The Viciousness of Envy

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Abstract: Across time and cultures, envy is widely regarded as a vice. This paper provides a theory of viciousness that explains why envy is a vice. First, it sketches an account of the trait of envy, utilizing some of the social psychology literature on social comparisons. Second, it considers some theories of vices—including Neo-Aristotelian, Kant's, and Driver's consequentialism—and argues that they are not adequate in general or with regard to envy. Lastly it articulates a theory of viciousness on which a trait's degree of viciousness is determined by its disposition to produce actions and attitudes that are of disvalue; it then applies this theory to envy.

Key Words: Value Theory; Value Tradition; Ethic of Virtues; Vices; Envy

It is no secret that the last few decades have seen a revival of the study of virtue among western philosophers.[2] Some might see the study of virtue as offering a new and distinctive approach beyond consequentialism and deontology. But even those who demur on that point still think it is worthwhile for their approach to provide an account of virtues and vices. As it is sometimes put, it is important to have an ethic of virtue, even if one is not a proponent of virtue ethics.[3]

Some central questions inside an ethic of virtue are: what are the virtues and vices? What makes virtues virtuous and vices vicious? And, for any given virtue or vice, what is the proper account of it? Of course, answers to these questions may constrain one another. For instance, on one standard reading, Hume thought that virtues are virtuous because they are traits that are useful or agreeable to one's self or others. (see, *e.g.*, E 268, 278). This leads him to reject the so-called "monkish virtues" as virtues. More recently, Julia Driver (1989, 2001) argues that certain virtues of "ignorance" should make us abandon accounts of the virtues that require agents to act from certain positions of knowledge.

While many authors focus on virtue, in this paper, I focus on vice, as much less has been written on the nature and scope of vice. Nevertheless, my argumentative strategy will be similar. Envy is widely regarded as a vice. My overall aim is to provide a theory of viciousness that explains why envy is a vice. I argue that several accounts of vice fail to explain its viciousness. I develop an account of vice that explains its viciousness in terms of the instrumental and final disvalue of its characteristic attitudes and actions.

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[2] Many credit Anscombe (1958) for starting the revival. Widely discussed monographs in the last two and a half decades include Hursthouse (1999), Hurka (2001), Driver (2001), Adams (2006), and Annas (2011). Introductory textbooks and handboooks include Russell (2013), Besser-Jones and Slote (2015), and van Zly (2019). I focus primarily on western accounts of vice. But there is interesting work on eastern accounts that I cannot engage at this time.

[3] See Baron, Pettit, Slote (1993) for a volume that brings these approaches together. For skepticism that virtue ethics is a "third" ethic, see Crisp (2015).

In section I, I provide my account of the trait of envy. Drawing on work in the social sciences, I argue that envy is a trait in which a person is disposed to have feelings of lower self-esteem or self-worth upon an upward comparison to others who are similar to them along some feature that is self-defining or otherwise important to their practical identity. In section II, I briefly examine four current accounts of vices—Taylor's self-frustrating account, Neo-Aristotelian accounts, Kant's account, and Driver's consequentialist account. I argue that none of them are fully adequate for explaining why character traits, and specifically envy, are vicious. Finally, in section III, I sketch my own positive proposal for viciousness and vices. I argue that my proposal explains why envy is a vice while simultaneously avoiding the issues raised for the authors in section II.

I. An Account of the Trait of Envy

One of the interesting things about envy is that no one likes it. Lists of virtues and vices change throughout the ages, from ancient, medieval, to recent work; but envy always shows up as a vice. Each culture has a word for envy. And people rarely like to admit their envy. Further, the feeling of envy is quite common. Perhaps few people have felt the red heat of malicious rage or the deep pain of profound self-sacrifice. But everyone has experienced envy to some degree and, again, almost everyone dislikes it. It seems as if envy is a pretty universal experience that is universally disliked and disapproved of (cf. Smith and Kim (2007: 46)).

One of my primary aims is to provide an account of the trait of envy. My basic account is this: envy is a character trait in which a person is disposed to have feelings of lower self-esteem or self-worth upon an upward comparison to others who are similar to them along some feature that is self-defining or otherwise important to their practical identity. I will fill in the details of this account by discussing (i) character traits, (ii) upward comparison, (iii) similarity to others, and (iv) self-defining features. I then turn to secondary effects of envy.

I assume a traditional approach on which character traits are clusters of dispositions to have certain actions and attitudes (cf. Miller (2013: chp. 1)). What distinguishes different character traits is that they have different characteristic actions and attitudes. The characteristic actions and attitudes of a malicious person are distinct from the characteristic actions and attitudes of a kind person. There is some doubt as to whether people have character traits; I'll say little about that here.

Character traits are composed of dispositions. Dispositions normally manifest only in certain "stimulus conditions." And different dispositions manifest in different stimulus conditions. A match is disposed to both light and snap in two—just in different stimulus conditions. Similarly, different character traits have different stimulus conditions. Normally, for the characteristic activities of a character trait, a given situation functions as a stimulus condition only if the agent represents it in certain ways. A courageous person will not act or feel in characteristically courageous ways if he does not regard the situation as a dangerous one (even if it is). A generous person will not act or feel in characteristically generous ways, if she does not regard the situation as one where others are in need (even if they are). And even if a person with a character trait is in a stimulus situation, the dispositions might not manifest—dispositions are not always 100% reliable. There may be background interference. A cruel person might be in a stimulus condition to perform a cruel act, but refrain from acting by realizing that such an act would come at great professional peril.

Some might find it odd that I'm characterizing envy as a trait as opposed to an emotion. However, sometimes people characterize emotions as traits—an emotion is a disposition to have certain kinds of reactions (attitudes, actions) in response to certain conditions. Other times,

emotions are characterized as the specific reactions—such as the specific attitude one has. But there's no grand conflict here. I prefer to focus on envy as a psychological state that manifest certain responses in certain conditions; in other words, a trait. Others prefer to focus on the manifesting responses in those conditions; in other words, an episodic emotional state. But obviously the trait and episodic emotional state are closely related.

If envy is a character trait, then it involves clusters of dispositions for certain actions and attitudes. As I'll discuss below, there might be a variety of such dispositions that can be associated with envy. But the *central* disposition is a disposition to have feelings of lower self-esteem or self-worth. One feels worse—one does not find worthy or esteem as much—about some feature of one's own life. The feeling might take various particular forms such as sadness or disappointment or melancholy. The feelings can vary both in terms of intensity—getting strong or weaker—and duration—lasting briefly or over an extended period of time. These feelings are normally unpleasant, getting more unpleasant with increases in intensity or duration. For these reasons, Joseph Epstein once quipped "of all the seven deadly sins, only envy is no fun at all" (2003: 1).

These feelings occur after certain kinds of upward comparisons; to use the earlier terminology, their stimulus conditions involve upward comparisons. Upward comparisons are when an agent compares themselves with others regarding some property or dimension and perceives the other to be comparatively superior. By contrast, a downward comparison is where an agent compares themselves with others regarding some property or dimension and perceives the other to be comparatively inferior. For these comparisons, it doesn't matter if the other actually is comparatively superior/inferior. What matters is that the agent perceives them to be.

Of course, the idea that envy involves comparisons to others is not new; it's a borderline truism. Historical philosophers have already observed this idea. Aquinas wrote, "we grieve over a man's good, in so far as his good surpasses ours; this is envy properly speaking" (ST, IIae.IIa.36.2). Hume suggested something similar: "…envy is excited by some present enjoyment of another, which by comparison diminishes our idea of our own" (*Treatise*, II.2.8 SB 377). And even Kant and Hume found agreement here: "envy is a propensity to view the well-being of others with distress" because "the standard we use to see how well off we are is not the intrinsic worth of our own well-being but how it compares with that of others" (6: 459).

However, the observations of those philosophers do not take us very far. There are lots of people in the world and they have lots of features. And upward comparisons do not always result in feelings of lower self-esteem or self-worth; sometimes upward comparisons result in pride, amusement, or a recommitment to an ideal. Further, even when people do experience negative feelings upon upward comparisons, the comparisons may differ in their content. I might envy an acquaintance's good looks; you their education; and a third party their well-behaved children. And a different friend might not be envious of them at all. An adequate theory of envy should try to explain *which* upward comparisons are the ones that cause these feelings.

One simple idea is that the relevant upward comparisons are to those who are similar. Aquinas tells us that "a commoner does not envy the king, nor does the king envy a commoner whom he is far above" (ST, IIaeIIa.36.1.R2). And Hume uses a similar turn of phrase, "A poet is not apt to envy a philosopher, or a poet of a different kind, of a different nation, or a different age" (*Treatise*, II.2.8 *SB* 378). But we can find more concrete suggestions by relying on some of the psychological literature on social comparisons.[4]

[4] The literature kick-starts with Festinger (1954). Important anthologies include Suls and Miller (1977), Suls and Wills (1991), and Wheeler and Suls (2000). Buunk and Gibbons (2007) provides a nice relatively-recent

In general, we are more apt to compare ourselves to others when they are similar to us not merely physically, but also in terms of age, sex, gender, race, social status, reputation, skill, or employment (cf. Tesser (1980: 77), Tesser and Campbell (1982: 262), Salovey and Rodin (1984: 781-2)).[5] Further, these features may combine so that one is more likely to compare one's self to someone who is similar across multiple features. A handful of studies support this. In one study, high-school students were given an ambiguous (and bogus) score and were then given a choice of what group of peers to compare their score with. They predominately chose those of the same age and gender (Suls, Gastorf, Lawhon (1978); see also Zanna, Goethals, and Hill (1975)). Additionally, when given self-evaluation tasks, some college students are more likely to use their best friends for comparison as a routine standard (Mussweiler, Rüter, and Epstude (2004)). And a different study found that people reported experiencing envy of people who are of the same gender and similar age (Henniger and Harris (2015)).

These dispositions to compare can be caused by reflection, when (for instance) agents are explicitly queried by themselves or others to compare. However, some comparisons might be relatively spontaneous, unreflective, and easy (cf. Stapel and Blanton (2004)). That is, agents might find themselves comparing themselves to others without having made a prior choice to do so. As some researchers once put it, "sometimes we choose to compare ourselves with others, but sometimes such comparisons are thrust upon us" (Gilbert, Geisler, Morris (1995: 233)).

So agents are more likely to compare themselves to others who are similar along relevant lines, e.g., gender, age, occupation, and such comparisons might be reflective or spontaneous. But obviously not just any comparison is liable to cause feelings of lower self-esteem. So what are the features of others that, when comparisons are made, are liable to cause the characteristic feelings of envy? On my proposal, it is those features that are self-defining or otherwise important to an agent's practical identity.

A self-defining feature is a feature that agents take themselves to define who they are, the kind of person they are. Or, to use a different phrase, self-defining features are features that agents identify with that make up their practical identity. Importantly, it is the agent *themselves* that takes themselves to have these features. It may be obvious to my friends that I am a miser, but if I do not see myself a miser, then it is not a self-defining feature of me. Many self-defining features are socially-salient features—one's sex, gender, age, sexual orientation, social standing, occupation, etc. But self-defining features may include psychological or moral traits. A person might identify as being brave, proud, and a 'type-A' personality. Self-defining features might originate in agent's projects, including hobbies—e.g., gardening, exercising, painting—or professional projects as well—e.g., being the best sale's person in one's paper company.

Self-defining features and practical identities are important to agents because agents derive a lot of enjoyment and value from them (cf. Tesser (2001), Crooker and Knight (2005)). For instance, agents frequently enjoy the particular projects they engage in, especially when those projects are successful. Agents take pride in being good at their jobs. Agents derive significance from belonging to certain groups that they self-identify with, etc. Self-defining features are thus closely connected to agents' feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. Feeling good about ourselves is not normally ungrounded from what is going on in our lives. Success in our personal lives along our self-defining features frequently boosts feelings of self-esteem and self-worth.

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overview. See Perrine and Timpe (2014) and Protasi (2021) for attempts to incorporate the social comparison literature into a philosophical account of envy.

[5] I am focusing on individual comparisons as opposed to group comparisons. See Guimond (2006) for a volume that discusses both together.

To be clear, in cases of envy, the self-defining feature is self-defining for the agent himself, not the person being compared to. For instance, suppose I visit my friend Liz's house where she shows me her beautiful garden, full of ripe vegetables. Since gardening is a self-defining feature of me, I may come to feel worse about myself if my garden is not as good as hers. But gardening does not have to be a self-defining feature for her. For instance, perhaps she doesn't self-identify as a gardener and was somewhat ambivalent about having a garden this year.

On my proposal, the upward comparison to a similar person on some self-defining feature that is important to practical identity causes negative feelings of self-esteem or self-worth. Other scholars describe the central disposition of envy more generally as just involving "pain" (Tain et. al. (2012)) or an "adverse response" (Protasi (2021: 21)). One reason for characterizing envy more specifically, as involving negative feelings of self-esteem and self-worth, is phenomenological. As some of the empirical studies below indicate, people who are having an episodic experience of envy frequently describe their experience in ways that clearly involve negative feelings of self-esteem or self-worth. However, another reason involves the classification of traits. If two traits have the same stimulus conditions but distinct characteristic activities, that is good evidence that the traits are distinct. Conversely, if two traits periodically have similar characteristic activities but distinct stimulus conditions, that is good evidence that the traits are distinct. Consequently, if the characteristic activities one uses to characterize a trait are too general—like "pain" or "adverse response" are—then one runs the risk of bringing together distinct traits. For that general characterization might accidentally include a wide range of disparate or otherwise distinct responses and traits. Additionally, both philosophers (Perrine and Timpe (2014: 233-5)) and psychologists (Micelie and Cristiano (2007: 470-474)) try to distinguish envy from related traits such as admiration, jealousy, envy, indignation, and zeal. Such tasks would be more difficult using a general characterization of envy's characteristic activity in terms of "pain" or "adverse response," since many of those traits have characteristic activities that include pain and adverse responses. A more specific proposal of envy's characteristic activity as involving negative feelings of self-esteem and self-worth helps avoid these problems.

So, on my account envy is a character trait in which a person is disposed to have feelings of lower self-esteem or self-worth upon an upward comparison to others who are similar to them along some feature that is self-defining or otherwise important to their practical identity.

Some studies bear out this account. In Salovey and Rodin (1984), subjects experience feelings of lower self-esteem and self-worth when they received comparative negative feedback to a similar person in a self-defining feature (namely: their intended career path). But, importantly, subjects were less likely to experience feelings of lower self-esteem and self-worth when they received comparative negative feedback to a similar person in a non-self-identifying feature (namely: a non-intended career path). One person described their experience like this (1984: 790):

> I tried to ignore the results on the graph because they seemed so far from the truth. But no matter how much I tried to get on with the task, my mind kept returning to that below-average profile. Soon, I was feeling a bit worried and very sensitive about my own abilities.

Similar results have been found in other studies as well, e.g., Tesser (1980), Tesser and Campbell (1980), Salovey and Rodin (1991), Cheng and Lam (2007); see also Smith and Kim (2007: 60-61).

The central disposition of the vice of envy is to have feelings of lower self-esteem and self-worth. The stimulus situation for such a disposition are upward comparisons to a similar person along a trait that is self-defining. A natural question is why agents have these dispositions; why is it that such upward comparisons cause these types of feelings as opposed to other ones entirely? Presumably, it is because agents are implicitly or explicitly utilizing comparative standards for deriving meaning from their self-defining features. That is, agents are deriving meaning and value from their self-defining features only if those self-defining features are comparatively superior to others. These implicit or explicit comparative standards help explain why the envious have the dispositions that they do.

At this point, I have filled in the basic details of my account of envy. What I turn to now are the secondary effects of envy. After all, the negative feelings of envy can be powerful motivators as people prefer to feel good about themselves.[6] Agents may respond to these negative feelings in various ways by acting in various ways. First, the agent might *shift* their self-identity so that future negative comparisons do not cause emotional harm (see Mussweiler, Gabriel, and Bodenhausen (2000)). I will say little about this here as this is not the natural response of an envious person.

Second, I will distinguish between "primary" or "on-target" responses and "secondary" or "off-target" responses from an upward comparison. A primary/on-target response tries to remove the upward comparison and regain some sort of comparative advantage on the self-identifying feature. A secondary/off-target response tries to disparage or harm some other feature of the agent other than those that are relevant to the agent's self-identifying feature. Let's briefly look at each.

One primary/on-target response might be to try to minimize or take away the thing that the other agent has (cf. Silver and Sabini (1978: 107)). This might include negative attitudes on behalf of the agent. The agent might dislike, disapprove, or even hate the envied in virtue of their feature, even if that feature is a good thing. The agent might encourage others to likewise have negative attitudes about the agent and/or the agent's features. Finally, in more extreme examples, the agent might try to actively take, modify, or remove the comparative advantage.

A different primary/on-target response might be for the agent to try to make herself better along the self-defining feature. Here caution is in order. From the mere fact that an agent wants to improve themselves upon an upward comparison to another, it does not follow that the agent experienced any envy. The upward comparison may simply remind the agent that they are falling below the standards they have set for themselves. (Learning about my coworker's running routine may remind myself that I have been neglecting my own routine.) For those agents what matters is improvement, not comparative superiority. By contrast, for envy of the kind I am considering here, what matters is comparative improvement—being better than the other along that self-defining feature. For instance, a socialite might be envious of a particularly lavish party she is attending. Being envious, she might resolve to hold an even *more* lavish party in the next month, even if she enjoyed the previous one she hosted. Likewise, a student depressed by how another has surpassed her in grades may work harder to get the highest score—but only to regain a comparative advantage not because she cares about learning.[7]

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[6] Bushman, Moeller, and Crocker (2011) found that college students reported valuing boosts to self-esteem over a variety of things, including eating favorite snacks or having sex.

[7] Sometimes envy is initially defined, glossed, or operationalized as a disposition to wish for something of value that someone else has (see, e.g., Farrell (1980: 531) Ben-Ze'ev (1990: 487), Alicke and Zell (2008: 74)). There are obvious counterexamples to this proposal. E.g., while I sit hungrily at a restaurant, I might desire what

A secondary/off-target response might include minimizing or taking away other features of the envied. Again, this response can take the form of negative attitudes towards the envied. For instance, the student in the Salovey and Rodin study continued their reaction as follows (1984: 790):

> Then, when I read the other guy's story, I couldn't help but think, "If he's such a hot-shot premed and does so well in his classes, I bet he's really just a nerd; I bet he's one of those unfriendly, antisocial weenies that hang out in the library 20 hours a day; he probably couldn't have an interesting conversation with anyone."

Here the student immediately adopted negative attitudes towards other features of the envied that were not the self-defining feature. But the envier might also encourage others to have negative features other than the self-defining feature (e.g., "If he is so good at selling paper, it makes you think he must neglect his wife, right?").

The central characteristic disposition of envy is to have negative feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. Envy is distinct from a range of other traits or emotions. But it may cause agents to have these other emotions. For instance, if one feels worse about one's self because another has acquired a superior material good—say, a nice car—one might also come to covet that person's material good or a similar one. Envy might cause schadenfreude, where one positively enjoys the failings of another, either on the self-defining feature (primary/on-target response) or on some other feature (secondary/off-target response). Extended experiences of envy might cause other attitudes and feelings as well. Routinely having upward comparisons, of this right kind, can cause depressive states. Alternatively, it may also develop into distain or even hatred of another.

II. Accounts of Vice and Viciousness

On my proposal, envy is a character trait in which a person is disposed to have feelings of lower self-esteem or self-worth upon an upward comparison to others who are similar to them along some feature that is self-defining or otherwise important to their practical identity. But what makes this character trait a *vice*? In this section, I will briefly critically examine four proposals—Gabriele's Taylor "self-frustrating" account, Neo-Aristotelian accounts, Kant's account, and Driver's consequentialist account. I cover these four because Taylor's work is a rare work that explicitly addresses the nature of vice and the other three represent major western ethical traditions. My aim is not exhaustive refutation but rather to indicate what I take to be some shortcomings that would ideally be overcome. I'll argue, in section III.C below, that my own proposal overcomes their shortcomings.

A. Taylor's Self-Frustrating Conception of Vice

In her (2006), Gabriele Taylor provides a theory of what she calls "deadly vices." On her account, deadly vices are those character traits that are "destructive of the self and prevent its flourishing" (2006: 1). But Taylor rejects accounts of flourishing that are independent of the agent's own desires or projects. Rather, a deadly vice is deadly because it interferes with an agent's ability to judge, from her own perspective, that her life is meaningful and worthwhile (2006: 3-4).

Deadly vices *internally* interfere with an agent's ability to judge that her life is meaningful and worthwhile. A coward who faces difficult obstacles may not rise to meet them and thereby achieve his goals. Consequently, he will not judge his life as meaningful. His cowardice

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another has—namely a valuable meal. But I do not envy them in the sense we are concerned with. More significantly, this characterization fails to connect envy to agent's self-esteem or self-worth. To be clear, I am not interested in semantic legislating. Perhaps it is perfectly fine English to say 'I envy his warm meal.' The important point is that such states are clearly distinct from the trait of envy I am focusing on.

frustrates him, but only because of the challenge of external situations. By contrast, a deadly vice *internally* frustrates the agent by disposing the agent to think, feel, and act in ways that keep the agent from achieving their goals and thereby judging their life as meaningful and valuable. Thus, deadly vices are *self-frustrating* on Taylor's account.

Taylor argues that envy is a deadly vice. Specifically, a type of envy she labels 'destructive state envy.' She describes this as when a person envies the "state" of another person having some perceived good and wants to "spoil the other's advantage" (2006: 44-5) by removing that perceived good. This destructive response is caused by the envier perceiving the other to have something she lacks, namely, an "esteem-worthy self" (2006: 48). Destructive state-envy is self-frustrating because the envier desires a self that is worthy of esteem but removing a comparative advantage is not an effective means to achieving that desire. Thus, the person's trait is self-frustrating—she is disposed to act in ways that will not help her achieve what she really wants. Thus, destructive state-envy is a vice, given Taylor's view.

I will raise two issues with applying Taylor's self-frustrating conception of vice to envy. First, envy is not necessarily self-frustrating in the way Taylor proposes. Envious people have the dispositions they do because they are using comparison to generate self-esteem and self-worth. But reacquiring a comparative advantage—by taking away another's superior position—may very well cause increased feelings of self-esteem and self-worth. Indeed, a number of studies indicate that downwards comparison to those similar to one on self-defining features *do* create positive feelings of self-worth. (See Buunk and Gibbons (2007: 7-8) for an overview of studies.) So, envy may not be self-frustrating in the way Taylor proposes.

Second, and relatedly, Taylor's self-frustrating conception of vice does not naturally explain the viciousness of giving into envy. A person gives into a vice when they do not resist the characteristic activities of the vice and may intentionally seek them out. Presumably giving into a vice results in a *more* vicious trait, since one is engaging in further morally problematic attitudes and actions. But more fully giving into a vice might be *less* self-frustrating. For instance, the envious person might give into their vice resulting in more actions where they tear down their rival and encourage others to think poorly of that person. But so doing, the envious person may regain a comparative advantage. But presumably giving into a vice in this way is *more* vicious despite being *less* self-frustrating. To be clear, as a matter of fact, vices may be self-frustrating in a variety of situations. But I am doubtful that being self-frustrating is the best way to understand whether and why vices are vices.

B. Neo-Aristotelian Accounts

An important contemporary account of virtue are Neo-Aristotelian accounts, as exemplified by Rosalind Hursthouse (1999) and Julia Annas (2011). The central claim of Neo-Aristotelian accounts of virtue is that what makes something a virtue—what explains a character trait's status as a virtue—is to be understood in terms of its connection to flourishing. Hursthouse writes that "a virtue is a character trait a human being needs for *Eudaimonia*, to flourish well" (1999: 167). And Annas writes, "the intuitive place to start is the ordinary, commonplace assumption that a person's life will, to put it generally, *go better* if they have the virtues—if they are generous and brave, for example—than if they don't" (2011: 147).

However, this still leaves a little obscure the exact connection between a character trait and flourishing. While Annas does not develop these ideas at greater length,[8] Hursthouse does (1999:

[8] Annas suggests the virtues are necessary for flourishing (2011: 118) and sufficient (2011: 168 fn. 19). But these comments come at the ends of chapters and are not developed at length. Most authors sympathetic to Neo-Aristotelism accept that virtues are necessary but not sufficient; compare, e.g., Roberts (2015: 43), Snow (2017:

167-174). Hursthouse denies that any individual virtue, or even all of the virtues, is necessary or sufficient for flourishing. Rather, *the* virtues—all of them—are reliable for achieving flourishing. Hursthouse suggests a further stronger claim: the virtues are the *only* reliable way to flourish given the way things are (1999: 172). Further, as she emphasizes, the issue here is a general one (1999: 171); *in general* or *on the whole* the virtues help agents acquire flourishing. Thus, an individual character trait—say, courage—is a virtue because it is part of, and contributes to, a *set* of character traits—the virtues—that, in general and on the whole, are the most reliable way to achieve flourishing.

Though Annas and Hursthouse focus on virtues, a Neo-Aristotelian account of vices can be proposed mirroring the account of virtues. A virtue helps contribute to character traits that are, in general, reliable ways to achieve flourishing. Presumably, a vice is a character trait that, in general, interferes with achieving flourishing. Individual vices are neither necessary nor sufficient for lacking flourishing. But they can in general interfere with—positively mitigate—an agent's flourishing. Of course, some character traits might neither contribute to nor interfere with flourishing in a general way. Such character traits would be neither virtues nor vices.

I restrict myself to a few critical comments. First, the viciousness of a character trait may get lost in the noise of life so that it routinely fails to interfere with flourishing. Less metaphorically, individual manifestations of a vice might not be frequent or significant enough to interfere with flourishing. Flourishing is an elongated stable state (cf. Aristotle, *NE* I.7, 1098a), abstracting away from particular interactions or concerns. And it is not obvious that having a vice that periodically manifests *would* interfere in general with such a state. To use an analogy, a flourishing prairie—full of plants and animal species—can easily handle periodic patches of poor weather while still being a flourishing prairie. So too a life may be flourishing with periodic patches of a vice rearing its ugly head. To be clear, I am not suggesting that we can imagine some merely possible world in which having a vice interferes with flourishing in general. Rather, I am suggesting that *in the actual world* it is not at all obvious that having an individual vice in general interferes with flourishing.

Second, the explanation that Neo-Aristotelian accounts provide of the virtues and vices is pitched at the wrong level—it is too general. On Neo-Aristotelian accounts, we see which individual character traits interlock in the right ways to contribute to and sustain a state of flourishing and which traits interfere with such a state. Thus, the explanation of which character traits are virtues or vices is pitched at the level of how they help fix or determine flourishing. But often times it is the particular actions and attitudes that are part of our life that play a role in explaining why a particular trait is virtuous or vicious. Some character traits are virtuous because they give rise to virtuous actions and attitudes; some character traits are vicious because they give rise to vicious actions and attitudes. To modify the analogy some, periodically spraying a particular chemical might keep the prairie from flourishing. But a full explanation of the chemical as a *pesticide* doesn't simply describe the long-term effects on the prairie, but the specific toxic effects it has on various plant species.

This second objection can be reinforced with a third. Part of what makes a character trait vicious is the way it disposes us to act towards *others*. Suppose I am envious of my friend Liz and her garden. This causes unpleasant feelings in myself, which may mitigate against my flourishing. But suppose overcome with envy, I sneak into Liz's garden and start destroying it. Quite clearly, my action is vicious and is an outcome of my envy. An appropriate explanation of

321). Interestingly, the ancient view in the west was that virtues were necessary and sufficient; see Russell (2012) for discussion.

the viciousness of envy would include that it disposes me to act in these ways. To merely talk about the general state of my flourishing would be to miss something important, namely, the particular localized actions and attitudes I am disposed to have towards others.[9]

These objections are based on what we might call a "pure" Neo-Aristotelian account on which the virtuousness or viciousness of traits is only explained in relation to the general flourishing on an agent. It is possible for an Neo-Aristotelian account to be "impure" and accept additional claims about what makes the virtues virtuous and the vices vicious. My account of vice below is something that could be part of an impure Neo-Aristotelian account.[10]

C. Kant's Account of Vice

In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant developed an account of virtue and vice. In general, virtue is a strength or resolve in acting in accordance with one's duties (*MoM*: 6: 394; *MoM*: 6: 405). Specifically, it is a strength or resolve to overcome internal opposition to doing one's duties that arise from one's inclinations (*MoM*: 6: 394; cf. *Lecture on Ethics* 27:300). Strictly speaking, for Kant, there is only *one* virtue: a strength or resolve in acting in accordance with one's duties. But on Kant's view, agents have different duties, differentiated by their ends. Thus, we might speak of different virtues, when these concern different ends (*MoM*: 6: 395; *MoM*: 6:406). If virtue is a strength to act in accordance with one's duties, vice is a willingness to *not* act in accordance with one's duties. That is, vice is a willingness to let one's inclinations keep one from doing one's duties (*MoM*: 6:405; *MoM:* 6:390). Again, we can distinguish between different vices by distinguishing between the different duties one is inclined to not do.

Kant understands envy as a vice opposed to the (imperfect) duty to love others and a (perfect) duty to value ourselves as ends-in-themselves (cf., *MoM*: 6:435-6). He writes (*MoM*, 6: 458-9),

> *Envy (livor)* is a propensity to view the well-being of others with distress, even though it does not detract from one's own. When it breaks forth into action (to diminish their well-being) it is called envy *proper*… Yet envy is only an indirectly malevolent disposition, namely a reluctance to see our own well-being overshadowed by another's because the standard we use to see how well off we are is not the intrinsic worth of our own well-being but how it compares with that of others… This vice is therefore contrary to one's duty to oneself as well as to others. (*MoM*, 6: 458-9).[11]

Presumably Kant's thought is that this distress of seeing others with various goods will increase our unwillingness to conform with our duties towards others. Likewise, this "distress" will keep us from our duties to ourselves to value ourselves as ends-in-themselves.

I agree with the point about duties to others; indeed, it is an improvement over Neo-Aristotelian accounts. However, one problem with Kant's account is his appeal to the perfect duty to value ourselves as ends-in-themselves. In general, an agent's self-esteem or self-worth is not grounded in her capacity to set ends but rather the agent's practical identities. For instance,

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[9] This objection could be used as premise of the "egoism" objection to virtue ethics, but does not assume that objection. For discussion of that objection see Annas (2011: 152-6), Hurka (2014), Toner (2015), and van Zyl (2019: 53-55).

[10] For instance, at some points, Annas describes the virtues as commitments to good things because they are good (2011: 103-105). Such claims are distinct from a pure Neo-Aristotelian account thus making her view an impure one, using my terminology. I think Annas' claims are a major concession regarding the potential significance of virtue ethics as a "third" approach to ethics. But I can't argue that here.

[11] In his lecture on ethics, Kant also discusses envy. However, he implausibly suggests that an envious person desires to be the only happy person (*L*, 27:438, 440, 443).

self-esteem and self-worth appropriately vary across lives—and across different times in the same life—in a way that the capacity to set ends does not vary. Similarly, having our self-esteem or self-worth be set by our capacity to set ends would be alienating, making our positive or negative feelings about ourselves divorced from our projects, passions, and things we care about. Thus, envious agents may experience lower feelings of self-esteem or self-worth, but they need not cease valuing themselves as ends-in-themselves. (In fact, it would be odd for them to do so.) Thus, understanding the viciousness of envy in terms of a perfect duty to one's self is unhelpful, since envy wouldn't naturally involve a violation of that duty.

D. Driver's Consequentialist Account

In her well-known (2001), Julia Driver provides a consequentialist account of virtues and vices. On her account, "a virtue is a character trait that produces more good (in the actual world) than not systematically" (2001: 82, emphasis removed, cf. xviii). This account has three elements. First, the account is non-maximizing in that a character trait can be a virtue even if it is not the best possible character trait or one that maximizes the good (cf. 2001: 73-4, xvii). Second, whether or not a character trait is a virtue or vice is determined by its systematic effects, not a single case (cf. 2001: xix, 67, 82; 2012: 148). Finally, her account is actualist: the *actual* systematic effects of a trait determine whether a trait is a virtue or vice (cf. 2001: 78ff). Additionally, Driver denies that any virtue requires the same kind of internal mental state, like believing one is acting virtuously (2001: 52). And while she recognizes different character traits may have different mental states that constitute that particular trait, those internal mental states are not of any intrinsic or final value (2001: xviii, 68); at best, they help agents act in instrumentally valuable ways in odd circumstances. While Driver, like most authors, focuses on virtues, it is clear she holds the analogous thing for vices. A vice is a character trait that produces more bad (in the actual world) than not systematically.

My main complaint with Driver's account is similar to my second criticism of Neo-Aristotelian accounts. As others have suggested (Slote (2004: 29-30), Adams (2006: 55)), sometimes it *is* the internal mental states of agents that play a role in explaining why a character trait is vicious. For instance, an envious person might enjoy the suffering of her rival, even if this enjoyment is kept to herself. Intuitively, part of what makes this person's envy vicious *is* this internal mental state. Envy is not unique. Part of what makes malice a vice *is* the negative internal mental states towards others. To neglect the mental states is to neglect a major component of viciousness.

To be clear, Driver is probably right that there is no singular mental state that is necessary for acting virtuously or viciously. But even if there is no singular mental state that is necessary, it does not follow that such internal mental states play no role in explaining the virtuousness or viciousness of character traits.[12] Indeed, the opposite seems to be the case.

III. An Account of Viciousness and Vice

In this section, I provide an account of viciousness and vice. I begin with some background assumptions about value, including an endorsement of what is sometimes called "higher-order" theories of value. Then I turn to providing an account of the degree of viciousness of a character trait which I then use to provide a proposal for a character trait being a vice. I then apply my proposal to the vice of envy, showing how my proposal avoids some of the issues I raised for the theories in the previous section. Finally, I consider some potential criticisms of my account of the viciousness of envy.

A. Background Assumptions About Value

[12] Or, more cautiously, no role outside of their causal role in generating actions.

First, I assume that there is such a thing as final value, where something is of final value when (at first approximation) it is appropriate, right, or correct to value it for its own sake. By 'value it' I have in mind a wide range of attitudes such as liking, caring about, being concerned with, desiring, taking pleasure in, etc. Something is of final disvalue when (at first approximation) it is appropriate, right, or correct to disvalue it for its own sake. By 'disvalue it' I have in mind a wide range of attitudes such as disliking, avoiding, taking displeasure in, being opposed to, etc.

Some things are of instrumental value or disvalue. The instrumental value or disvalue of something is determined by its causal consequences, specifically, its balance of consequences involving final value or final disvalue. When something is of instrumental value, it is appropriate, right, or correct to value it—it just may not be appropriate, right, or correct to value it *for its own sake*, as opposed to its valuable consequences. Similarly, when something is of instrumental disvalue, it is appropriate, right, or correct to disvalue it—it just might not be appropriate, right or correct to disvalue it *for its own sake*, as opposed to its disvaluable consequences.

Additionally, I assume higher-order theories of value. (For relevant discussion, see Moore (1903: sections 113-114, 117, 122), Ross (1939: 302ff.), Nozick (1981: 428ff.), Hurka (2001: 11-19), Zimmerman (2001: 199ff.).) According to these theories, our valuing attitudes themselves might have final value or disvalue partly in virtue of the value of the contents of those attitudes. For instance, suppose something is of value and an agent adopts an appropriate attitude towards it, that is, the agent values it. On these theories, the agent's attitude itself is of final value because it is the appropriate response to the thing of value. Conversely, if something is of value and an agent disvalues it, then the agent's attitude is of final disvalue, since it is an inappropriate response to the thing of value. Similar points will apply to disvalue. If something is of disvalue and an agent disvalues it, then her attitude is of final value because it is the appropriate response to the thing of value. If something is of disvalue and an agent values its, then her attitude is of final disvalue because it is an inappropriate response to the thing of value.

A further question is what sorts of things are of final value. According to value monism, there's only one sort of thing of final value.[13] Perhaps the most well-known version of value monism is hedonism, on which pleasure is of final value and pain is of final disvalue. However, most contemporary philosophers adhere to some kind of value pluralism, though there are differences between what things they propose for being of final value. Moore (1903: sections 50, 107-8, 113, 122) proposes things of beauty, consciousness of beauty, pleasure in admirable mental traits, and exercises of virtue motivated by a concern for good, evil, or rightness. Ross (1930: chp. 5) proposes virtuous dispositions, pleasure, a distribution of pleasure and pain that is appropriately merited by virtuous dispositions, and knowledge (and to a lesser degree "right opinion"). Railton (1984: 163) briefly suggests things like happiness, knowledge, purposeful activity, autonomy, solidarity, respect, and beauty. Brink (1989: 231-236) suggests personal and social relations, as well as the reflective pursuit of (permissible) projects. Lemos (1994: chp. 5-6) proposes pleasure, correct belief, understanding, and the flourishing of non-sentient life amongst other things. Hurka (2001: 12) includes pleasure, knowledge, and accomplishment.

[13] More cautiously, there's only one kind of thing of *basic* final value. Other things might be of non-basic final value in virtue of their relation to the things of basic final value. (E.g., a life might be of non-basic final value in virtue of having many things of basic final value, where those things of basic final value are all of the same kind). I'll ignore this complication in what follows since it won't matter for my discussion here. For a fuller discussion of basic final value and its relation to value monism, see Perrine (2023a).

Like most philosophers, I agree that value pluralism is more plausible than value monism. Without fully settling a specific axiology, I think it is plausible that pleasure, knowledge (or accurate representation more generally), certain kinds of interpersonal relationships, and doing what is deserved are of final value. As my account of viciousness in the next section indicates, I do not think that virtues are of final value or vices are of final disvalue. Rather, at best, they dispose people to have actions and attitudes that are of final value/disvalue or instrumental value/disvalue. In this way, I do disagree with some of the above authors.

B. Proposals for Viciousness and Vices

In this section, I sketch my proposals for viciousness and being a vice.[14] Actions and attitudes may be of final value/disvalue or instrumental value/disvalue. On my proposals, there is a degreed property of being vicious (as well as a degreed property of being virtuous), which are understood in terms of final value/disvalue or instrumental value/disvalue they bring about in stimulus conditions. Using these properties, I analyze a vice as a character trait that has a high degree of viciousness and low to no degree of virtuousness.

Character traits are dispositions to have attitudes and actions in certain stimulus conditions. Those attitudes and actions may be of final/instrumental disvalue. I propose that the *viciousness* of a character trait is determined by whether those characteristic actions and attitudes in stimulus conditions are of final/instrumental disvalue. Specifically, the more final/instrumental disvalue those actions and attitudes are of, the more vicious a character trait is.

An illustration. Imagine a man who has a bad temper when it comes to his dog. When he discovers his dog has misbehaved, he lashes out, punishing the dog disproportionally. Disproportionally punishing the dog is disvaluable. Thus, this trait is to some degree vicious. But suppose over time the punishing becomes even more disproportionate and the man comes to enjoy punishing the dog. Such actions and attitudes are even more disvaluable. Thus, this man's trait has become even more vicious.

Notice that the degree of viciousness of a character trait is determined by the disvalue of its actions and attitudes in stimulus conditions and not in terms of the trait *simpliciter*. The distinction is important. A character trait may be quite vicious and yet rarely manifest. To illustrate, the king's chief torturer may have a cluster of traits that make him well-suited for his position. But, thankfully, the kingdom is at peace and the chief torturer is rarely, if ever, called upon. The chief torturer has traits that are quite vicious because of what he *would* do even though *as a matter of fact* he rarely performs those vicious actions or has those vicious attitudes.[15]

I assume higher-order theories of value on which our attitudes can be of value or disvalue as well. Thus, on my view, an agent's attitudes can be of disvalue when she values the disvaluable or disvalues the valuable. Given these axiological views, agents' attitudes are also relevant to whether their character trait has some degree of viciousness. To illustrate, consider an old racist curmudgeon in a nursing home. Because of his advanced age, he is unable to perform many actions that go against racial equality. Nonetheless, when he hears about the success of ethnic minorities, he disapproves, is displeased, and sometimes even despises their success. Given higher-order theories of value, his attitudes are of disvalue; for he holds inappropriate attitudes towards what is valuable. Given my proposal for viciousness, his character trait also has some degree of viciousness. Both claims strike me as right.

[14] I focus on the viciousness and vice here; I develop a fuller account that incorporate virtuousness and virtues in Perrine (2023b).

[15] Analyzing viciousness of a trait in terms of the stimulus conditions and *not* the actual results of the trait is a further difference between my proposal and Driver's.

So a character trait is vicious the degree to which its characteristic actions and attitudes in stimulus conditions are disvaluable. The converse is true for the degreed property of virtuousness. A character trait is virtuous the degree to which its characteristic actions and attitudes in stimulus conditions are valuable. Using these properties, I propose an account of when a trait is a vice. A trait is a vice when it has a high degree of viciousness and low to no degree of virtuousness. That is to say, if a character trait's actions and attitudes in stimulus conditions are frequently of final/instrumental disvalue and rarely if ever of final/instrumental value, then that character trait is a vice.

Because virtuousness and viciousness come in degrees, there might be some leeway in which character traits are considered virtues and vices. For instance, there are no clear "cutoffs" for when a character trait becomes a vice or virtue. Indeed, there might be some character traits that are unclear or borderline cases exactly because they exhibit virtuousness or viciousness to some degree. (Consider, for instance, timeliness. I've found that many people are unsure if it is a virtue or think that, if it is a virtue, it is a weak or less important virtue.)

Similarly, a character trait might exhibit certain degrees of virtuousness and viciousness that keep it from being either a virtue or a vice. For instance, blind loyalty might not be a virtue or a vice because it disposes people to be loyal in conditions that it would be good to be loyal in as well as conditions that it would be bad to be loyal in. Likewise, competitiveness might produce some value in terms of hard work, cooperation with teammates, personal mastery, or pleasure. But it may also produce some disvalue in terms of a lack of moral concern, or even hostility, towards those one is competing against.

Lastly, notice that the account of virtuousness and viciousness does not require that a character trait is to some degree vicious because the agent knows (or otherwise believes) that the resulting actions or attitudes are disvaluable. A character trait might be to some degree vicious simply in virtue of having disvaluable actions or attitudes in stimulus conditions. Of course, some agents might know and seek out those disvaluable actions or attitudes. Given a higher-order theory of value, such knowledge makes a potential character trait more vicious, since the agent values something that is disvaluable. But knowledge (or belief of some kind) about the value or disvalue of actions or attitudes is not necessary for a state to have some degree of viciousness—though such knowledge might increase the viciousness of a state.

C. *Envy*

Let me apply my proposal about viciousness and being a vice to the trait of envy. The central disposition of envy is to have negative feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. These feelings are of final disvalue because they are quite unpleasant. In more extreme cases, they can cause depressive episodes. These feelings are frequently also of instrumental disvalue. They discourage agents from engaging in projects that give their lives meaning. Thus, the characteristic feeling of envy is quite disvaluable.

The vice of envy frequently disposes agents to have negative feelings about various things that others have accomplished and achieved. Frequently, the accomplishments and achievements of others are valuable, normally of instrumental value but also potentially of final value as well. An appropriate reaction to such a success is to value it, not be upset by it. Having negative feelings about this thing of value is, itself, of disvalue. Additionally, envy might cause feelings of schadenfreude. Again, frequently, such feelings are of final disvalue; when things go poorly for another, it is normally appropriate to be saddened by them. Taking pleasure in their pain is of final disvalue in such cases.

So envy disposes agents to have certain attitudes that are of final and instrumental disvalue. But envy disposes agents to act in ways that may also be of instrumental disvalue. Specifically, envy disposes agents to undermine or take away the comparative advantage. One way that this can occur is "on target." However, normally taking away another's comparative advantage is instrumentally disvaluable. If I destroy my neighbor's garden because I envy her superior skill, this will be instrumentally disvaluable because it will deprive her of the pleasure she got in her garden. But secondary or "off target" responses are likely also of instrumental or final disvalue. Spreading a rumor that a coworker neglects his child because one is envious of his sales record is certainly of disvalue.

So, many of the characteristic actions and attitudes of envy are of final and/or instrumental disvalue. Does envy also lead to actions or attitudes that are of final and/or instrumental value? Envious agents may try to regain a comparative advantage by improving themselves. And improving one's self may be of instrumental value. But since the underlying motivation is to be superior to others, envious agents who improve themselves are still likely to have disvaluable attitudes towards others and engage in disvaluable actions. For instance, perhaps an envious student studies hard and gets a superior score to a rival. Upon achieving the superior score, the student is still likely to have actions and attitudes that are disvaluable. For instance, she is still likely to dislike the other student and his achievements; she may even publicly demean the other student she has surpassed. So even in cases where envious agents ultimately improve themselves, they are still likely to engage in disvaluable actions and have disvaluable attitudes.

So the characteristic activities of envy—both attitudes and actions—are normally of final and/or instrumental disvalue. On some occasions, envy may lead to some things of value, such as self-improvement. But even on those occasions, it is accompanied by attitudes and actions of disvalue. Thus, envy has a high degree of viciousness and a low degree of virtuousness. Thus, on my proposal, envy is a vice.

My account of viciousness avoids several of the problems for other accounts. First, one of my objections to Taylor's self-frustrating account is that giving into envy may actually help a person not be frustrated in their goals. Thus, on Taylor's account giving into envy may be less vicious than not. However, on my proposal, giving into envy is more vicious. For giving into envy means acquiring additional dispositions to have actions and attitudes that are of final and instrumental disvalue—even if one is no longer self-frustrated.

Second, I objected to Neo-Aristotelian accounts of vice that they pitched their explanations at the wrong level. Specifically, the focus on the global features of an agent's life as opposed to the particular manifestations of that vice. However, my proposal emphasizes the particular disvaluable manifestations of the vice—the attitudes and actions people have, including the attitudes and actions directed towards others. Indeed, the value/disvalue of these actions and attitudes are what determine the viciousness of a trait. Therefore, it avoids this objection.

Third, in contrast to Kant's account, nothing in my account requires or proposes that agent's self-worth is grounded primarily or exclusively in their status as an end-in-itself. Finally, like Driver, my account incorporates the value of actions of a character trait (though I focus on actions in stimulus conditions unlike Driver). But unlike Driver I also include the final disvalue of the characteristic attitudes of a trait as well. Thus, my account avoids the problem I raised with Driver's account, which explicitly denies that agent's attitudes can be of final value or disvalue.

D. Thomason on the Moral Value of Envy

My analysis of the viciousness of envy implies that envy, when in stimulus conditions, is a disvaluable trait. However, that claim has been directly challenged by Krista Thomason in a 2015 paper entitled "The Moral Value of Envy." Thomason claims that "envy has moral value because moral agents value goods and talents as part of lives they see as worthwhile" (2015: 51). Thomason characterizes a moral agent as an agent that cares about, or is otherwise invested in, having goods and talents that make up the life they deem valuable (2015: 46). In virtue of caring about having a certain life, an agent is liable to experience feelings of envy when they lack those things while others have them (2015: 44). These feelings of envy include both feelings of sadness, depression, and frustration that one lacks the relevant goods that are part of the life as well as resentment, bitterness, and anger that another has the relevant goods (2015: 44-49). Because the liability to have these feelings are either constitutive of, or instrumental to, caring about a certain life, the liability to have these feelings are of moral value—either constitutive or instrumental value.

In response, it is important to carefully distinguish between two kinds of feelings that Thomason describes. Some feelings are "inward directed" feelings about one's self. Suppose it is important to the life I deem valuable that I own my own home. But suppose currently I do not. I am liable to have inward directed feelings such as disappointment, sadness, or frustration over my not having something I care about. Other feelings are "outward" directed feelings about others. Suppose I have a rival who I strongly dislike. In virtue of my dislike of the rival, I am disposed to feelings of resentment, bitterness, and anger if things go well for my rival.

Having distinguished these two kinds of feelings, it is plausible that some of the inward directed feelings are partly constitutive of what it means to value a life involving certain goods or talents. By contrast, it is not plausible that the outward directed feelings are partly constitutive of what it means to value a life involving certain goods or talents. If owning my own home is part of the life I desire, then it seems part of the desire that I'm liable to feel depressed, sad, or frustrated when I don't own my own home. By contrast, it is not part of that desire that I'm liable to feel resentful, bitter, or angry when others have that thing.

But those inward directed feelings are not necessarily constitutive of having envy. For the stimulus conditions of envy involve interpersonal comparisons of various kinds. But feeling depressed, sad, or frustrated about lacking something I care about does not necessarily involve interpersonal comparisons at all (though, of course, an interpersonal comparison could be the occasion to remind me of a lack of something I care about). By contrast, the outward directed feelings Thomason describes—resentment, bitterness, and anger—are more closely associated with envy. For upward comparisons to others who are similar to them along some feature that is self-defining might cause those outward directed feelings.

So Thomason is wrong to suggest that the liability to experience envy plays an important role in the emotional life of a moral agent. The liability to experience certain emotions—what I've labeled inward directed emotions—may be part of being a moral agent but they are not constitutive of envy. The liability to experience other emotions—what I've labeled outward directed emotions—are more likely to occur in people who are envious but they are not part of being a moral agent.

Thomason anticipates something like this response. She writes (2015: 49):

> But there is a practical tension in the emotional life of a person who cares about having goods and talents but does not feel envy. This would require that someone could care about having goods and talents she values without feeling badly when she does not have them and without feeling badly when she sees others enjoying them

And at another point, she writes "The fact that we are bitter about others enjoying the things we value is simply part of our desperate wish to have it" (2015: 48). However, once we've drawn a distinction between these inward directed emotions and outward directed emotions, these claims are implausible on their face. It is not part of wanting something—even desperately wishing to have it—that one must be bitter when others enjoy it. That is a separable—and arguably vicious!—attitude to have. Similarly, there might be a tension in an agent who deemed that something was a worthwhile part of their life but had no negative inward feelings when that thing was not part of their life. But there's no tension in an agent who deemed that something was a worthwhile part of their life but had no negative outward directed feelings towards those who had that thing. So Thomason has not shown that envy is morally valuable, either instrumentally or constitutively.

E. Types of Envy and Disvalue

On my view, envy is a vice because of the disvalue of its characteristic actions and attitudes. Some people have claimed that envy is not necessarily disvaluable. However, whether those claims conflict with mine depends partly on whether the trait(s) being identified as 'envy' is the same, or suitably close, to the trait that I have described. Sometimes it is clear it is not. For instance, La Caze (2001: 32) characterizes envy as "a complex of feelings involving the recognition that others have through luck or either deserved or undeserved means, received goods or had successes which are considered desirable." She then claims that this emotion can be moral (and thus presumably not disvaluable) when it is directed towards undeserved success such as illegitimate preferential treatment (2001: 35). I agree with La Caze's diagnosis of such an emotion; but I think it is clearly distinct from what I have characterized (cf. Van Hooft (2002: 143)).

Some philosophers (e.g. Rawls (1999: section 80), Taylor (2006: 43), and psychologists (e.g. Crusius and Lange (2014), Lange and Crusius (2015), van de Ven (2016)) distinguish between two types of envy. One type of envy is "benign," not involving any ill-will towards others; another type of envy is envy "proper" or "malicious envy" and involves ill-will towards others. As the names suggest, these two kinds of envy do not get the same moral evaluation. However, the author who has done the most to taxonomize and evaluate "types" of envy is Sara Protasi. In a sequence of articles, culminating in a 2021 book, Protasi distinguishes between four types of envy and explores their moral status. Consequently, relating Protasi views on envy to the discussion here may be worthwhile.

In her (2021) book, Sara Protasi offers an account of envy. She writes that "envy is an aversive response to a perceived inferiority or disadvantage vis-à-vis a similar other, with regard to a person that is relevant to the sense of identity of the envier" (2021: 25, 29). Her account of envy is an account of the emotion of envy as opposed to the trait of envy. But presumably she could extend her account to the character trait by maintaining that the character trait disposes one to feelings or emotions of envy.

One important difference between Protasi and my account is Protasi characterizes the emotion of envy just as "an aversive response." As noted earlier, on my account, the response is much more specific: it is feelings of lower self-esteem or self-worth. This difference is not trivial. There can be many more aversive responses than mere feelings of lower self-esteem or self-worth. And it is not clear that all aversive responses are appropriately labeled envy or otherwise constitute a uniform class. For instance, consider the following case. Two athletes are competing in a large-scale sporting competition. One of the athletes loses to the other but only because the latter cheated. As a result, the athlete is outraged. In this case, the athlete has an

aversive response (outrage) to a perceived inferiority (losing) vis-à-vis a similar other (the winning athlete) with regard to a person that is relevant to the sense of identity of the envier (being a competitive athlete). But, pretheoretically, cases like these are not cases of envy. Nor do such cases constitute a natural class with paradigmatic cases of envy. Cases like these indicate that the feeling of envy should be more narrowly circumscribed than merely involving "an aversive response."[16]

Protasi also claims that there is a specific kind of envy that is valuable. She distinguishes between four kinds of envy using a two-fold distinction that cuts across each other (cf. 2021: 43) The first distinction is a distinction of behavior. Does the person "level up"—so to speak—trying to make themselves better or does the person "level down"—so to speak—by making the envied worse? The second distinction is the "focus of concern." Is the focus of the adverse reaction that one lacks the relevant good or the focus of the adverse concern that the other has the relevant good? These two distinctions cut across each other, thereby generating four kinds of envy (cf. 2021: 44-65).

Protasi labels one of these four kinds of envy "emulative envy." In it, the focus of concern is that one lacks the relevant good, and one aims to try to achieve the relevant good for one's self (2021: 44, 50-4). Protasi claims that emulative envy is, in fact, a virtuous emotion (2021: 85-92), where virtuous emotions are emotions that are "rationally justified and ethically appropriate stable emotional traits that are constitutive of the good life" (2021: 86). She argues that emulative envy is instrumentally valuable (2021: 88-90) as well as intrinsically valuable (2021: 90).[17]

In response, I am doubtful that the character trait that Protasi describes meets either her account of envy or mine. For the stimulus conditions of the trait do not essentially involve comparison to others. In generating the four-fold distinction, Protasi describes a distinction between focusing on the fact that one lacks a good and focusing on the fact that another has the relevant good. But one can have an adverse reaction by focusing on the fact that one lacks a good *without* having an interpersonal comparison. Or one can have an adverse reaction by focusing on the fact that one lacks a good while having an interpersonal comparison with someone who is not similar to one at all. And, of course, one can have an adverse reaction by focusing on the fact that one lacks a good while having an interpersonal comparison with someone who is similar to one. Thus, the stimulus conditions for this kind of adverse reaction don't necessarily include interpersonal comparisons towards others who are similar to one along lines relevant to self-identity.

For instance, imagine the case of a lazy agent. This agent has set a personal goal to achieve something they value, say, mastering a specific dance move. But the agent has become side-tracked and is lazy. But the agent focuses on the fact that they lack this good, and decides to recommit themselves to achieve that good for themselves. The agent's willingness to recommit to their goal is presumably "rationally justified" and the kind of trait that is "constitutive of the good life." This agent meets many of the psychological and normative characterizations Protasi provides of emulative envy. But it hardly sounds like a case of envy. For it doesn't essentially involve interpersonal comparison.[18] So even if Protasi is right that "emulative envy" is valuable

[16] Perrine and Timpe (2014: 234-5) give a similar example from a religious context.

[17] See also Vaccarezza and Niccoli (2022)'s discussion of "inspiring envy."

[18] Similar points will hold for the other kind of "envy" that Protasi describes: "inert envy." Just like emulative envy, invert envy involves a focus of concern on the lack of a good and not the fact that the other has the relevant

in various ways, since it isn't the kind of trait I've described, her views about its value are consistent with my claims about the viciousness of envy.

At the end of the day, disagreements about how many "types" of envy there are, or whether each type is envy "proper," are likely verbal disputes. For instance, both those who see benign envy as a type of envy (van de Ven, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (2009), Crusius and Lange (2014), Lange and Crusius (2015), van de Ven (2016))) and those who do not (Smith and Kim (2007), Miceli and Castelfranchi (2007)) agree that the phenomenology of the emotion is different and its functional role in generating actions is different as well. And both Protasi and I agree that the behavioral profiles of the four traits she describes are different in various ways. Consequently, I have no grand objection to a usage of the word 'envy' on which the term designates a trait that might be valuable and thus designates a trait that is not a vice. However, my view is that the trait I've described—that is studied by social scientists and is historically and culturally ubiquitous—is disvaluable in stimulus conditions and, for that reason, a vice.

IV. Conclusion

Envy is widely regarded as a vice—a vicious character trait. In this paper, I develop an account of the trait of envy. I briefly argue that some standard accounts of vices fail to adequately explain the viciousness of envy. I then develop my account of viciousness in terms of the final and/or instrumental disvalue of actions and attitudes of the vice. I argue that this account adequately explains the viciousness of envy.

Statement and Declarations

The author announces no competing interests.

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good. For the same reason as for emulative envy, inert envy does not essentially involve interpersonal comparison in its stimulus conditions.

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