

Happy Self-Surrender and Unhappy Self-Assertion:

A Comparison between Admiration and Emulative Envy

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“Envy is concealed admiration. An admirer who feels that he cannot be happy by surrendering himself elects to become envious of that which he admires. So he speaks another language, and in that language of his the thing which he really admires is called a stupid, insipid, and queer sort of thing. Admiration is happy self-surrender; envy is unhappy self-assertion.”

(Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*)

You did it! You won first prize. You just heard the speaker announce your name. You can't quite believe it. All the sleepless nights, all the work, all the fights with your partner and the yelling at the kids, followed by repentance, making amends, and explaining you are just so very tired, and you will do better next time. You tell yourself it was all worth it. You open your eyes, realizing only now that you closed them for a second, and you look around. Everyone is waiting for you to stand up and go to the podium. You can't help but look in the eyes of the people near you: they were all competing with you, and their hopes have just been dashed by your victory.

What would you expect to see in their gaze? And what would you rather see? Admiration or envy? Most people will say that they would rather be admired than envied, even though we often expect, and fear, to be envied. It's because you fear to be envied that when you give your little speech at the podium you start by collecting good will and thanking all of the people in front of you; it's because you fear to be envied and to avoid sounding boastful that you highlight your lack of desert and your good fortune, even though you actually believe you achieved success through your

hard work. All socially apt adults know this much: even if you sincerely believe you are better than everyone else, you just don't say it out loud.¹

Conversely, imagine that you are one of the people who have not won the prize. What would you rather feel? And what should you show that you are feeling, on the outside? Envy or admiration? The answer here will be, I suspect, universal: admiration. No matter what you actually feel inwardly, consciously or unconsciously, you will clap your hands and put up a congratulatory smile on your face. Again, very few socially apt adults will stomp their feet and make a frowning face, and storm out of the ballroom, no matter how envious they are feeling.

None of the phenomena I described are surprising. Most people think of admiration as a positive emotion, both affectively and morally: it is pleasant to feel; it inspires the admirer; it is void of ill will and thus does not threaten the admired, who does not fear being deprived of their superior status or harmed in any way. Conversely, most people think of envy as a negative emotion, almost a perfect opposite of admiration: it is unpleasant to feel; it depresses the envier; it is malicious and thus scares the envied, who fears the envier's attempts to spoil the good they covet.

And yet, innumerable stores and products contain the word "envy" in their name, and any psychologist working in marketing or advertisement will tell you that many ads are aimed to elicit envy in the viewers. We do, secretly, want others to envy us. And we do, often, envy others. This gap between the story that emerges to the surface and the story buried in our hearts is not merely the chasm between ideal and reality, a chasm we so often confront when philosophizing about ethics. It is also an expression of the complexity of human moral psychology, a symptom of the variety and nuance of social-comparison emotions.

¹ This is a social behavior that we are taught early on in life. For most of us, a certain kind of modesty, whether sincere or not, becomes automatic and intuitive, an internalized norm of etiquette. Some adult individuals flout the norm, either because of a disability or neural atypicality, or because they can afford to do so given their social position and power. However, there are significant cultural variations in what counts as "modesty". While these behaviors can be observed cross-culturally, here I focus on contemporary Western society.

In this essay, I argue that a certain kind of envy is not only morally permissible, but also, sometimes, more fitting and productive than admiration. Envy and admiration are part of our emotional palette, our toolbox of evolutionary adaptations, and they play complementary roles. I start by introducing my original taxonomy of envy, which allows me to introduce emulative envy, a species of envy sometimes confused with admiration. After reviewing how the two emotions differ from a psychological perspective, I focus in particular on the distinct and complementary roles they play in the ethical and political domains.

1. The Varieties of Envy

Philosophers are used to lively ontological debates, but even psychologists seem far from a consensus on the thorny question of what emotions are. In both disciplines, emotions are argued to be feelings, judgments, perceptions, cultural constructs, innate responses, all of the above or even none of the above, given the recent popularity of psychological construction theories, according to which emotions are not discrete natural kinds.²

This ontological debate, however, has no direct bearing on the question I am tackling in this paper, so I will use a relatively neutral definition of emotion as a syndrome of characteristic appraisals, feelings and physiological changes (including facial expressions), motivational tendencies and behavioral outputs. Fear, for instance, can thus be individuated by its appraisal that a certain object is scary (because dangerous or harmful); by affective responses caused by specific bodily changes (e. g. increase in heart rate and blood pressure, accelerated breathing, release of stress hormones); and by the typical urge to flee or fight. Fear, like many emotions that have traditionally been called “basic”, involves a two-place relation: the agent who experiences the emotion and the object that triggers it.

² See Scarantino and de Sousa 2018 for a review.

Envy is more complex, and so there is disagreement on whether it is better characterized as a two or three-place relation. I assume here the view that I defend elsewhere (Protasi 2016, 2017b): that it is a three-place relation, composed of the *envier* (the subject who feels the emotion), the *envied* (the person toward whom the emotion is directed, or target), and the *good* (the object with regard to which the envier is in a disadvantageous position vis-à-vis the envied).³

But what is envy *about*? Envy's *appraisal*, or evaluative content, has to do with perceived superiority or advantage: the envied has something that the envier lacks and that they care about. As a consequence, envy's affect is negative: it is a painful or at least unpleasant emotion to feel. Such a pain is amplified by a further aspect of envy. In cognitivist terms, envy's appraisal involves a perception of similarity: that is, the envied is perceived as similar to the envier along some relevant dimension. (Note that envy's appraisal may not be conscious—in fact, envy itself often isn't (Smith and Kim 2007: 56).) In a noncognitivist account, perceived similarity may be considered a situational antecedent or part of the fittingness conditions.

Envy feels a lot worse than simple wish for something or a general feeling of inferiority to another person: it compounds the two. The insult of feeling inadequate is added to the injury of lacking a valued good, so to speak. In addition, envy is never felt with regard to goods that are considered important, but not connected to the envier's identity. This aspect, too, may or may not be part of envy's appraisal depending on the account of emotions one chooses.

My working definition of envy will thus be: aversive response to a perceived disadvantage vis-à-vis a similar other with regard to a domain of self-relevance, which motivates the agent to overcome their disadvantage *either* by pushing themselves up to the envied person's position *or* by pulling the envied down to theirs.

³ For a fuller explanation and defense of my account of envy, see Protasi (2016). Therein, I also provide extensive references to the empirical literature supporting my descriptive claims.

Such a disjunctive motivational tendency (which we can informally call “leveling up” or “leveling down”) gives rise to a variety of behavioral outputs, which in turn characterize four specific varieties of envy. In order to see how that works, though, we have to take a step back and look more carefully at envy’s appraisal.

Recall my initial scene and adapt it to your professional context. The prize winner is a colleague of yours. They have achieved a significant professional milestone, while you haven’t. This perceived inferiority of yours is painful. But it might be painful in two different ways: it might sting because you really care about that goal. Or it might sting because... it is *that colleague* who has achieved it. That is, you might be primarily concerned with the lack of the good, or you might be primarily concerned with the superiority of the envied.

If the former applies, you will be disposed to pursue the good further, because that is what you really want, what you value for its own sake, and the envied’s success is only a reminder of your (perceived) failure. But if the latter applies, and what really bothers you is the envied’s superior performance, then achieving the goal is a means to beating your rival and is thus valued only instrumentally. You will therefore be disposed to do everything it takes to bring the envied down.

Thus, **focus of concern**, the first variable of envy, determines whether the envier is motivated to level up or level down: to overcome their disadvantage either by pushing oneself to the envied’s level or by pulling the envied down to their level. What that means, in concrete action terms, varies depending on another variable: **obtainability of the good**. (For simplicity, I will speak as if the variables are dichotomous, even though they are continuous. Since they do not correlate, they give rise to four kinds of envy.)

The good might be perceived as obtainable or not, depending on many circumstantial factors. In the case of a professional achievement, this might be an exclusive or particular good, such as receiving an honorific title that cannot be shared. In that case, it is not possible for the

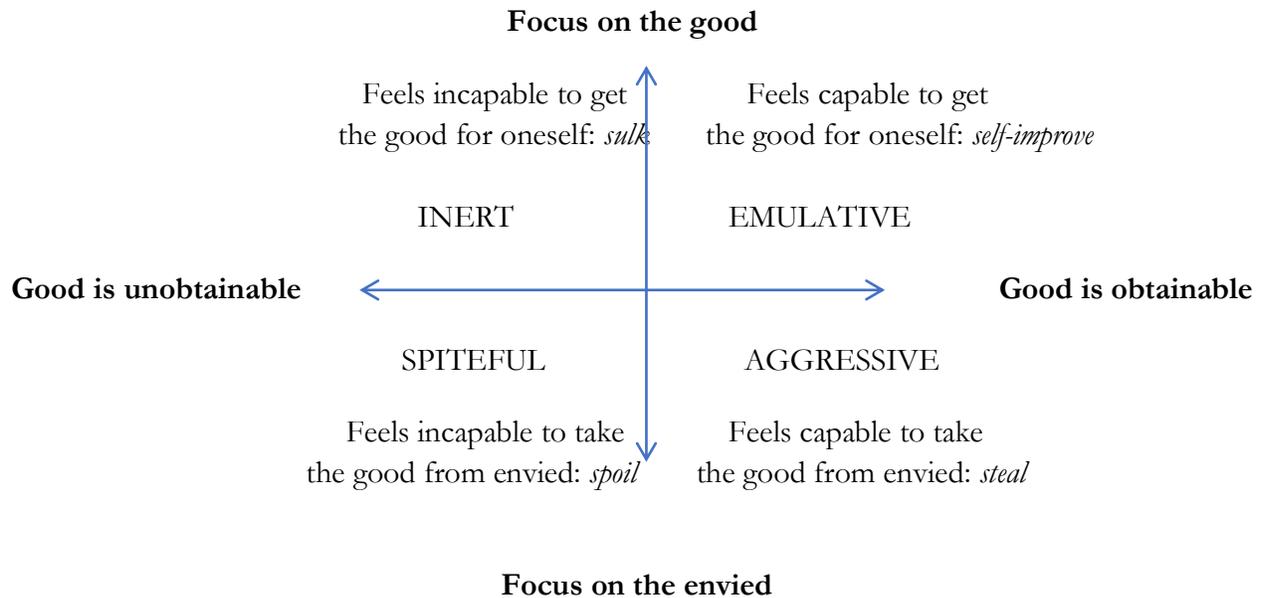
envier to achieve the good: the envied already got it! Thus, leveling up is impossible, notwithstanding the envier's disposition. But sometimes goods are nonexclusive or shareable: imagine the professional achievement in question being promotion to a higher rank. In that case, it is possible for the envier to achieve their own goal (assuming they perceive themselves as being capable of it—if they don't, then the outcome is the same as before).

When enviers are concerned with the lack of the good and perceive themselves as capable of obtaining it, then they are disposed to *self-improve* and *strive* to level up with the envied. I call the emotion they feel **emulative envy**. When enviers are concerned with the good, but do not perceive themselves as capable of obtaining it, then their self-improvement disposition is frustrated and they end up being *sullen* and *sulky*. The resulting emotion is **inert envy**, which is self-defeating by definition.

When enviers are concerned with the superiority of the envied and perceive themselves as capable of bringing the envied down, then they are disposed to *steal* the good. Gaining the good thanks to one's own improvement does not matter to the envier; however, to obtain it for oneself is a nice bonus, the best possible way of bringing the envied's down. I call this emotion **aggressive envy**. But stealing the good is not always perceived as possible, in which case the envier is disposed to *spoil* the good, as the saying goes (“envy spoils the good it covets”). This last type of envy is **spiteful envy**. Note that spiteful envy is not self-defeating: even if the good is lost, the envied has been brought down, per the envier's goal.⁴

The figure below summarizes my taxonomy:

⁴ Anthropological research (Foster (1972) and Lindholm (2008)) shows that the fear of enviers stealing or spoiling the good is a common element of the stigma attached to envy cross-culturally.



Emulative envy and admiration are close emotions, which are often confused with one another. In the remainder of the paper, I am going to set aside the other subspecies of envy, in order to show how sometimes emulative envy is a more appropriate and productive emotional response than admiration, *contra* what popular wisdom and traditional morality would argue.⁵

2. Admiration and Emulative Envy

Let me introduce you to Emma, our exemplary Emulative Envier. She is a hip-hop dancer, who wants to become a star; she trains in the same studio as a strong-willed and talented girl named Beyoncé.

Emma is a very good dancer, but Beyoncé is excellent, and regularly outperforms her in competitions. Emma feels a painful emotion toward Beyoncé when she sees her on stage: she is aware of her own inferiority and would like to become like Beyoncé. They have trained in the same

⁵ There are, however, fierce critics of admiration as well. See Jan-Willem van de Rijt's contribution to this volume: "Admiration and Self-Respect".

studio since they were children, so Emma thinks that becoming as good as Beyoncé is within the realm of possibility. She keeps training hard and keeps hoping that one day she will achieve her goal.

Emma feels an aversive response to a perceived disadvantage vis-à-vis a similar other with regard to a domain of self-relevance, which motivates her to overcome her disadvantage by pushing herself up to the envied person's position. It is not an immoral response: it does not involve any ill will toward the envied. Emma never wishes that Beyoncé lose her talent. Watching her dance fills her with excitement and longing, the way a child looks at a lollipop behind a store window. She does not want to spoil the envied's talent, nor she desires to steal it: she cares about becoming an excellent dancer through hard work, by her own means.

Emma's response is not a self-defeating or imprudent response either: it does not make her sulk in despair, nor berate her unlucky fate. Thus, her envy is neither morally nor prudentially bad: it is not harmful to the envier or the envied. While painful to experience, it is a productive kind of pain, which motivates to self-improvement.

But is Emma's emotional response really an envious one? How does it differ from admiration? The question arises naturally and legitimately. After all, emulative envy and admiration have much in common. Both emotions are complex, value-laden responses to upward social comparison: both the admired and the envied are perceived as superior to the self. The agent "looks up" to the target in both cases. However, the admiring gaze is only superficially similar the envious one. The two emotions differ in affect, appraisal, antecedent and affiliation tendency.

Starting with the most obvious difference: emulative envy is painful, admiration is pleasant (or "happy" versus "unhappy," in Kierkegaard's words). That is because emulative envy is focused both on the self *and* the other, while admiration is mostly (but perhaps not exclusively) focused on the other. Such a shift in appraisal correlates with a shift in the situational antecedent: emulative envy arises when comparison is toward someone who is similar in status or ability, and with regard

to a self-important domain. Admiration typically arise toward people who are perceived as much superior to the agent and its “stimulus events [...] are not directly relevant to the individual’s current goal pursuits” (Schindler et al. 2013: 90). Finally, and relatedly, admiration motivates to affiliate with the target, whereas emulative envy does not.

However, when it comes to action tendency and what these emotions motivate the agent to do, the evidence is mixed and still quantitatively limited. Earlier studies (van de Ven et al. 2011) showed that *benign envy*, as is generally called in psychology,⁶ outperforms admiration in the effectiveness to motivate the agent to self-improve. Admiration was not shown to motivate agents to emulate the admired. But these results were contradicted by subsequent research by Ines Schindler and her collaborators (Schindler et al. 2013, 2015), which showed that admiration is in fact linked to the tendency to emulate the admired other. The emerging consensus is that admiration and benign envy serve two different functions and that they motivated different kinds of emulative behaviors (Schindler et al. 2015, van de Ven 2015).

Envy is a negative affective state that motivates to act immediately; it narrows the agent’s cognitive processing and pushes one to pursue the coveted object right away (Harmon-Jones et al. 2012).⁷ But there is another kind of emulation, the development of a commitment to abstract ideals, akin to being inspired. That is what “an emotion with lower motivational intensity that broadens cognitive processing” does (Schindler et al. 2015, Harmon-Jones et al. 2012).

⁶ Most psychological taxonomies distinguish only between malicious and benign envy, as defined by the motivational tendency to level down or up. The main explanatory factor for this difference is taken to be perception of control over the situation. I think this taxonomy neglects significant nuances, and I defend my own account in comparison to the psychological one in Protasi (2016). However, emulative envy does coincide with benign envy in many of the aspects studied by psychology, and especially with regard to the comparison between envy and admiration, so I will use psychological findings about benign envy as applicable to emulative envy as well.

⁷ These empirical findings nicely dovetail with envy’s iconography and cultural tropes of the envious gaze as one that comes through squinted eyes, which well-represents the envier’s focus on the lacked good.

To summarize, admiration is a pleasant emotional response to the perceived excellence of an object (often but not necessarily a person), whose primary function *may* be to “enhance one’s own agency in upholding ideals” (Schindler et al. 2013: 86).

Emulative envy, *qua* envy, is an unpleasant emotional response to the perceived superiority or advantage of a similar other in a self-important domain, which *may* be the most adaptive and less harmful response to being outperformed in evolutionarily important domains of resource competition (Hill and Buss 2008).

Kierkegaard’s pithy slogan of admiration as “happy self-surrender” and envy as “unhappy self-assertion” seems about right. Recall Emma and her envied target, Beyoncé. They both admire Misty Copeland, whom they perceive as a much more talented dancer than both of them. (This is all, of course, purely fictional.)

Setting aside their competitiveness, the two girls often get together to watch videos of the famous ballerina, and they lose themselves in the performance, emitting sighs of love and shrieks of pleasure as Misty pirouettes on stage. Watching Misty dance renovates, in both, the commitment to show up to the dance studio every day and to engage in outreach activities with younger girls of color in their local community, and it makes them dream of future success and fame. But when Emma looks at Beyoncé “pop and lock”, she is focused on imitating her sharp arm movements, here and now.

That these emotions are so similar may suggest that they have evolved from some sort of common affective ancestor.⁸ Nevertheless, as I define them here, they are cultural constructs that are typical of certain contemporary Western societies, like the current United States. We may not find them in ancient honor cultures, such as the Homeric one, where malicious forms of envy prevail,

⁸ Heidi Maibom (2012) hypothesizes that human shame and animal expressions of submission evolved from “protoshame”, an emotion felt by the ancestor primates and human beings share. Perhaps something similar could be argued for the varieties of emotions that stem from social comparison.

and we may not find them in contemporary collectivist cultures (such as China, Korea and Japan), where an interconnected sense of self prevails over an individualistic one (Henrich et al. 2010).

3. The Moral Value of Admiration and Emulative Envy

Emma has grown up and set aside her artistic ambitions. She is now a philosophy professor and admires both Beyoncé and Misty Copeland from afar. As it turns out, she is your departmental colleague, and she envies you for that prize you won. Does that make her a bad person? Is her envy morally impermissible or inappropriate? And, more pressingly for the topic of this essay, shouldn't she admire you instead?⁹

If ought implies can, we cannot hold Emma to ethical standards that are psychologically too demanding. We have limited control over our emotions. As discussed above, admiration and emulative envy typically arise in different circumstances. Emma's professional status and her philosophical talents are similar to yours: she perceives you as similar to herself. Furthermore, she shares your goals and self-identity: like you, she cares a lot about being a good philosopher. Envy, not admiration, is the natural response in this case. Furthermore, it is also a *fitting* response: you did deserve your prize. Your work is, indeed, superior to Emma's at the moment. And Emma is right in thinking that she could improve and achieve what you have achieved.

That an emotion is a typical and fitting response to circumstances does not in itself make it morally appropriate. But emulative envy is not morally bad either, because it is fully void of ill will and malice. It does not involve either the desire or the effect of harming the envied.

It is possible that, upon discovering that Emma envies you, you might feel uneasy, especially if you are not sure what kind of envy Emma feels. However, many behaviors that are not morally

⁹ To reiterate, this essay is narrowly focused on a comparison between emulative envy and admiration, rather than a comprehensive analysis of the moral value of either emotion. For an argument that admiration plays a pivotal role in morality, see Zagzebski (2017). For some well-founded critiques of Zagzebski's views, see Irwin (2015) and van der Rijt (2017).

impermissible have the potential of creating uneasy feelings in others (think of surgeons: they may induce fears in their patients, even if they benefit them). Thus, making someone feel uneasy is not, in itself, harmful and therefore is not morally impermissible.

One might argue that admirers are more disinterested and altruistic: they are focused on the admired, after, all, not on themselves. However, this rosy picture is not supported by empirical evidence, which shows that admirers do expect some advantage from the admired other (Schindler et al. 2013). In fact, emulative envy might be *more* disinterested than admiration, given its lack of desire to affiliate with the envied. Emma is focused on becoming like you, not on getting any favor from you.

What about Emma's character? Is her disposition to envy her colleagues morally bad? Shouldn't she habituate herself to feel admiration more frequently? Wouldn't that promote more harmonious relationships in your department?

Moving from single occurrences and actions to dispositions can help us see how admiration and emulative envy are complementary emotions that play different roles in our moral psychology. As we know, Emma is capable of feeling admiration. In fact, she did feel deep admiration for you when she was hired a few years ago. But, as time went by, she came to see you as a peer. She has grown intellectually, also thanks to your mentorship. That Emma now envies you is something you should respect and appreciate: she sees you as an equal. There does not seem any reason, then, to think that Emma is a bad person, provided she habituates herself to feel emulative envy, as opposed to the other varieties, and provided that she feels admiration when appropriate.

Might admiration, however, be more appropriate *prudentially*, that is, more conducive to the well-being of the agent? We have already seen that both emotions motivate to self-improvement, if in different ways and times, but admiration is more pleasant. This seems a strike in favor of admiration.

However, the importance of feeling pain can hardly be overstated. Negative affect is crucial to human survival. Without fear of predators, disgust for contamination and pollution, sadness for loss, and sheer physical pain for hunger, thirst, or wounds, we would not be here. Envy's pain can be a productive one, as is the case for emulative envy.

If Emma didn't feel envy for you, but only admiration, she would still go to work, teach her courses and write her articles, but she would be less motivated on a day-to-day basis to try to achieve more and to fulfill her potential.

Furthermore, as highlighted above, that Emma feels envy for you is a sign that she perceives herself as a more talented philosopher and that she believes she can become as good as you are; provided that her self-assessment is correct, it seems good, other things equal, to be on terms of equality with others.

One might worry that such a claim, however convincing anecdotally, is not sufficiently supported by empirical evidence, given the consistent correlations between envy and poor mental and physical health (Smith and Kim 2007: 58-60). But *what kind of envy* is investigated in the studies that provide such evidence? Most of these studies do not distinguish between different kinds of envy. Those which do make this distinction provide evidence supporting the claim that emulative envy is not bad for the envier.

Furthermore, the study that is most often cited for the correlation between envy and poor health outcomes (Smith et al. 1999). only focuses on *dispositional envy*. But, as Kenneth Tai and collaborators observe, the Dispositional Envy Scale is construed so as to investigate the most negative aspects of envy, and thus it is unsurprising that it ends up tracking only negative outcomes associated with envy (Tai et al. 2012: 108).

In sum, I suggest that admiration and envy complement each other, prudentially speaking: one provides the big picture, the long-term goals, and the other sets up a schedule, the short-term steps to achieve those goals.

4. The Political Value of Admiration and Evaluative Envy

One way to think about the difference between ethics and politics is to think of the former as the realm of private interactions, between agents *qua* individuals, and of the latter as the realm of public interactions, between agents *qua* members of a polity.

What happens once we start thinking of multiple Emmas, and conceive of her not as a moral agent but as a citizen of a state? Indeed, envy has been widely discussed in political philosophy, but almost always with regard to its negative varieties, and almost always in the context of redistributive justice (e.g. Rawls 1971, Nozick 1974, Neu 1980, Ben-Ze'ev 1992, La Caze 2001, Kristjánsson 2005, Morgan-Knapp 2014, Bankovsky 2016). Here, I am rather interested in a comparative analysis of admiration and emulative envy in motivating citizen behavior. Particularly, I will focus on two kinds of relations: a “vertical” one between a political leader and their followers, and a “horizontal” one between members of different racial groups.

Once again, admiration and envy seem to play complementary roles. Admiration, being affiliative but hierarchical, seems more apt in the context of vertical interactions, while emulative envy, being adversarial but equalizing, is more appropriate to the horizontal ones.

Being capable of arousing admiration is an indispensable quality of political leaders, and successful politicians are indeed admired, or even adored, by their followers.¹⁰

Of course, admiration for a leader who is undeserving of it, because of lack of competence or immorality, for instance, can be detrimental and even very dangerous, as history has proven time

¹⁰ For the difference between admiration and adoration see Schindler et al. 2013.

and again; in this respect, admiration's power is also its weakness. Because it provides the ideals and long-term goals, it can set up not just an individual, but an entire society, to failure and even, in the most tragic cases, horrific events like genocide. Admiration is not unique in this respect: trust, respect, compassion, and love, which have all been defended as important political attitudes, have the same problem, that is, they can be directed at an undeserving target and inspire to commit moral atrocities. (Thus, I do not take this to be an effective objection against admiration specifically.)

But, when a leader is worthy, admiration for them can lead to momentous positive change: Malala Yousafzai inspired young women in Pakistan and all over the world to courageously pursue their education notwithstanding political oppression or other adverse conditions. Most political movements are thus associated with one or more admired leader. If I say decolonization of India, you think Mahatma Gandhi; if I say American Civic Rights, you think Martin Luther King Jr., and so forth.

This association might be slightly less common in the internet era. Consider Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter, two US political movements of the early 2000s. Even though they were, in practice, organized and led by a handful of individuals, neither is obviously associated with a popular leader. However, admiration still play a role in building these movements. For instance, the photo of a Black woman, Ieshia Evans, standing in front of the police in a protest in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, went viral in July 2016; many people felt deep admiration for her courage. Her graceful yet firm stance became iconic. Figures like this, and the admiration felt for them, are pivotal in creating political and social movements.

Envy, even of the emulative kind, cannot play this role. It does not bring people together; it does not arise in the presence of someone whom we perceive as much more capable than ourselves. Someone who feels emulative envy for a Barack Obama or a Benazir Bhutto ought to be part of

their entourage. And such an envier will not be drawn to be their follower: quite the contrary, they will aim to surpass them in talent or status. They will aim to become like them.

However, relationships in a polity are not exhausted by the one between a leader and their followers. Contemporary democratic and pluralistic societies are comprised of groups, which can be extremely different from one another, and among which hostility, mistrust or resentment often surface.¹¹ It is hard to believe that in Aristotle's times *philia*, a form of love and friendship, was expected to be felt toward one's fellow citizens! But it becomes more plausible once we realize that only a relatively homogenous group of people composed the citizenry of IV century Athens: free male adult individuals. It is much harder to get along in more diverse societies.

Furthermore, diversity of values, goals, and background is made particularly problematic in a context of limited resources: citizens often strive to access goods, including essential ones, that are available to some but not others, and the competition is often unfair. Hence, the "war among the poor" kind of phenomenon: groups that would benefit from being allies tend to be hostile against one another.

In this kind of situation, envy is a double-edge sword: in its aggressive and spiteful varieties, it can be as dangerous as warned by its many detractors, tearing apart the delicate tissues of civic society. Emulative envy, however, is not malicious and is not counterproductive, and it may be an apt response to a situation of perceived disadvantage.

Consider the case of policies aimed to increase racial diversity at university level as a case study. The reaction of some social groups, such as lower-SES Whites and highly-educated Asian-Americans, toward groups perceived as advantaged by these policies, such as African-Americans, can be construed either as resentful *and* envious, or envious only. (I assume here the fairly common

¹¹ When I talk about *groups* feeling emotions, that is a shorthand for individuals of a certain group who feel emotions for individuals of other groups *qua* members of those groups.

characterization of resentment as a moral emotion that necessarily involves perception of injustice, and of envy as an amoral emotion that requires no such perception. See Ben-Ze'ev 2002 and Miceli and Castelfranchi 2007, and *contra* La Caze 2001.)

Consider first a resentful and envious response.¹² Since resentment involves a perception of wrongdoing, it involves hostility toward a culprit or cause of the wrongdoing. This might be the response of a student who does not benefit from a diversity policy and who believes the policy to be unfair. Given that one does not have control over one's race, and that the perception of unfairness is likely to make the envied's success more bothersome than the lack of the good (e.g., access to a prestigious university), the student will likely feel spiteful envy.¹³ In this scenario, *neither admiration nor emulative envy can arise*. When the parties involved are convinced that a certain situation is unjust, and thus resentment is called for, a resolution is very hard to achieve. We often witness a stalemate in which agreeing on the facts, in this case historical causes of present inequality and effective means to eliminate it, is prevented by entrenched hostility and lack of empathy. I do not believe that either envy nor admiration can play a central role here. It is no coincidence that anger, resentment and forgiveness are such popular topics in contemporary discussion of political emotions!

But there are contexts in which resentment is low or not salient. In those contexts, one could suggest lower-SES Whites or highly-educated Asian-Americans that they emulate the political battles of their Black counterparts, while suspending judgment on whether those gains are deserved or undeserved. In fact, this could be a strategy meant to actively decrease resentment! Emulative envy only requires perceiving the envied as capable and successful; the envied's success is indicative of the possibility of one's own (because the envier is sufficiently similar to the envied) and thus the

¹² I'm thankful to Jan-Willem van der Rijt for helpful criticisms of this section.

¹³ Such an envy might be excusable (Rawls 1971). Miriam Bankovsky argues for the stronger thesis that in conditions of deep injustice, (what I call) spiteful envy might be rational and prudentially appropriate (Bankovsky 2018).

envier is set to emulate them. While changing race is not possible,¹⁴ advocating for extending diversity policies to other underrepresented groups: lower-SES Whites can argue that socio-economic status is a source of discrimination comparable to race; Asian-Americans can point out that, while not subject to the same kind of discrimination faced by African-Americans, they suffer other kinds of disadvantage: for instance, Asian-American students are underrepresented in philosophy departments.

Here, admiration could actually play a supporting role, by fostering respect between groups. For instance, admiration for accomplished women may undermine sexism; admiration for great artists such as Toni Morrison or Miles Davis may help undermine White supremacy; admiration for esteemed conservative figures such as John McCain might increase Democrats' respect for Republicans; and so forth.¹⁵ Thus, admiration may make groups *like* each other more, decrease hostility and allow emulative envy to motivate productive behavior.

It is important to highlight again that envy is susceptible to the agent's subjective assessment of the circumstances: we can shift our perspective and make salient factors that favor perception of autonomy and control in our lives. We do see such a shift in perspective in the calls, for instance, for African Americans to refuse victimization and to see themselves as powerful and agentic. Consider the #Blackgirlpower and the #Blackexcellence memes on social media.¹⁶

One may object, at this point, that emulative envy is too adversarial an emotion, a far cry from the ideal of political *philia*, the civic friendship invoked by philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum under the auspices of revered figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi (Nussbaum

¹⁴ I am setting aside cases of “passing” or even permanent race change, assuming they are possible, since they are not available to most people anyway.

¹⁵ I thank André Grahle for this suggestion.

¹⁶ See: <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/blackgirlpower/>; <https://twitter.com/hashtag/blackexcellence?lang=en>. Note the difference with so-called respectability politics: making one's power and excellence salient need not imply that systemic disadvantage is unreal, nor that individual agency is full and complete, nor that talking in terms of victims and perpetrators is never appropriate or effective.

2015). I have argued elsewhere that Nussbaum's model does not take sufficiently into account empirical findings (Protasi forthcoming), and I have defended the view that love and envy are two sides of the same coin, rather than radical opposites (Protasi 2017). At the same time, the increased acrimony and dividedness that we are witnessing in the US and European political scene, the hostility between different social groups that is seemingly ripping countries apart, does give me some pause. While neither civic friendship or admiration seem available in such cases, it seems that we might need to find ways of reestablishing basic sympathetic responses to each other. After all, even envy is not possible when we cease to see others as fundamentally akin to us. And dehumanization is a constant threat in our history, and, possibly, our present (Livingstone Smith 2011, and under contract).

In a short essay such as this, I can only gesture toward how to start thinking of very complex issues. My aim here was only to suggest that admiration and emulative envy can both be political emotions and play a positive role in civic society: neither is uniquely productive, nor detrimental, quite like in the private domain.

5. Conclusion

In this essay, I have presented my original taxonomy of envy, which helps differentiate emulative envy from admiration. I have argued that these emotions play complementary roles in both the moral and political domain: in our private interactions, admiration helps us elaborate and achieve our long-term goals, while emulative envy aids us in setting up intermediate steps; in our public interactions, admiration is often targeted at our leaders and helps build community of like-minded citizens, while emulative envy may motivate fair competition between social groups.

I have long advocated for the rehabilitation of envy, and there is a general trend of re-evaluating negative affect emotions in both psychology and philosophy: we should not fear the dark

side of human nature, for there is no light without shadow. We should not recoil from pain, for it is as crucial to our flourishing as pleasure. As Michelle Mason aptly puts it, “an enlightened morality need not be a gentle morality” (Mason 2003: 271). But it need not be a harsh one, either. Practical wisdom sometimes requires happy self-surrender, sometimes unhappy self-assertion, and sometimes something else altogether.

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