If so, then an important question is whether there are ways of stimulating future self-envy. On this point, I am genuinely not sure and I suspect more empirical research might be needed on the ways in which people feel this type of envy, thus going back to a more descriptive inquiry (but this is not a criticism: the factual and the normative are bound to be intertwined).

Finally, when reading about counterfactual envy, I kept wondering: How is this different from regret? Osler mentions that counterfactual envy can come "shot through with regret and grief" and that it has "a similar a similar texture to nostalgia, a bittersweet experience that both mourns something we cannot have or cannot be while also cherishing that possible-self, even cheering them

on." I can intuitively see the difference between nostalgia and envying one's past self; for one phenomenological difference, I suspect envy for a past-self is less sweet and more bitter than nostalgia. However, I cannot quite see the difference between regret and counterfactual self-envy. As Osler highlights, thinking about self-envy shows that imagination and idealized versions of ourselves and others play a big role in envy (empirical evidence shows that even in garden-variety envy we often perceive ourselves to be a bit better than we are), so perhaps this is a failure of imagination on my part.

### 3. ON ADMIRATION AND EMULATIVE ENVY

Alessandra Tanesini's incisive critique focuses on my claim that dispositional emulative envy can, in highly specific and perhaps rare cases, count as a virtuous trait, and thus not be only instrumentally good but also constitutive of our flourishing.

Tanesini helpfully characterizes my account of dispositional emulative envy as the character trait of being a fair competitor, and I appreciate that she takes my arguments in its favor seriously, even though she ultimately argues against them. She concedes that dispositional (or "trait," as she calls it) emulative envy can be instrumental to achieving a good life, but believes that only admiration can be constitutive of it. Her argument relies on the claim that "admiration is reserved for those among the goods possessed by the target that are perceived as achievements," which she defines, following Gwen Bradford's account,<sup>8</sup> as good features possessed by a person in virtue of their competence and efforts.

The idea that admiration and achievement are essentially linked might seem intuitive and it is certainly plausible, but it's far from obvious. In this reply, I do not have the space to provide a proper literature review on admiration, so I will draw from a brief review that can be found in a recent book by Alfred Archer and Benjamin Matheson to show that Tanesini's claim is more controversial than it might appear at first. Alfred and Matheson write that "there is disagreement about which particular and formal object [admiration] can have."<sup>9</sup> For some authors, such as Antti Kauppinen, admiration can only be felt toward people,<sup>10</sup> but for other authors it can be directed also at animals,<sup>11</sup> natural events,<sup>12</sup> "qualities, relations, comic timing, positions, virtues, and actions,"<sup>13</sup> and even social groups.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, philosophers disagree about admiration's formal objects as well, and the list includes "a person's character traits, attitudes, actions and achievements."<sup>15</sup> Thus, there is no philosophical consensus that admiration is only felt about people's achievements.

If we look at the literature on admiration in social psychology, we do not find a scholarly consensus on this matter either. While Niels van de Ven does define admiration as "a feeling of delighted approval over the accomplishment of another person,"<sup>16</sup> Ines Schindler and her coauthors, who have published a series of papers on admiration and adoration, write that admiration is a reaction to a person's actions, skills, or characteristics, which are deemed superior to a standard, outstanding, or excellent.<sup>17</sup>

In sum, while I agree with Tanesini that many cases of admiration are about a person's achievements, I reject the claim that all of them, or even all of the paradigmatic ones, do. We admire people for all sorts of reasons that are not achievements, including unmerited traits (such as beauty) and actions that may be seen as praiseworthy but not achievements. (For instance, see Linda Zagzebski's example of Thomas More's refusal to sign the oath of allegiance to Henry VIII.<sup>18</sup>) And I lean toward agreeing with those who claim that admiration can be properly directed at non-human objects as well, which most clearly clashes with the view that we only admire achievements.

Consequently, I am not moved by the thought experiment involving Nadia and Mchiwa. We know from empirical research that both admiration and benign/emulative envy motivate someone to emulate the target of the emotion, but in different ways: "benign envy, as a negative affective state with high motivational intensity, narrows cognitive processing to assist immediate pursuit of the coveted object [. . .] If we conceive of emulation as increased commitment to abstract ideals, it takes an emotion with lower motivational intensity that broadens cognitive processing [such as admiration]."<sup>19</sup> What this evidence entails when it comes to the scenario of a magical pill is a little unclear, which highlights the risk of this type of philosophical methodology. Don't get me wrong: I like introducing magical pills as much as the next analytic philosopher! But, in this case, I am not sure the thought experiment causes the required shifting of intuitions in any particular direction.

Would Nadia, focused on the good of knowledge as she is, take the pill? I tend to think she would not, since her being more focused on the good than the envied means she appreciates knowledge for its own sake and thus she probably has developed an appreciation for our standard ways of seeking knowledge. However, perhaps she really cares about knowing some specific things that the envied knows, and thus taking the pill would do. But then, I don't see why that could not apply to Nadia! If admiration, as I showed above, is not necessarily connected to achievements, then I don't see why she would not be inclined to take the pill. It is true that admiration is hypothesized to motivate the agent towards long-term improvement,<sup>20</sup> but that is its functional role in *real-life scenarios*, where magical pills are unavailable. So I see no principled reason why an admirer might not want to take a shortcut in some situations. After all, regular people often admire Hollywood stars, and one might argue that that admiration is at least in part responsible for those regular people undergoing cosmetic surgery to resemble those stars. So I reiterate my conviction that admiration does not fare any better or worse than emulative envy as possible constituents of the good life, and that both can play a role in it, albeit a different one.

### 4. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Again, I want to restate my gratitude to my critics, who spurred me both to look back at what I argued for and also to consider avenues for future research. In particular,

I want to think more about gendered dimensions of envy. Currently, there is no systematic research that suggests that there are major differences among genders with regard to feeling envy.<sup>21</sup> But, given the fact that society is so deeply affected by gender, such research is needed. Additionally, I am currently writing on whether feminists should compete (unsurprisingly, and in line with ideas seen in section 1, my answer is a resounding yes!), and I would like to explore the topic of envy as felt by and towards trans folks qua trans folks (I hypothesize that, just like racism is at least sometimes fueled by envy, so is transphobia). More generally, I am interested in expanding my work on envy in its political manifestations and effects. I hope I have succeeded in showing that envy is a powerful force in the public sphere, as much as other emotions that have already been investigated at length such as anger, and I look forward to the contributions of other scholars on this topic.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to Barrett Emerick and Ami Harbin for hosting this symposium. I am also thankful to Barrett Emerick and Shen-yi Liao for very helpful feedback on my response.

#### NOTES

1. D'Arms, "Envy."
2. I can't help but make the following nitpicky clarification. My writing is unclear in the passage quoted by Chaplin, namely, the one that reads, "Even if Diotima happened to lose her philosophical talent on her own, Emma's envy would not be extinguished because its constitutive desire of obtaining the good for herself would not be satisfied but rather emptied of its object." I think Chaplin interprets me as opposing "extinguished" with "emptied" and thus sees me as denying that Emma's envy is extinguished. But I, too, meant to agree, just like she does, with D'Arms and concede that Emma's envy is extinguished, while pushing back against the idea that her envy is thus *satisfied* (a term used by D'Arms and that I argue in the book that is not appropriate). That said, Chaplin's amendment is still valuable and compatible with my diagnosis, which I still believe in, that in that particular case Emma's envy would be *deflated*, so to speak. For a similar case, think of being angry at someone for a perceived wrongdoing: if we realize that we were factually mistaken on the situation and no wrongdoing has occurred, our anger will (perhaps slowly) deflate and will become unfitting; it will be "extinguished" even though we would not say it was "satisfied" to use D'Arms' terminology.
3. For a detailed review and bibliography on this evidence, see Garcia et al., "The Psychology of Competition."
4. Fülöp and Orosz, "State of the Art in Competition Research," 3.
5. Fülöp and Orosz, "State of the Art in Competition Research," 8.
6. For a review on the vast psychological literature on self-continuity, see Sedikides et al., "Self-Continuity"—the review does not mention envy.
7. Lange et al., "Dispositional Envy."
8. Bradford, *Achievement*.
9. Alfred and Matheson, *Honouring and Admiring the Immoral*, 13.
10. Kauppinen, "Ideals and Idols."
11. Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*.
12. Cawston, "Admiring Animals."
13. Ibidem, in reference to Sophie Grace Chappell's view in "No More Heroes Anymore?"
14. Wills, "Toward a Concept of Revolutionary Admiration."
15. Archer and Matheson, *Honouring and Admiring the Immoral*, 13.

16. van de Ven, "Envy and Admiration," 2.
17. Schindler et al., "Admiration and Adoration"; Schindler et al., "Linking Admiration and Adoration to Self-expansion: Different Ways to Enhance One's Potential."
18. Zagzebski, "Admiration and the Admirable," 206.
19. Schindler et al., "Linking Admiration and Adoration to Self-expansion," 298.
20. See Schindler et al., "Linking Admiration and Adoration to Self-expansion"; and van de Ven, "Envy and Admiration."
21. I am thankful to Jan Crusius for confirming via an email exchange that only negligible effects in frequency and intensity of envy have been found. It's plausible that gender makes someone likely to envy others for different things (see, for instance, DelPriore et al., "Envy," who adopt an evolutionary psychology perspective), but even on this topic there is no robust evidence.

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after it first came out, Rich reflected that the piece was written to "encourage heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality as a political institution which disempowers women—and to change it."<sup>1</sup> Rich was interested in how the existence of lesbians denaturalized heterosexuality, rendering its compulsory nature perceptible. On one level she approved of the idea of women deciding to be lesbians, writing, "we can say that there is a *nascent* feminist political content in the act of choosing a woman lover or life partner in the face of institutionalized heterosexuality"—but, as she emphasizes, "for lesbian existence to realize this political content in an ultimately liberating form, the erotic choice must deepen and expand into conscious woman identification—into lesbian feminism."<sup>2</sup> So becoming queer was something, but you still needed politics.

## Challenging Straightness

Alexis Shotwell  
CARLETON UNIVERSITY

The people currently targeting trans people for eradication, aiming to end legal abortion, accusing queers of grooming kids, and fulminating about "woke" politics don't usually talk about the work they're doing as defending straightness. The constellation of politics they enact share many other features—hatred of the poor, white supremacy, various forms of ethnonationalism, and various forms of neoliberalism among them. Still, if we are interested in building a collective politics that counters these things and chooses as our side instead the feminist, trans, queer options they hate, it is fruitful to target straightness.

In this paper, I argue that everyone who cares about human well-being should be working against straightness, both personally and politically. People who are afforded ease by straightness should betray it because of its effects on others as well as themselves, and people who experience the harms of straightness should oppose it as a key strategic target in our own work for collective liberation. I'm primarily concerned with all of us who are most endangered, rather than identified, by straightness, but I believe even straight people would be better off without the structure of straightness. The "we" I'm aiming to invoke here thus includes people who benefit enormously and those who suffer egregiously from the production of straightness. To call for solidarity against straightness is to call for a personal and political practice organized around selves and worlds that do not yet exist, but which we might shape in part through the work we do towards those worlds.

It's a commonplace among queer folks to suggest that the best way to address the harms of straightness would be to recruit straight people into queerness. The logic goes that if enough people convert, or discover the joys of being queer, the problems of straightness would evaporate. I've always loved the idea of choosing queerness, and in practice my experience of my own sexuality has rendered the "born that way" narrative something between irrelevant and evil. Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" offers one touchstone for the insight that the existence of queer people opens up space for straight people to imagine otherwise. In 1982, some years

Forty years on from Rich's words, Jane Ward's book *The Tragedy of Heterosexuality* makes a call to return to a version of lesbian feminism based around a kind of woman identification that claims loving women as a choice, "a cultivated political stance, an act of opposition to heteropatriarchy."<sup>3</sup> Ward formulates a way to choose to be straight that is about *liking* women, extending to straight men a "lesbian feminist mode of desire." She writes:

Lesbian feminist ethics dictated that to lust after women, to want to fuck women—even casually or nonmonogamously or raunchily—was inseparable from being *identified* with women as a whole and with the project of wanting women's freedom. It meant learning about what lifted women up, and also what harmed them, and aligning one's desires in the direction of women's collective liberation rather than their suffering.<sup>4</sup>

Such an approach resists what Ward characterizes as the "misogyny paradox," whereby "boys' and men's desire for girls and women is expressed within a broader culture that encourages them to also hate girls and women."<sup>5</sup> I know a lot of feminist, cisgender, straight women who believe that heterosexuality disempowers women, but not many who share Rich's or Ward's hope about leaving or changing it. I want to take straight people seriously, to not assume that they can all solve the woes of straightness through becoming queer, and I love this part of Ward's book—she doesn't think that the solution to toxic heteronormativity is just for everyone to convert to queerness. While I'm profoundly sympathetic to her provocation about the possibilities of people, including straight men, genuinely liking and respecting women, I think we need a more collective and political approach to the problems straightness occasions. Consider how Alva Gotby articulates the approach of the activist group Wages Due Lesbians (WDL), which grew out of the worldwide Wages for Housework organizing and thinking, which argued that capitalism relies on women's invisibilized, feminized labor. Gotby traces how WDL articulated heterosexuality itself as a work discipline, writing,

To refuse such labour, however, is not merely negative withdrawal of one's efforts. . . . In the WDL writings, lesbianism emerges not as a fixed identity but as a particular practice—one that involves

the efforts of living a life outside the institutions of the capitalist organisation of the heterosexual family. WDL thus conceptualised lesbianism not at the end-goal of the feminist movement, but as a collective organisational form based on both refusal of reproductive work and the invention of new types of sociality and different forms of life.<sup>6</sup>

This formulation of sexuality as a form of life entangled with systems and social relations organized through capitalism opens the possibility of building on the personal approach Ward outlines, into a broader politics.

We ought to dismantle straightness insofar as its maintenance requires the repression, oppression, and control of gender, sexuality, and reproduction and insofar as it is a hinge in myriad other social forces that harm people. Again, my “we” here intends to call together a disparate group of people and to orient us toward a shared enemy. Wherever we are placed in relation to straightness, we experience the ways it distributes benefit and harm. Wherever we are placed in relation to straightness, we have traction for opposing it personally and politically. I’m most interested in betrayal and solidarity as animating political responses.

We who benefit from it ought to betray straightness. Here I think about betrayal in line with work on white people becoming treasonous to whiteness in the ways that Mab Segrest articulates that possibility, when one wants to abolish a social relation in which one is embedded and from which one benefits.<sup>7</sup> I also have in mind some of the politics and analysis that came out of formations such as the journal *Race Traitor*.<sup>8</sup> Although I am queer, I situationally and contingently fall into this group depending on who “reads” me, what they know about my biography and relational practices, and how I’m behaving. We who are oppressed by straightness—and I think this includes people who actively and enthusiastically or (perhaps more likely) implicitly identify as straight—ought to work together to abolish, dismantle, or destroy it. Each of these terms carries slightly different meanings: Abolishing evokes aiming toward a horizon of possibility that engulfs and surpasses an existing social order; dismantling involves taking something apart, perhaps to its constituent parts; destroying is the work of making something that currently exists no longer exist in that form. These and other kinds of activities will be tactically useful in opposing straightness’s harms. The strategic orientation I’m calling “betrayal” offers a normative guidance for these and other tactics. In any given situation, we can ask, how can I best act against these social relations of oppression and benefit that have been naturalized as “being straight”? How can I best be in solidarity with the people who are targeted by that naturalization? The affect, practice, and fantasy of solidarity can offer something helpful to our work for collective liberation across and with difference. In order to discern what we might decide to betray and with whom we want to act in solidarity as regards straightness, let me lay out first some diagnostic criteria for straightness and then consider the social structures that maintain it.

## 1. HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU’RE STRAIGHT?

The website WikiHow has a helpful instructional on “How to Know if You Are Heterosexual,” starting with the instruction to determine if you feel “attracted to people of the opposite gender.”<sup>9</sup> This is a common everyday formulation. Bracketing the very interesting epistemological question of how we know we’re attracted to people at all, consider the durability of the formulation “opposite gender.” In her 1990 article “Heterosexuality and Feminist Theory,” Christine Overall defines heterosexuality as “a romantic and sexual orientation toward persons not of one’s own sex,” and nonheterosexuality as the same towards “persons of one’s own sex.”<sup>10</sup> Of course, even way back in the year 1990, there were more than two sexes and genders, but even among feminists this was a fairly common definition. James Joseph Dean’s 2014 ethnography *Straights* shifts the language a bit, defining heterosexualities as “configurations of practice and discourse that refer to the identity category heterosexuals and generally, but not necessarily, align with sexual behaviors and desires orientated to the other—as opposed to the same—gender.”<sup>11</sup> Again, here we see a supposition of there only being two of something—we’ve moved from sex to gender in the years between Overall and Dean, but still remain within a binary in defining straightness. Dean carefully explores the ways sexualities are “fluid and situational,” both sociologically across history and within an individual’s life path, but like other scholars studying straight people he returns to this folk meaning of straightness as an identification. As Jane Ward has argued in the book *Not Gay*, the identificatory work straightness does is quite robust, such that people can have quite a lot of sexual contact with people who are not their “opposite” sexually and understand that as just horsing around, being hazed, or “heteroflexible” [as Urban Dictionary defines it, “I’m straight, but shit happens”<sup>12</sup>]. This robustness rests in part on the hand-waveyness of most people’s everyday assumption of straightness, and in part on the intensity with which straightness is asserted and crafted everywhere from gender reveal parties to prisons.

Straightness as an identity category is a relatively recent historical development, taking form in opposition to the definitions of all that was not normal, in ways we can perceive when those definitions take on material effects, such as laws governing who can marry, who can make medical decisions about dying partners, or whether teachers are allowed to talk about homosexuality in schools. In his *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, Johnathan Katz fruitfully notes the longer history of homosexual history research owing “its main impetus to gay, lesbian, and feminist movements.”<sup>13</sup> I like Kadji Amin’s rendering of Katz’s argument: “heterosexuality emerged belatedly, as a normative ballast against homosexuality.”<sup>14</sup> Medicalizing and criminalizing homosexuality as the abnormal type created the epistemological and practical problem of articulating the love that had never needed to bother to speak its name, and we live in the ongoing aftermath of concealing heterosexuality’s ideological origin story through pretending straightness goes back to Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.<sup>15</sup>

Wikihow’s shorthand of “attracted to people not of one’s gender” names three core conditions that have come to



define straightness: sex, gender, and attraction. None of these really exist in a stable, easy-to-know, durable way. At least three things follow from the foundational instability of straightness. First, straightness's unfixity and need for self-reinforcement and management opens generative space for life beyond straightness—it is because core markers of straightness are unfixed that they can be destabilized. At the same time, straightness's instability means that it is able to change shape quickly and illogically. When we oppose straightness, we are targeting a polymorphous and emergent system—this may make it simultaneously easier and more difficult to aim at it as something we can oppose. Second, the instability of straightness has implications for the people who may want to work against it—who “we” are and who we ally ourselves with will be dynamic and shifting groups, particularly (as I note below) as people may move in and out of identifying with straightness. Finally, the instability of straightness means that it shifts over time and has site-specific formations; if fewer and fewer young people identify with straightness, what will this mean in the future to the significant social projects straight life secures? As the formation “Against Equality” argued years ago, angling for inclusion in the institution of marriage, the military, and the prison industrial complex undermines queer possibility; being not straight doesn't automatically carry politics that oppose straightness.<sup>16</sup>

So what currently defines straightness, unstable though it may be? As Amin argues, building on Katz, “heterosexuality was an afterthought to homosexuality, its belatedness a symptom of its purely ideological origins. As fictive as it is idealized, heterosexuality names an exclusive, normal, and healthy sexual orientation to the opposite sex that hardly exists in practice.”<sup>17</sup> As we know, that things are ideological through and through does not mean that they don't have profound effects. So our working conception of straightness involves the following:

1. Identifiable distinct sexes—usually based on a physical marker for sex (secondary characteristics, chromosomes, hormones).
2. Stability of gender designation over an individual's lifetime, usually yoked to sex designation.
3. Sexual or romantic desire.

Again, none of these conditions are the kind of stable and reliable determinant on which we should rationally build entire social orders; they each have salient counterexamples that show that they are not sufficient diagnostic criteria. Indeed, a central point here is that there are no diagnostic criteria that would make straightness coherent. Instead, it is an emergent and gestural formation with fuzzy boundaries.

**Identifiable distinct sexes** Any physical marker used to delimit sex categories—male, female, or other non-binary but socially-fixed sex designates—has counterexamples. To take the top three, sex identification based on chromosomal markers (where XX chromosomes indicate “female” and XY indicate “male”) is unreliable; the usual example given here is that of people with XY chromosomes and androgen insensitivity, who may not know of their hormonal status

unless medical interventions are needed and “look like” woman. The idea that secondary sexed characteristics will have clear delimitations—genitals, facial hair, voice timbre and so on—similarly fails, especially in intersex people. And the idea that hormones make the male or female, popularly framed as though people with lots of estrogen are female humans and people with lots of testosterone are male humans, is similarly inaccurate.

**Stability of gender designation over an individual's lifetime**

Gender designation may seem simpler to stabilize over our lifetime, since after all many societies relentlessly gender and re-gender everyone from human babies to cars, and since many of us actively participate in liking our gender and how we live it. I read the sheer effort that goes in gendering process—whether it's the joyful effort of feeling gender euphoria or the punishing effort of disciplining other people's genders—as telling us something about how instable and needy gender is as a project. As I settle into middle age, I am reflecting also on the felt experience of gender shifting over the life course. A remarkable number of people my age and older are taking up nonbinary, genderqueer, or agender gender identifications. This may be because of the increased hermeneutic space in which people can understand their genders—it may be more common or ordinary now for people to claim genders beyond “man” or “woman.” It may also be about the ways that gender shifts across our individual life-course, even for people who do not think of ourselves as transgender or transexual—these shifts in gender experience are, perhaps, underdetermined, especially since much of what gets rendered as the experience of gender is through a youth-centric lens, itself tied up with narratives about the possibility of sexual reproduction.

**Sexual or romantic desire**

Finally, sexual or romantic desire exists for many people, but unstably so even for those who have it. Orientation or availability to interest might be a settled state, but its manifestation is episodic, often specific to particular people or places. People are not in continual states of lust or heart-eyes swooning after someone, and it's worth noting how much of the classification of straightness relies on the assumption that people's self-identification can be reliably read through this species of other-directedness. There might be a lot of distance between people's fantasy lives and their sexual practices. People might not have sexual or romantic desire at all in their lives, after life transitions, or in relation to specific circumstances. Monogamy turns out to also be central to the disciplinary conceptions of sexual and romantic desire; people are expected not only to have stable orientations but also to attach them to one person, who is themselves expected to not transform their gender, sexual orientation, sex designation, or pattern of desire. At the same time, there are so many non-scientific examples of straightness not relying on these core anchors. There are many straight trans people. Asexual and aromantic people are often read as straight, imputing forms of orientation to them they may not have—but by the same token they may identify as straight despite not having sexual or romantic desire. Or consider any of the people you know who always identified as straight until they got into a queer relationship. Consider people who thought of themselves as totally queer until

they started dating a straight person and began to worry—if they're in a monogamous relationship with someone who identifies as straight, and everyone around them thinks of them as straight, what does that mean for them?

So there are obvious counterexamples to any of the popular anchors for commonsense straight identification: When we examine any of them in any detail at all, we can see that the categories that are taken to give clear, scientific, commonsense answers for the questions we'd need to answer (about sex, gender, desire) whether someone is "really" straight don't have clear answers. This matters morally and politically because determining straightness is currently operating as a vector of oppression, everywhere from in legislation that prevents trans kids from accessing gender-confirming care, to restricting access to space to non-trans people, to people targeting drag story hours, to banning queer books, and so on. I read all of these current political maneuvers as part of a project aiming to shore up something that does not exist, with disastrous and painful consequences to people's lives. The people defending straightness through attacking trans people, queers, and reproductive freedom rely on a conception of the relation between bodies and lives that has been thought of as deterministic: If you are born with a particular body, you must have a specific sort of life.

Gary Kinsman's discussion of the social construction of sexuality is helpful here. He argues against determinism in all its forms: biological ("queerness is in our genes!" "I'm born this way!"), social ("society made me do it!"), and discursive ("how we talk made me this way!"). He argues for a social constructionism that resists reification—the ossification of social relations into relations between fixed things—and that moves "beyond the stifling polarities of the 'nature versus nurture' debate to see how our physiological potentialities get built upon, organized, and developed as they become part of our social bodies and worlds."<sup>18</sup> I very much like this way of placing our bodies and pleasures in history and society because I think it helps us grapple with the ways that our sexualities can feel inevitable and unchangeable. Kinsman makes a useful analogy with language acquisition. He writes:

Most of us (but not all of us) are born with the physiological capacities for speech. But this does not mean we will learn how to speak since this is a social process building on these physiological capacities. A child isolated from human culture will not learn a language. The physiological capacity for speech also does not determine in any way what language we will speak or how good we will be in speaking it. In a similar fashion most of us are born with the physiological capacities or potentialities to derive erotic pleasures from our bodies and our interaction with the bodies of others but this does not pre-determine what forms this eroticism will take.<sup>19</sup>

This conception of sexuality names the ways that the formation of our capacities for eroticism and relation are embodied, social, historical, and relational—not simply an individual choice or physiological situation, even as

individual choices and physiological realities are central to how we experience eroticism and sexuality. Building on Kinsman's approach, I want to ask what tactics we might take up to oppose the shaping and disciplining of bodies, relationships, social practices, and modes of being that stabilize straightness as a social fiction with profound material effects that we experience very personally.

## 2. BETRAYAL AND PERSONAL RECKONING

It may be that only straight people can really betray straightness, in the way perhaps only true believers can be truly apostate or blasphemous. However, all of us can work to collectively transform the social relations of oppression and benefit that animate straightness. Those of us who live lives orthogonal to straightness might have fewer choices about when and whether we resist straight imperatives, and thus it may be particularly important for people who identify as straight to betray the social world that claims them. But I believe there's a role for everyone—queer, straight, and undecided—in this work. I see three primary modalities for productive betrayal, out of which we might build aspirational solidarities for selves and futures that don't yet exist—personal, political, and social.

Straightness is experienced personally, in the everyday and everynight lives of straight people. Whether they're going on dates, trying to get a job, parenting, grieving, trying to make friends, their micro, biographical experiences are part of what constitutes social relations of straightening. Of course, we queers also experience straightness personally, since straightness defines itself against us—I do not want to minimize the effects of serving that role in the very intimate ways that many of us have. Whether this is dating people who later turn out to have only been experimenting with their sexuality and using us as their test subjects, family members who attack what they see as the manifestations of queerness in our personality or life choices, or experiencing homophobia in the street or workplace, straightness affects queer people.

This personal production of straightness out of people's personal lives is frequently painful, at each point that it is specifically straightness as a norm being enacted. Quite a lot of the pain here involves the co-production of a gender binary and gender hierarchy. As Amin argues, "heterosexual men who are attracted to trans women may commit acts of extreme transmisogynist violence to protect their heterosexual masculine status. Extraordinary acts of transmisogynist violence may therefore be one consequence of the homo/hetero divide."<sup>20</sup> Straight men also murder straight women at an astonishing rate. And as Ward argues, even when death is not involved, straight people are regularly injured by production and enforcement of straightness. As Ward puts it,

the tragedy of heterosexuality is about men's control of women, but it is also about *straight women's and men's shared romantic and erotic attachments to an unequal gender binary*, or to the heteroerotic fantasy of binary, biologically determined, and naturally hierarchical gender oppositeness.<sup>21</sup>

Or, again, the misogyny paradox, that straight men and women are expected and enabled to desire one another and build lives together without liking, respecting, or understanding one another.

While I think there is a lot of promise in the work of betraying straightness on a personal level—through queerness in many forms, straight friendships that do not defer to the romance myth, mutually supportive communities—the best way to challenge the white cis capitalist heteropatriarchy is collective and it is political. However, let’s consider what work we can do on the level of the personal. Ward turns to the ideal of friendship as a site of the personal reckoning with straightness. She argues, “if we held straight couples to basic standards of good friendship—mutual respect and affection and a sense of comfort and bondedness based on shared experience—many straight relationships would fail the test.”<sup>22</sup> Of course, many queer relationships, let alone many friendships, would also fail this test. But as a socially structuring imperative—to pursue monogamous, sexually replete, straight pair-bonds, establish them in single-family dwellings supported by productive work, and unfold them through biological progeny—it is striking how difficult it can be to be straight. Perhaps it is the case that straight men can practice women-identification, regard, and friendship; they could really like women, and desire them in all their complexity, enlargement, and expansiveness. I see such practices of friendship inside straight relationships as a betrayal of straightness as a hierarchical norm; such betrayals are potentially useful.

But perhaps one reason my straight women friends seem to find thinking about the possibilities for transforming heterosexuality depressing rather than exciting is that they do attempt to practice friendship in this way with their men partners—they may have respect for, affection towards, and like the men they’re involved with, but they often don’t have a sense of comfort and mutuality. And they overwhelmingly shoulder the care labor in households and family formations, itself another manifestation of straightness as a hierarchical normalizing structure of our social world.

So, on that level of the personal, perhaps friendship can be a betrayal of straightness in a more thoroughgoing way than simply being friends with people with whom we are sexually or romantically involved. One of the most precious perceptual lenses asexual and aromantic friends have offered me opens the radical space of relationality without these forms of desire. Holding dyadic sexual-romantic relationships as the paradigm for our social world but adding friendship is not transformative, even on the personal level. I think of the famous conversation between Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, where Lorde emphasizes, as she so often did: “we cannot fight old power on old power terms only. The only way we can do it is by creating another whole structure that touches every aspect of our existence, at the same time as we are resisting.”<sup>23</sup> Consider the ways that friendships outside dyadic relationships are perceived as threatening the pair-bond, and reflect: instead of simply adding friendship to that threatened interior—better, though, that would be than a relationship where you say you love someone you do not like—what else might happen?

In a dense reflection on actor Jason Mamoia, with especial attention to the ways his Instagram account reveals what she sees as his praxis of friendship, Yasmin Nair theorizes a “queer art of friendship.” She writes:

If “queer” means anything, and if we queers have given anything to the world, it’s a combination of sex and love that stretches the imagination and the concept of friendship. Conventional heterosexuality has been bounded by a need to define friendship between non-romantically-linked opposite-sex people as nothing but a field of landmines, sending therapists and columnists into near-panic. . . . We queers ask, on some level: whom do you love in ways that exceed bounds of conventional romance, and whom might you sleep with and then bound back with into a long and abiding friendship without feeling the need to “break up?” Nothing is perfect and this is by no means the last word on the matter, but we can safely say that queers have perfected the art of friendship as something not defined by whom you are or are not sleeping with but who excites you and whom you keep in your ambit: Who makes you crazy with love when you see them?<sup>24</sup>

I want to follow Nair in this question of what follows when we ask *who excites us* and *whom shall I aim to keep in my ambit*? Beyond imagining a world in which romantic and sexual relationships did not trump any and all friendship, this is an invitation to attune ourselves to our own excitement, interest. For many women, and many straight women in particular, being attentive to other people’s excitement and interest overrides even the question of our own interest. As well, the question of ambit is generative. Ambit gives scope—we cannot be friends with everyone, or friends in the same way with everyone we’re friends with. But attuning to our own sense of aliveness in our relationships can be part of practicing forms of relationality orthogonal to straightness.

Prioritizing friendship can also have the personal effect of disrupting what Dean Spade talks about as the “romance myth”—which operates in both queer and straight spaces—one stabilizing story that facilitates straightness.<sup>25</sup> As Spade articulates it, this is the myth that there is a perfect/best partner out there who we should give up anything for, who we will be with for our whole life, who will meet all of our relational needs, with whom love and sex will be continuous and easy, and that this will be the most important, sustaining relationship, competitively secured through being an appropriate seller/consumer of the dating market, we can aspire to. Having friendships of many different sorts can viscerally disrupt this myth; in particular I want to mark that recent focus on people who marry their best friends, or books like *Big Friendship* don’t disrupt the romance myth as much as they slightly displace it away from sexuality. To really nourish friendship, as Nair’s work encourages us to consider, requires including not only these “big friendships” but also the situational, episodic, casual friendships that are also part of a complex ecosystem of relationships. Again, I’ll argue below that truly disrupting settled practices of straightness will

require transformed social relations—but along the way towards that end formulating the possibilities for deeply caring relationships that are nondyadic, nonsexual, and nonromantic can be meaningful.

My “gym wife” Anne Clarke—a very specific category of friendship!—has theorized in conversation with me this more collective approach to disrupting the harms of straightness. Beginning from the reproductive labor of raising four kids, intensified in context of the last years of parents everywhere being thrown to the COVID wolves, Clarke argues that we have been collectively stripped of the capacities and skills to build community. She thinks of care work as definitional of humanness, including in the ambit of care kids, vulnerable people, sick people, as well as the nonhuman animals and ecosystems for which we might care better. She texted me the other day, “being human is the antidote to straightness.” I’m sparked by this formulation because so often the pillars of straightness are equated with humanness—or, at least, with a wrongheaded and conservative conception of the work of evolution to produce the dyadic straight family. Resistance to such a conception of the human and the family in Marxist humanism—becoming more human humans—has been a central preoccupation and question for me for many years now. Always worrying about human exceptionalism, I’m ambivalently on side with this horizon of possibility in Marxist humanism, especially in contemporary work towards the abolition of the family.<sup>26</sup>

Ultimately, we do not transform social relations of oppression and benefit through individual transformation, whether that is becoming better friends to ourselves and others, or skilling up the capacities to be vulnerable, connected, and in communities not organized through capitalism. To turn to that, let’s pause to consider what social relations straightness uses as guy lines—tethers to hold itself together.

### 3. WHAT DOES STRAIGHTNESS NEED TO STABILIZE ITSELF?

I’ve been arguing that straightness shores itself up against the pounding waves of all that is not straight. The work of making straightness seem natural, normal, and expected is widely distributed and surprisingly powerful. As individuals we do not have much traction for crafting lives and ways of being outside of straightness; we open the space of queerness for one another, collectively, as it has been opened for us. It is in part because, as theorists such as Crys Ingraham have argued, straightness is conceptually and practically incoherent that we are able to create queer communities.<sup>27</sup> I believe it is only through collective and political work that the sometimes-violent stabilizing practices that enact straightness can be transformed.

As I mentioned above, many queers are delighted enough with being queer that we do on some level think all our straight friends would be happier if they converted. Since the boundaries around sexuality are in fact so fuzzy and gestural, and since there has been so much violence and suffering directed at people who are not deemed straight, the thought is that the appropriate political and theoretical

move is just to declare everyone actually a bit queer and go on from there. However, thinking again with Kinsman’s work, this gesture is both condescending and ineffective. I do not think that the best political remedy for the wrongs of straightness is to convert all straight people into queerness.

The condescendingness of the “just convert” approach includes its disavowal of the material conditions of straightness. Although the fuzziness of boundaries around criteria for proper straightness is quite thoroughly disavowed, their bright lines take brutally clear bureaucratic and social form. Just try to sponsor someone to immigrate outside of family bonds articulated through monogamous sexual and romantic love, or to give your insurance benefits, if you’re lucky enough to have them, to a friend. So, we could say, *fuzzy boundaries*, but also, *massively stabilized categories requiring mountainous collective work to perpetuate their existence*. Here we perceive the work of whiteness, medicalized conceptions of bodies as having a real, true, knowable teleology, and the heteropatriarchy work in tandem. Thinking of heterosexual hegemony as something that is made and can be remade, I see six stabilizing patterns to be the most significant in maintaining heterosexuality:

1. Naturalizing evolutionary and biologically determinist narratives as explanation for social organization—nature made us so that we could reproduce the species, care roles arise from reproductive roles, men naturally do y, women naturally do x.
2. A conception of sexual desire as natural, organizing, and simultaneously out of control and foundational to social life.
3. Disciplining hierarchies that simultaneously produce and enforce the social organization of gender—heterosexuality stabilized through social and political institutions.
4. Distinct and mutually exclusive gender roles.
5. Material social relations of oppression and benefit that stabilize people’s access to a good life based on their proximity to straightness.
6. Under neoliberalism, an intensified conception of the family as the only appropriate unit of care.

Since the minimum conditions of straightness are incoherent fictions, yet socially real, these stabilizing apparatuses are perhaps the most vulnerable vectors for destroying the white cissexist heteropatriarchy—indeed, these have been historically some of the main points of attack for collective social movements. I am thinking about attacking these as a useful starting point for betraying straightness and building solidarity.

The political betrayal of straightness involves targeting its stabilizing apparatuses: the ways straightness distributes material harm and benefit to shape people to fit its illusory criteria. To return to those six significant

ideological apparatuses of straightness, this would mean the following:

1. Contesting the social organization of care based on a narrative about the “natural fitness” of women to take care of kids and elders, with the concomitant distribution of wage disparity, household labor, emotional labor, and so on.
2. Reconfiguring how we think and talk about sexual desire everywhere from schools to bathrooms such that we do not posit it as foundational to human experience but simultaneously dangerously impossible to control. This means taking seriously the idea that men are not natural rapists biologically compelled to control the people they date because of evolutionary compulsions to identify their biological progeny, that women are not incapable of partner abuse, and so on.
3. Resisting the form of heterosexuality as Ward advises—personally, straight people coming to like and respect one another, collectively recognizing many different forms of friendship and relationship as valid and good, and politically shifting tax law, practices of housing and cohabitation, hospital visitation rights, adoption and fertility access practices, and monogamy as norm.
4. Fighting the stabilization of mutually exclusive gender roles in every aspect of life.
5. Providing meaningful access to a life of sufficient abundance and meaning for everyone, regardless of whether they fit straight norms of dyadic gender-differentiated monogamous reproductive coupledness.
6. Refusing the neoliberal cant that the family is the only form through which humans should offer care and nourishment to one another or the world.

Consider the white supremacist “14 words,”—“We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” While this is a statement about whiteness, it is also a lynchpin orientation for the articulation of straightness, resting on the idea that white women have an obligation to reproduce the race—that what we are for is that reproduction. The violence it takes to secure that white future is then rendered as the domain of the white man, who husbands its possibility. As Ladelle McWhorter has argued, in the North American context, racism, ableism, heterosexism, and sexism do not operate in isolation from one another, but in fact collectively underwrite “oppressive conditions and relations.”<sup>28</sup> Thinking about their entanglements invites an intersectional method that is comfortable with, indeed relies upon, the transformation of the social relations that also constitute us. The monster is always already inside the house, and it’s from here that we’ll do any transformation.

#### 4. FORMING NEW SOCIAL RELATIONS AND STRUCTURES

In the AIDS activist oral history project I conducted with Gary Kinsman, people often talked about how they got involved with organizing across difference. Gay men would say things like, well, I got interested in gay politics and so of course I was going to the abortion clinic defense actions that were happening then, and so that’s how we got to know feminist organizers who’d been working on the political part of health for ages and we learned so much from them. And then lesbians would say, well, I was doing anti-rape activism and so of course I got to know the gay men that were active around town and supporting our work there and when they started struggles about AIDS it was obvious that that was something that mattered to me. And straight people would say, well, I was working on drug access in prisons and we couldn’t talk about needle exchanges without thinking about how gay sex was stigmatized and that’s how I got connected, showing up for demos and so on.

The solidarity orientation here seems to me to be about rejecting that privatization of straightness, taking personally the connection of struggles. Activists who did care work in the context of AIDS recognized that the best way to support people living with AIDS was not to focus on supporting individuals living with AIDS. It was to make public housing a priority and resist attacks on the poor. It was to stand with drug users and sex workers and dismantle criminalization of survival, and then to try to get people out of prisons but to make needle exchanges and condoms widely available inside in the meantime. It was to make drug trials ethical and responsive to people directly affected, and then to make drugs accessible regardless of wealth. It was to highlight how border imperialism and neoliberal regimes of global capitalism distributed access to treatments to the global north and medical trials and bad drugs to the global south. It was to put into practice the understanding that neither the state nor dyadic privatized families could not be relied upon to offer end of life care. I’m interested in how we can *do likewise* with some of how we struggle to challenge white cis heteronormativity today.

I take this idea from McWhorter’s book *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-American*. This book does vitally important work on the interconnection of struggles against racism, ableism, sexism, and more. She thinks specifically about the ways that social movements for transformation inherit past struggles and rearticulate them in our current work. As McWhorter writes,

Times have changed. Doing likewise is not necessarily doing the same. Doing likewise is taking up the challenge of inventing what to do in the absence of set models and clear precedents and of living with the uncertainties and unforeseeable consequences that invention entails. And of course doing likewise is no guarantee that we shall overcome—or that we shall be overcome as agents and conduits in an order we want to resist and dismantle. But it is, I think, the only open door, the only possibility. Go forth and do likewise—

which means: Listen. Speak. Incite. Invent. And never, ever adjust.<sup>29</sup>

McWhorter here signals with the notion of “adjustment” the process by which we straighten ourselves, or by which we are disciplined. So again, there will always be a significant part of what we do that involves the personal betrayal of the harms of straightness.

But it is more interesting to do likewise—to take inspiration from activists like the people who fought for the lives of people living with HIV. In betraying straightness, we might do well to build collective practices that erode the disciplinary foundations stabilizing straightness. But simply moving to collective forms of relationality not built around the ideal of the dyadic family unit only takes us so far. To close, let’s return to Adrienne Rich’s invitation to make heterosexuality no longer compulsory. C. L. Cole and Shannon L. C. Cate explore how Rich’s work might offer us resources for trans solidarities. They frame Rich’s understanding of the lesbian continuum as “a strategic mechanism for generating politically viable identities and alliances. It is a way of shifting investments, a reorientation that attempts to demystify and recognize women’s complex lived experience. It is a standpoint, a mechanism for interrupting hetero-patriarchy, in Rich’s terms, male-identification.”<sup>30</sup> Or, to invoke Wages Due Lesbians again, it is to take up the labor of inventing, as Gotby puts it, “new social and sexual practices.”<sup>31</sup> This “playful work of inventing new ways of survival and flourishing . . . open up queerness as a practice of experimentation rather than a fixed identity category.” In turn, “those who currently understand themselves as heterosexual, and benefit from the material rewards of heterosexuality, may potentially betray their loyalty to the status quo and become part of the collective struggle against work and for new forms of sociality and desire.”<sup>32</sup> This move toward our politics as a prescription rather than a description, a mechanism for interruption, also allows us to reckon with the material conditions that shape both our identities and our alliances.

If we had universal guaranteed housing, people would not be forced to stay in abusive relationships because they had nowhere else to go; universal childcare would allow caregivers of kids to better unfurl their own life course; universal, public medical care for people of all ages would transform the bounds of family and community; free movement of people across borders would do away with the need for family reunification procedures and simultaneously eliminate exploitative foreign-worker programs and punishing border regimes; eliminating forced surgeries and treatments for intersex people and affording everyone universally accessible dignified trans healthcare would shift how we live gendered lives. In sum, the best way to betray straightness is to work towards fundamental, revolutionary shifts across nearly every aspect of our lives and social relations. Such work can only be done together, in beloved community. The solidarities we practice toward in order to do this work are of necessity aspirational—we stand with future versions of ourselves who do not yet exist, who have refused to be adjusted, who have yet to be realized. How beautiful that world we can’t yet fully experience is, and how worth struggling for.<sup>33</sup>

NOTES

1. Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” 23.
2. Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” 66.
3. Ward, *The Tragedy of Heterosexuality*, 160.
4. Ward, *The Tragedy of Heterosexuality*, 166.
5. Ward, *The Tragedy of Heterosexuality*, 27.
6. Gotby, “The Labour of Lesbian Life,” 78.
7. Segrest, *Memoir of a Race Traitor*.
8. I also have some concerns about these politics, which I’ve elaborated in the book *Knowing Otherwise*, some of which are cognate with the argument I attempt below about the need for collective, political responses to harms such as straightness.
9. Fox and Lorenz, “3 Ways to Know If You Are Heterosexual.”
10. Overall, “Heterosexuality and Feminist Theory,” 1.
11. Dean, *Straights: Heterosexuality in Post-Closeted Culture*, 25.
12. Ward, *Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men*, 9.
13. Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, 10.
14. Amin, “We Are All Nonbinary,” 110.
15. Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*.
16. See <https://www.againstequality.org/>
17. Amin, “We Are All Nonbinary,” 110.
18. Kinsman, “Queerness Is Not in Our Genes,” 264.
19. Kinsman, “Queerness Is Not in Our Genes,” 265.
20. Amin, “We Are All Nonbinary,” 111.
21. Ward, *The Tragedy of Heterosexuality*, 22.
22. Ward, *The Tragedy of Heterosexuality*, 17.
23. Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 103.
24. Nair, “Jason Momoa, Aquaman, and the Queer Art of Friendship.”
25. Spade, “Valentine’s Day Webinar with Fireweed Collective—Dean Spade.”
26. O’Brien, *Family Abolition; Abolish the Family*.
27. Ingraham, *Thinking Straight*, 3.
28. McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America*, 15.
29. McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America*, 331.
30. Cole and Cate, “Compulsory Gender and Transgender Existence,” 282.
31. Gotby, “The Labour of Lesbian Life,” 93.
32. Gotby, “The Labour of Lesbian Life,” 94.
33. Thank you to Gail Weiss for the initial invitation to think about straightness for a panel on “Challenging White Cis-Heteronormativity” at the Society for Phenomenological and Existential Philosophy annual conference in 2021, and the other participants in that panel—Perry Zurn, Megan Burke, and Nikki Sullivan; also to Caleb Ward at the Universität Hamburg for hosting the Feminist Political Philosophy Speakers Series, where I received very helpful input. Thanks to Chris Dixon for commenting on many versions of this (and resisting straightness generally), Anne Clarke for conversations while lifting weights, Stacy Douglas, Rebecca Schein, Karen Hebert, Megan Rivers-Moore, Kelly Fritsch, and Laura Horak for writing with me, and the generous Facebook friends who made 103 comments on my post about straightness at an early drafting stage. Thanks to Ami Harbin and Barrett Emerick for keen and generous editorial guidance.

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