

Envy, self-esteem, and distributive justice

European Journal of Political Theory

1–20

© The Author(s) 2022



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/14748851221125572

journals.sagepub.com/home/ept**Vegard Stensen** 

UiT the Arctic University of Norway, Norway

Abstract

Most agree that envy, or at least the malicious kind(s), should not have any role in the moral justification of distributive arrangements. This paper defends a contrary position. It argues that at the very least John Rawls, Axel Honneth and others that care about the social bases of self-esteem have good reasons to care about the levels of envy that different distributive principles reliably generate. The basic argument is that (1) envy involves a particular kind of harm to self-esteem such that excluding envy-avoidance from the more general commitment to protect self-esteem requires a justification. (2) There are no strong reasons for this exclusion. I discuss three objections to the second premise: that envy is irrational, that it is unfair to prevent and compensate for it, and that envy-avoidance is unreasonable due to the vicious or antisocial nature of envy. The response is that envy can be rational with respect to opportunities for attaining social esteem; that it is not unfair to prevent or compensate for envy that is reasonably unavoidable and relatively burdensome; and the kind of envy-avoidance I defend does not appear unreasonable if distinguished from a form of preference-satisfaction.

Keywords

Envy, self-esteem, Rawls, Honneth, recognition

Introduction

This paper defends the relevance of envy to questions of distributive social justice. Most agree that envy—or in any case the malicious kind(s) that is the chief focus in the literature on distributive justice—should not have any role in grounding principles of distribution. Almost all egalitarians reject the charge sometimes leveled by non-egalitarians that

Corresponding author:

Vegard Stensen, Department of Philosophy, UiT The Arctic university of Norway, Tromsø 9037, Norway.

Email: Vst027@uit.no

their egalitarian ideals are based on envy (e.g. Walsh, 1992). “Many egalitarians would no doubt recoil in horror at the thought of defending a theory which postulates that envy-avoidance is a legitimate moral concern” (Tomlin, 2008: 113). In other words, that egalitarian ideals minimize envy (if they do) is not at all a legitimate reason for thinking that they are valid.

This strong view of envy’s place in a theory of distributive justice is motivated by the fact that envy is an irrational vice. It infamously involves “... the propensity to view with hostility the greater good of others even though their being more fortunate than we are does not detract from our advantages” (Rawls, 1999: 466) regardless of whether the envious person believes the inequality is just or not. As such, it does not seem to reflect any interest that is morally relevant in determining justice (Norman, 2002; Rawls, 1999: 464–468; Walsh, 1992).

There have been several attempts to provide a corrective to this dominant position (e.g. Bankovsky, 2012, 2018; Frye, 2016; Tomlin, 2008). Each of these is indebted to Rawls’ account of envy and particularly his remarks about “excusable envy” (Rawls, 1999: 464–468), though they differ widely in how they interpret and develop this idea. Very briefly, Rawls’ official position is that while he thinks envy has no place in the moral justification of principles, he concedes that envy can sometimes be so resistant that we cannot reasonably ask people to overcome it. In such cases, envy is “excusable.” Rawls goes on to discuss whether his theory is unstable because it generates too much excusable envy—in which case the principles must be reconsidered. He concludes that it is not, and that his conception, therefore, is not based on envy.

Harrison Frye (2016) provides a partial critique of this position where he agrees that envy has no place in the moral justification of *ideal* principles, that is roughly the principles that apply under ideal circumstances where we can expect compliance with the demands of justice and the material conditions for realizing justice are satisfied. However, he believes envious sentiments may be useful under some unjust (i.e. non-ideal) circumstances in bringing about a more just state of affairs. It can trigger moral reflection and provide extra motivation to fight against unjust inequality. Miriam Bankovsky also applies Rawls’ notion of excusable envy to make an argument about envy under non-ideal circumstances (2018). Her basic contention is that envy can be both fitting and prudent under certain unjust circumstances, and that we have a moral-political commitment to avoid such instances.

However, to wit, there is not a developed argument that envy-avoidance is a legitimate moral concern that provides us with moral grounds for preferring *ideal* principles and policies that minimize occurrences of envious feelings.¹ Patrick Tomlin (2008), to whom I owe the term “envy-avoidance,” comes closest when he provides an internal critique of Rawls and argues that a consistent Rawlsian is committed to considering all degrees of excusable envy as morally relevant.² Nonetheless, Tomlin does not go so far as to endorse envy-avoidance as a legitimate moral concern because, he reasons, envy is still a vice.

This paper goes further by providing a more general defense of the moral relevance of envious sentiments to distributive justice. The basic thesis is that, at the very least, all who defend some version of the idea that the distribution of social goods ought to secure the

social bases of self-esteem have good reasons to care about envy-avoidance too. The basic argument, which I shall develop and qualify, is (1) that envy involves a particular kind of harm to self-esteem such that excluding envy-avoidance from the more general commitment to protect self-esteem requires a justification. (2) There are no strong reasons for this exclusion. (3) Therefore, at the very least Rawls and others that care about the social bases of self-esteem have reasons to care about the levels of envy that different distributive principles reliably generate.

The paper is organized as follows. First, in the envy, self-esteem, and resentment section, I briefly explain what envy and other key terms will mean in this text. Next, in the basic argument section, I expand on the first premise and the basic thesis. Following that, I discuss three objections to the second premise: that envy is irrational, that envy-avoidance is unfair because individuals are personally responsible for being envious, and that envy-avoidance is unreasonable due to the vicious and/or antisocial nature of envy (the imprudence objection, why should the envious care about undeserved social esteem?, the fairness objection(s), and the vice objection sections). The concluding remarks section concludes with some remarks about the implications of my argument.

Envy, self-esteem, and resentment

My definition of envy is largely based on Morgan Knapp's (2014) and conforms to the standard Rawlsian view of "envy proper" (Rawls, 1999: 467) that operates in the debate surrounding the envy charge to egalitarianism. Here envy has four basic features. (A) The envious person believes that a rival has some good that she lacks or more of it. (B) The envier is troubled, pained, by the difference *per se*. This relates to the envier's hostility toward the rival and her willingness to impose a loss on the envied even at some cost to herself, as long as the relative difference becomes smaller (Knapp, 2014: 114; Rawls, 1999: 464).

(C) The envious experiences a sense of inferiority *vis-à-vis* the rival. She feels that the difference reflects poorly on her worth. Her self-esteem suffers because of it. "Self-esteem" will here mean roughly the same as in Rawls:

...it includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions. (Rawls, 1999: 386)

However, *pace* Rawls, I shall let it be an open question whether wounded self-esteem is just a main cause (1999: 469) of envy or also one of its constitutive components (Knapp, 2014; Protasi, 2016; Salice and Sánchez, 2019).

(D) The envious believes the difference is undeserved in one way or another. However, I shall operate with a distinction between envy and resentment.³ This is to ensure that my case targets the kind of envy that egalitarians are most concerned to exclude in the construction of their ideals. Now, resentment is here the feeling that you are being treated unjustly. Following Rawls, resentment is a moral feeling because

we account for it with a moral notion (1999: 420–424). If you steal from me, I will feel resentment toward you. When asked why I feel this way, I will invoke the moral notion that theft is wrong. In contrast, if I did not think that you stealing from me is morally wrong, I might still be angry and frustrated, etc. but I would not feel resentment. Envy, in contrast, contains no such reference to a moral concept. I might still feel that the difference in question is undeserved, for example because I believe it is a result of bad luck on my part. This does not commit me to think that it is unjust.

That said, envy and resentment can go together, and this can be a source of confusion. For example, I can envy people for their greater wealth while also holding that inequality is unjust I believe Frye gives an adequate explanation of what separates the two feelings in such situations:

Anger against unjust inequality potentially has two targets: the injustice or the inequality. Resentment takes its target as the *injustice* of the inequality, whereas envy takes its target as the inequality simpliciter [...] Some react to the injustice, whereas some react to the inequality. Perhaps others react to both. (Frye, 2016: 519 emphasis in original)

As a final point, I must mention that my focus is on envious feelings directed toward the social goods and social positions that are the concern of distributive justice. They must concern with the subject of distributive principles and policies. Such sentiments may nonetheless *include* envy of things like talent, say because talent is important to attain some scarce social good.

The basic argument

The basic thesis that I shall defend in this paper is that, at the very least, all who are committed to some version of the idea that protecting the social bases of self-esteem is a legitimate aim of distributive justice, have good reasons to care about envy-avoidance too. By “distributive justice,” I mean the basic principles and ideals that the distribution of social goods ought to satisfy and how they should be implemented through specific laws, policies, and arrangements. By saying that envy-avoidance is a valid ground for such ideals and policies—and indeed is one ideal of a distributive scheme—I mean that we have a moral pro tanto reason to favor those principles and policies that reliably lead to the least amount of envy. I also mean that there is a case for compensating the envious for their feelings ex-post There are certain qualifications, however (Two prudence requirements—social esteem and impotence, and the fairness objection(s) sections).

How important is envy-avoidance? I shall not take a very specific stance on this issue. My aim is primarily to show that one significant desideratum that the distribution of social goods should satisfy to be just is envy-avoidance.⁴ The argument in this paper is also open regarding which specific social goods are, ultimately, the subject of distributive principles. That is, it is silent about whether our focus should be on primary goods (Rawls), capabilities, opportunities, resources, etc.

Why is envy-avoidance an aim of distributive justice? This paper connects envy-avoidance to the idea that we should protect the social conditions important to self-

esteem. Esteem is a form of recognition that pertains to prestige and social status. In contrast to some forms of respect, it is not about the equal moral concern we are entitled to in virtue of being persons with some invariant equal moral value, but those things that make us different from each other (Honneth, 1995: 5, 2002; Laitinen, 2002). Esteem is conditional and differential in the sense that it depends on a gradable evaluation of the traits, activities, and performance of the recognized. We respect people as rights-bearing persons or citizens, but esteem them as philosophers, police officers, etc. and for how they perform their particular social roles. There seems to be some consensus that the diminished sense of self-worth involved in envy pertains to the esteem in this sense rather than respect. Alessandro Salice and Alba Montes Sánchez, for example, state that “The absence of recognition in the sense of respect—think about marginalized groups, such as African illegal immigrants or asylum seekers in Europe, or the homeless—typically produces feelings of humiliation rather than envy” (2019: 236).

Very briefly and a bit roughly, self-esteem is judged valuable from the perspective of justice chiefly because of its importance to motivation. Rawls, for example, writes that “Without [self-esteem]⁵ nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them. All desire and activity becomes empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism” (1999: 386). Similarly, Axel Honneth and Joel Anderson remark that “... to the extent to which one lacks a sense that what one does is meaningful and significant, it becomes hard to pursue it wholeheartedly” (2005: 137). These quotes both point to a problem of motivation in one way or another.⁶ Lacking self-esteem, we struggle to see the value of our pursuits, or we doubt our ability to attain them.

Envy also involves harm to self-esteem in the sense that the envious is pained by the difference between herself and the rival because it makes her feel inferior. It involves a curious combination of shame (the discrepancy reflects poorly on your worth) and affront (the discrepancy is undeserved) (Knapp, 2014), though it is often rationalized as something else (Protasi, 2016). I shall not analyze the precise differences and connections between envy, demoralization, and self-doubt, however. The important point is that envy can surely have the same debilitating effects on our psyche as these other harms. Envy is unpleasant and, closely related, it can get in the way of pursuing our important interests similar to how demoralization and self-doubt interfere with our motivation. The envious, to the extent that she is envious, struggles to motivate herself to pursuits unrelated to the interest in reducing the rival’s advantage, which in turn is normally incompatible with the pursuit of her important interests. This much, I think, is evident in the literature on envy and self-esteem cited throughout this text. Thus, if we concede that demoralization and a lack of self-efficacy are harmful distributive policies should, albeit within certain limits, protect us from, then, on the face of it, so is the particular sense of inferiority involved in envy.

This takes us to the idea of the social bases of self-esteem. Self-esteem relies on social conditions, of which the most important is arguably recognition from others. It can be undermined by misrecognition in the form of disesteem or lack of esteem, which can lead to harms to self-esteem just noted. In short, “a socio-cultural environment that is hostile to considering what one does meaningful is *demoralizing*”

(Anderson and Honneth, 2005: 137 emphasis in original). Even if it is possible to maintain one's self-esteem in the face of adversity such as stigma, the extra effort required can be an unjust burden (Anderson and Honneth, 2005: 10). This leads to moral-political duties to protect the social bases of self-esteem, albeit within certain limits. Esteem cannot be distributed directly, nor demanded—esteem on demand cannot be genuine (Taylor, 1994: 70). Because esteem is conditional it is largely a matter of personal responsibility. There is, however, a shared basic idea that a just society secures all individuals *reasonable opportunities* to attain and maintain a healthy level of self-esteem.

How do we do that? To generalize some influential suggestions⁷, the state should (1) support “pockets of esteem” (Laitinen, 2015: 74–75) tailored to the interests and aims of its members where they can get recognition for “what [they] do in everyday life” (Rawls, 1999: 387). Such pockets range from sports associations to work environments. (2) The state should combat unwarranted stigma, stereotypes, and invisibility (the absence of recognition) of valuable activities such as traditional household work and child-rearing (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 135–160; Zurn, 2015: 39–43, 70–74). This gives a reason for such measures as guaranteeing that everyone has the goods required to “appear in public without shame,” for example with a clean shirt and so on (Laitinen, 2015: 66–68). (3) There is a collective duty to prevent what Laitinen calls “general rank-formation” of activities and ways of life that might make it hard for those at the lower end to view their pursuits as meaningful (2015: 74). Similarly, Rawls insists that when we engage each other outside of our respective associations of “non-comparing groups,” we meet as citizens with equal status *qua* citizens (1999: 470). The implications of envy-avoidance for a political theory of esteem are briefly remarked upon in the final section.

The imprudence objection

The aim of this section is to show that the imprudence objection to envy-avoidance is exaggerated by defending two prudence requirements on the instances of envy that the commitment to avoid envy covers.

Why does envy seem to be imprudent? On the standard definition of (malicious) envy operating in the Rawlsian debate (e.g. Frye, 2016; Norman, 2002; Tomlin, 2008; Walsh, 1992), it might appear as if envy is systematically imprudent by definition. Rawls, for example, explains envy as “the propensity to view with hostility the greater good of others even though their being more fortunate than we are does not detract from our advantages” (1999: 466). Indeed, in the Rawlsian characterization, the envious person is willing to reduce the discrepancy even at a cost to herself (Rawls, 1999: 466). Envy appears to be systematically imprudent because it seems to involve a willingness to harm oneself for no tangible gain. It implies that the envious person—to the extent that she is envious—wants equality between herself and the rival group regardless of the benefits of inequality that she may have to forsake. In short, the envious desire appears to be a desire for equality at all costs—though other desires may outweigh it (Norman, 2002: 43–44).

Therefore, it could be argued that a rational person is not envious since there are no prudential reasons for having such a preference. This is relevant because we expect, and require, citizens to adhere to certain standards of rationality, at least under the ideal circumstances that ideal theory concerns. In addition, even if there are some prudential reasons to be envious, you could argue that satisfying the envious desire would not in any case make the envier better off *overall* regarding those interests that distributive justice ought to protect.

The two prudence requirements—social esteem and impotence section shows how this objection is exaggerated by arguing for two prudence requirements on the instances of envy that the commitment to avoid envy covers. Section 5 defends this argument against the objection that envy is unfitting.

Two prudence requirements—social esteem and impotence

(1) The first prudence requirement is that the envied good(s) must—to a significant extent—be associated with esteem in the communities of the envier. For example, if wealth were highly associated with esteem in all or most subcultures and associations in society, then economic envy would generally satisfy this requirement. If the diminished sense of self-worth involved in envy is indeed self-esteem, the requirement that the envied good must be associated with social esteem is natural. On Salice and Sánchez's account, it is even part of the definition of envy:

... there are two assets that play a role in envy: a superficial and a deep asset. The superficial good one strives for in envy ... delivers peers' esteem recognition. The superficial good has symbolic valence: The subject desires the good not (or at least not exclusively) in its own right, but rather for the esteem that it can secure. (Salice and Sánchez, 2019: 237)

Salice and Sánchez's distinction between a "superficial" and "deep" asset is highly useful in this context because it makes it intelligible how the envious can have a rational desire for equality even when they would lose on it in material terms. If wealth (the superficial asset) delivers esteem (the deep asset), they would fare better regarding social esteem even if worse materially.

(2) The second prudence requirement is that the envier must be impotent relative to a socially salient rival group regarding the obtainability of the envied good. A sense of impotence is typically considered either the main cause (Rawls, 1999: 469) or constitutive (Protasi, 2016; Salice and Sánchez, 2019) of malicious envy. Salice and Sánchez explain that the envier assesses herself as "disempowered," as "a loser," based on how she compares to the rival (2019: 234). This comparison must be rational in the sense that the rival group is a socially pervasive reference point when potential recognizers of the envious evaluate her merit. For example, professional runners are compared to professional runners. Amateur runners are generally not. The rival must be a competitor in the struggle for social esteem in such a way that more recognition for the rival means less for the envious.⁸ This view on the relevant rivals is admittedly permissive, but I shall later introduce a requirement of realism (Moral hostage-taking and reasonable unavoidability section).

The kind of impotence I have in mind is a broad one. It can be the result of socio-economic advantages, but also differences in natural talents. It cannot be the result of a lack of willpower or ambition, however.

The impotence requirement is important because it explains the rationality of wanting to reduce the rival's advantage rather than striving to attain the good itself. If possible, the latter option is normally better since, presumably, the "superficial asset" has some value aside from the esteem it delivers. Indeed, the envied good is usually intrinsically important to the envier's sense of self-worth and not merely instrumentally because it delivers esteem. This is the "self-relevance factor" (Protasi, 2016: 536–537) of envy, which states that the good is important to the envious' sense of identity. The envier presumably desires wealth, for example because, say, she takes pride in being wealthy in addition to caring about the esteem it delivers, though there are obvious connections. However, when the envier is impotent, she cannot attain the superficial good and consequently wishes to reduce the rival's share (Salice and Sánchez, 2019: 231, 237).

These criteria provide a partial answer to the imprudence objection. If the two prudence requirements are satisfied, the difference does detract from the envier's advantages in terms of opportunities to attain social esteem. This can make it rational all-things-considered to wish for a situation in which both the envier and the envied have less of the material (superficial) good but the difference between them is smaller. In addition, since envy is a psychological burden, the envious person may also be motivated to commit hostile acts toward the rival that would not improve her situation even with respect to recognition in order to alleviate her feelings.

In fairness to Rawls, I must mention that he accepts these requirements as *causes* of excusable envy, which he concedes is rational (despite the account of envy⁹). My answer draws heavily on his. To further clarify and defend it, I shall briefly spell out our differences on this issue. Rawls says this about excusable envy:

Sometimes the circumstances evoking envy are so compelling that given human beings as they are no one can reasonably be asked to overcome his rancorous feelings [...]. For those suffering this hurt, envious feelings are not irrational; the satisfaction of their rancor would make them better off. When envy is a reaction to the loss of [self-esteem] in circumstances where it would be unreasonable to expect someone to feel differently, I shall say that it is excusable. (Rawls, 1999: 468)

Rawls' overall position, then, is twofold. On the one hand, there is never a reason for feeling envious in the first place. On the other hand, we sometimes cannot help it. In such cases, satisfying the envious desire to reduce the rival's advantages even at a material cost to the envious would make her better off, but only if she cannot reasonably overcome her envious feelings. This implies that when reasonably possible, a rational agent would always work to stop feeling envious in the face of disappointing esteem expectations rather than having her envious desire satisfied.

My view differs on both counts. What I am arguing is that the two prudence requirements do not merely describe causes of envy but constitute a reason for feeling envious in the first place (an argument that is completed in the next section). Moreover, the

requirement that it must be reasonably impossible to overcome the envious feelings for their satisfaction to make the envious better off is too strong (assuming that this means impossible or extremely difficult). It ignores the effort and pains involved in changing our standards of self-esteem such that we no longer care about differences in the type of social esteem in question, and/or how we compare to the rival. I see no reason why it cannot be good for the envious all-things-considered to have her envious preference satisfied even if it were reasonably possible for her to get rid of it (though controllability and intensity are obviously relevant). For example, imagine that we have a well-ordered society that corresponds to Justice as Fairness. The material expectations of the worst off are maximized. However, wealth is highly associated with esteem such that the worst off receive less esteem than the better off. Would it be clearly irrational for the members of the worst-off group that are impotent in advancing to a better-off group to desire a more egalitarian distribution in such a situation, even assuming they could overcome their rancor by putting in some effort? I think not.

Why should the envious care about undeserved social esteem?

This section defends the aforementioned account of envy's rationality against Knapp's argument that envy is systematically unfitting, which he takes to imply that envy is systematically irrational. After having briefly explained Knapp's argument, I turn to Bankovsky's reply to Knapp that aims to show how envy can be fitting (Can envy be fitting? section). I think Bankovsky's reply mostly succeeds and that her criteria of fittingness cover many of those socially significant occurrences of envy that my prudence requirements do. However, they do not cover all and so I supplement her argument with an additional one that shows how all instances of envy that satisfy the prudence requirements are rational, or at least rational enough (Envy can be rational all things considered section).

Knapp contends that the difference between the envier and the envied can never be both undeserved and at the same reflect poorly on the envier's worth (2014: 121–124). He argues that if the difference is deserved and reflects poorly on the envier's worth, then shame is the proper emotion. And if it is not deserved, the envier has no reason to think less of herself. For example, if I do worse in cricket (Bankovsky's example) than my rivals because I do not train hard enough, and cricket is important to me, I should feel shame. The difference is deserved in this case. In contrast, if my competitors cheated, my loss would be undeserved. In that case, it should not affect my self-esteem. It does not reflect poorly on me that they cheated. It would likely be appropriate to be angry and frustrated about the fact that they won and receive more recognition as cricket players, but I have no reason to think less of myself. Knapp concludes that envy is never fitting and therefore systematically irrational.

Knapp's argument is pertinent because it prompts the question of why we cannot ask the envious to stop caring about their social status. If their envy satisfies the impotence requirement, then their status is undeserved. We are not responsible for the social advantages of our rivals, or our natural talents. Knapp would say that the envious have no reason to think less of themselves. Therefore, we might add, that they should not care

about their status unless it translates into material disadvantages (and we cannot assume that it does since we are talking about *malicious* envy). If they do, they are irrational, and we once again seem to face the imprudence objection. The problem has simply been moved one step: from material differences that do not detract from the envious' material advantages to differences in status that the envious should not care about.

Can envy be fitting?

Bankovsky (2018) provides an interesting reply to Knapp that aims to show that envy can be fitting under certain circumstances. She builds her argument around the following hypothetical scenario. We have an individual, Rajeev, who fails in achieving his goal of being selected for the national junior team in cricket because he performs worse than his competitors do. However, Rajeev performs worse partly, but only partly, due to injustice. On the one hand, some of his rivals have socio-economic advantages (better opportunities for training, better equipment, and so forth) that Rajeev (correctly) believes are unfair. The Rawlsian principle of fair equality of opportunity is not satisfied. On the other hand, he also believes that just maybe he could still have made it if he had put in more effort, been more talented, etc. Rajeev will never know for sure. Thus, he feels both shame (he feels that it is partly his own fault) and resentment (he has been wronged).

Moreover, Rajeev belongs to a group that is relatively impotent in addressing these injustices. Their struggles for better-funded training facilities at the schools in their neighborhood, etc. lead nowhere. Rajeev therefore also feels a sense of impotence. He has no realistic chance of bettering his opportunities for succeeding in cricket relative to the more privileged groups. Nonetheless, it is hard for Rajeev to stop basing his sense of self-worth on his success in cricket. This has been his goal for many years, and it is highly valued in the social environment that he is part of. Rajeev's sense of shame, resentment, inferiority and impotence therefore develop into a form of envy.

Bankovsky provides two objections based on this scenario to Knapp's argument that envy is systematically unfitting. First, the outcome is both deserved and undeserved since Rajeev has some but not much control. Therefore, Rajeev has grounds for thinking less of himself and at the same that the difference is undeserved in the way of envy:

... it is not possible to clearly demarcate the deserved and undeserved components of personal failure. Personal desert is combined ambivalently with undeserved social injustice, and the blow to self-esteem is entangled with the sense that it is undeserved. (Bankovsky, 2018: 8).

Second, to counter the objection that we should only base our self-esteem on things that are completely under our control, Bankovsky appeals to the intersubjective nature of human beings. She argues that our need for recognition can make it rational to ground our self-esteem in things that we have little control over under certain circumstances:

The social interdependency of the process of formulating grounds for self-esteem may well make it rational for Rajeev to continue to ground his self-esteem in the achievement of an outcome over which he knows he has little control, if that outcome is both particularly valued by his community and if his natural talent suggests that the successful achievement of the outcome would likely be achieved under fair conditions. (Bankovsky, 2018: 11–12)

In sum, Bankovsky claims that envy can be fitting under three conditions. (1) One is that the outcome must be partially deserved and partially undeserved. (2) A second is that the good must be associated with esteem in our communities. This is the same as my first prudence requirement, though I defend it as a criterion of prudence and not of fittingness.¹⁰ And (3), the good must be realistically attainable under conditions securing fair competition given our natural talents.

Envy can be rational all things considered

The aim of this section is to supplement Bankovsky's argument with an additional one that shows why it can be rational to experience envy even when it is not fitting, provided that the prudence requirements are satisfied. Though I agree with Bankovsky that Rajeev's envy is rational, I think providing such an additional argument is worthwhile. One reason, as mentioned, is that her fittingness requirements do not cover all cases of envy that satisfy my prudence requirements. Another rationale is that there is ground for doubting that her second and third criteria of fittingness are about fittingness at all, though I shall not pursue this line of reasoning.¹¹

As a first step, I must make a preliminary point about rationality and fittingness. D'Arms and Jacobson (2000) convincingly show that there is not just one consideration, such as fittingness, that bears on whether an emotion is rational. There are several, including fittingness but also the prudence of having the emotion and its moral appropriateness. "Thus, there is a crucial distinction between the question of whether some emotion is the right way to feel, and whether that feeling gets it right [i.e., is fitting]" (D'Arms and Jacobson, 2000: 66). In other words, envy could be rational all-things-considered even when it is not fitting. But how? The basic idea in this section is that envy can be rational when it is *indirectly* prudent in the sense that having those self-attitudes and expectations that make us psychologically vulnerable to envy is generally good for us.

The indirect prudence of envy has to do with the widely recognized ethical significance of social esteem. Enjoying social esteem—especially partaking in relationships of mutual esteem recognition—enriches our lives in many ways. One being that it is a large part of what makes others and our own achievements and endeavors pleasurable and meaningful to us (Honneth, 1995: 121–130; Rawls, 1999: 386–392).

Therefore, it makes sense to care about social esteem and form your aims partly with a mind to which things that enjoy esteem in the communities in which you are a member. It was rational for Rajeev to cultivate an interest in cricket in light of the esteem it enjoys in his community, and also partly basing his sense of self-worth on the recognition he enjoys for being a good cricket player. This makes it far easier for him to take pride and pleasure in his struggle to succeed in cricket.

However, since Rajeev's self-esteem then becomes partly dependent on specific esteem recognition, he becomes vulnerable to envy. For when he loses, he will enjoy less esteem as a cricket player, or at least will have his expectations of esteem disappointed.¹² As a general rule, this will affect his sense of self-worth as a psychological consequence of the fact that he partly grounds his self-esteem on this specific esteem recognition, whether partly deserved or not.¹³ This, in turn, provides a reason for his envious desire to reduce the material discrepancy between himself and his rivals in such a way that his chance of getting on the team and attaining recognition increases.¹⁴ In other words, it gives him a reason for feeling envy in the first place.

That Rajeev experiences an *initial* loss of self-esteem and a burst of envy is thus not irrational in a blameworthy way all-things-considered, even if we say that his loss was wholly undeserved. The target of critique must rather be that he does not adapt and move on by revising his conception of the good and the corresponding standards of self-esteem. It is on this point that considerations of fittingness become salient—in addition to considerations about fairness and his best interests. Bankovsky adds that Rajeev knows that injustices will prevent him from pursuing other goals too (2018: 12–13). I agree with her that such general impotence plausibly makes it less blameworthy to experience strong and lasting envy—though I cannot see how it bears on whether it is rational to feel envy in the first place. I return to this issue in the next section.

The crucial points here are in any case the following. If the two prudence requirements are satisfied, then two things seem to follow. (a) It does not seem reasonable to criticize Rajeev for experiencing a temporary burst of envy. (b) Both this burst and the effort involved in revising his standards (at its most extreme, becoming another person) is surely a psychological cost. Therefore, when the envied good is associated with esteem and the envious is impotent to attain it, envy is harm that normally rational and, by default, moral actors are liable to experience.

I wish to stress that the argument is not that, due to our dialogical nature as human beings, we will inevitably be downcast, in some cases envious, of a lack of recognition. The argument goes beyond this because I concede that it may be possible to cultivate a loosely stoic ideal where we refuse to be much affected by recognition for, and take pride in, things that are not meaningfully within our control—but not all recognition. This ideal is perhaps feasible since normal adults obviously have some control over which recognition, or the lack of it, that matter to them. What I have argued is that it is not reasonable to impose this ideal of self-esteem on the citizenry.

The fairness objection(s)

So far, I have defended envy-avoidance against the imprudence objection by arguing for two prudence requirements on the occurrences of envy that we have reasons to care about. The aim of this section is to defend envy-avoidance against the fairness objection. To this end, I shall introduce two further requirements pertaining to reasonable unavoidability (Moral hostage-taking and reasonable unavoidability section) and burdensomeness (Indulgence and burdensomeness section).

In its general form, the fairness charge goes as follows. Because people have some control over which things they care about and potentially envy, they are responsible for their envious feelings. Because they are responsible, they should pull themselves together and work to stop feeling envious rather than demand satisfaction or compensation for their rancor. Drawing on a paper by Simon Keller (2002) we can divide this overall charge into two specific complaints.¹⁵ (1) It could be argued that envy-avoidance gives rise to situations morally akin to hostage-taking, where people can voluntarily cultivate interests that may lead to envy and subsequently claim compensation. Compensating such voluntarily risked envy is, at least *ceteris paribus*, wrong. Call this the “moral hostage-taking objection” (Keller, 2002: 531). (2) A second concern could be that envy-avoidance is a form of illegitimate indulgence. The critic might say what is said about compensating people for having expensive tastes, namely that it “... encourages the individual to conduct himself like a whiny adolescent” (Keller, 2002: 531). Call this the “indulgent government objection” (Keller, 2002: 531).

Moral hostage-taking and reasonable unavoidability

The first requirement is that the envy in question must be reasonably unavoidable. An example is an involuntary envy, e.g. Rajeev was brainwashed to become fully invested in cricket. The condition I have in mind is broader, however. It also includes cases of envy where the envier has lacked reasonable alternatives to become strongly immersed in a specific pursuit and thus take the risk of serious disappointment. This requirement meets the moral hostage-taking objection because, as Peter Vallentyne notes, it seems wrong to ask people to take full responsibility for the outcome of their actions when they could not reasonably have chosen otherwise, *just because* their actions were voluntary (2002: 531–543).

When are the alternatives to becoming strongly invested in a specific pursuit associated with esteem unreasonable? Continuing with (and slightly modifying) Bankovsky’s Rajeev scenario, I propose that the following features of his situation suffice to make his envy reasonably unavoidable. First, we say that succeeding in cricket was the only *realistic* possibility Rajeev had to attain recognition for excellence in his social environment. He was not talented enough to excel in other pursuits and/or excellence in cricket is the only thing deemed particularly prestigious. Second, we say that succeeding in cricket was the most meaningful goal for Rajeev in the sense that it is by far the activity that most fully engages his talents and/or by far the thing he believes has the most perfectionistic value among his realistic options (Bankovsky, 2018; Laitinen, 2015: 73; Rawls, 1999: 372–380). Third, let success in cricket be the only realistic opportunity he had of advancing to an economically better-off social class. In other words, assume that it was also materially rational for Rajeev to dedicate himself to cricket. (This does not contradict the fact that when Rajeev has become fixated on the prestige of being good in cricket and fails, he may develop malicious and envious preferences that are irrational regarding material goods.)

In short, Rajeev’s decision to go all in on cricket, rather than simply dividing his time and energy across several pursuits, or some such, were by far the best choice among his

realistic options—despite the uncertainty and hardship it entailed. The other alternatives open to Rajeev did not promise a reasonable chance to attain a healthy level of self-esteem. This is not to say that they offered no chance, only that utilizing them would require more adaptability than it is fair to demand. Therefore, I believe, the alternative actions were below the level of quality that is required for it to be fair to ask someone to take full responsibility for their choice *just because* it was voluntary.

Indulgence and burdensomeness

The second fairness requirement concerns the burdensomeness of the reasonably unavoidable occurrences of envious feelings that we should compensate for and try to avoid. In short, the envy must be particularly burdensome. This second requirement is necessary because unavoidability is not sufficient, I think, to establish a case for either prevention/minimization or compensation for envy considering the indulgence objection.

The issue of burdensomeness and indulgence is pressing because preventing all forms of rational and unavoidable envy is neither feasible nor desirable. There are many sources of unavoidability comparable to those listed in the previous section, and some would be rather problematic and/or impossible to do much about. Not everyone can enjoy high esteem or achieve the things that are most important to them. Besides, complete status equality of social roles and ways of life is neither possible nor something we should strive for (Honneth, 1995: 129–130; Laitinen, 2015: 70–71).

Moreover, disappointments *similar* to Rajeev's are rather common. Sometimes we learn that we are not talented enough to reach a goal or obtain a good that we desire, or that doing so requires costs that we are not willing to accept. Usually, we feel some temporary disappointment, maybe even a little rancor, and perhaps frustration and “natural shame” (Rawls, 1999: 390) if we lack the required talents. But then we adjust. We revise our conception of the good and change our aspirations and standards of self-esteem accordingly. This happens in any normal life and is clearly compatible with having reasonable opportunities to attain and maintain a healthy level of self-esteem. Some wounds to our self-esteem we must simply learn to live with (Jakobsen, 2015; Van den Brink, 2011). In contrast, the ideal of zero societal stigmatization is more realistic and clearly worth striving for (Honneth, 1995: 121–130; Jakobsen, 2015; Laitinen, 2015: 66–68). Under what conditions, then, would it be an unreasonable burden for the envious to redirect their attention to other goods that also deliver esteem (albeit less, perhaps) and are, for them, more obtainable?

I suggest that there are two important differences between the case of Rajeev and more normal and sometimes inevitable cases of envy. One is, as previously indicated, that it is reasonable to expect that he will experience relatively strong envy when he fails to win a place in the national junior team, since there is so much at stake. That said, I do not claim that Rajeev's rancor must be quite so strong that it makes him commit crimes or prevents him from functioning as a normal citizen. All that is required, I think, is that it is relatively strong. Another important difference is that there is a rather large gap between what he could realistically hope for and what he can now expect. This makes it relatively harder for Rajeev to move on by revising his standards of self-worth and his

corresponding aims. In Bankovsky's scenario, he vandalizes the training facilities of his rivals to alleviate his envy in part because he does not have any satisfying ways of dealing with his feelings of inferiority (2018: 13–14). This is not to say that moving on must be impossible or extremely difficult, however. Again, all that is required is that it is relatively difficult.

In short, it is reasonable to assume that envy like Rajeev's will be extra burdensome: relatively strong, lasting, and hard to handle in an appropriate manner. This does not fully absolve him of the blame for sabotaging the equipment of his rivals, however, but I agree with Bankovsky that, to provide some compensation, a more lenient criminal sentence would be fair (2018: 16–17).

The vice objection

A critic could accept what I have said so far but still object that envy-avoidance is unreasonable due to the vicious and/or antisocial nature of envy. I shall concentrate on three versions of this objection. (1) One is that envy is a vice and that ideals of justice cannot be found in vices—not even partly. This seems to be the position of George V. Walsh (1992). Tomlin (2008) too raises this as a serious worry, though he also offers counter considerations and does not take a stance on whether it is decisive. My response echoes and slightly expands upon Tomlin's discussion.

The argument I have given does not entail that satisfying the vicious desire involved in envy is a legitimate moral aim *per se*. I have not defended a simple-minded preference-satisfaction theory of justice. The legitimate moral aim is rather to minimize a kind of harm. "The fact that [envy-avoidance] is a concern that arises from the original position, a situation in which all are equal, shows that the desire to avoid envy is not necessarily a selfish motivation, but rather a legitimate attempt to reduce or eradicate a social vice" (Tomlin, 2008: 113). In addition, minimizing envy-generating circumstances need not involve leveling otherwise just inequalities. There is also the possibility of organizing a society in such a way that said inequalities do not generate morally relevant forms of envy.

This last point allows me to clarify how the ideal of envy-avoidance applies when social esteem is based on problematic standards. First, it must be stressed that the ideal of envy-avoidance belongs to ideal theory: it applies to relatively well-ordered societies regulated by a shared conception of justice. There cannot be socially pervasive standards of esteem based on clear injustice in such societies. Nonetheless, one might argue that there can still be pervasive standards that are otherwise problematic, e.g. having many followers on social media, having a cute and popular pet, and so on. The problem is that these standards arguably involve evaluative errors about which things deserve esteem, or at least how much esteem they deserve (Scanlon, 2018: 28–35). Despite everything I have said, one may wonder if envy and envy-avoidance are appropriate in such cases.¹⁶

However, one way to solve such issues is to change the relevant standards and/or the social framework that exaggerates their importance, e.g. the way social media works. The best solution must be determined in view of other ideals of justice and feasibility

considerations. Importantly, there may be some cases of morally relevant envy that it is impossible to do something about in a way that is just *all-things-considered*. The appropriateness of the standards might also bear on how we should solve issues of envy, but it is not a decisive consideration.

In short, the commitment to minimize and compensate for envy is different from the envious desire not just in its ultimate concern (alleviating a bad feeling versus satisfying a vicious desire to reduce a discrepancy), but also in the policies it motivates. Therefore, on the face of it, the fact that envy is a vice does not obviously count against envy-avoidance. Indeed, you could argue that it rather bolsters it. Surely, we wish to protect others and ourselves against morally corrupting circumstances.

(2) A more substantive version of this criticism is that envy-avoidance would undermine social unity due to the antisocial nature of envy.¹⁷ Specifically, one could argue the following. Envy-avoidance exclusively benefits the worst off. In contrast to the difference principle, it gives no positive reasons for allowing economic inequalities such that those better off have a prudential reason to accept it. Furthermore, from the perspective of envy-avoidance the worst off have no reason to look favorably on the advantages of the better off—they risk nothing by leveling down inequalities. On the contrary, inequalities per se are seen as a constant source of worry, supposing that it will be difficult to clearly determine when the ideal of envy-avoidance is satisfied and to what extent. Therefore, at least Justice as Fairness, if not most conceptions of justice, would fare worse in terms of social unity if it included the ideal of envy-avoidance.

My response is that this view on what envy-avoidance requires is questionable and at the very least exaggerated. You could easily argue that the ideal of envy-avoidance, just like the difference principle, does give positive reasons for allowing material inequalities. For one thing, allowing inequalities might improve the material prospects of the worst off and therefore improve their capacity to avoid morally relevant envy. In addition, allowing material inequalities could generate more social diversity in the sense that there would be fewer and/or less pervasive general status hierarchies, and more attached to different associations and subcultures. This could also work to minimize morally relevant envy (Ben-Ze'ev, 1992; Nozick, 1974: 232–246). Indeed, Rawls' assumption that inequalities, by default, provoke envy has little support in the literature (D'Arms and Kerr, 2008; Rawls, 1999: 464, 468). Though I do not want my argument to hinge on envy-avoidance having very specific implications, I shall suppose the ideal gives positive reasons for allowing *some* inequality.

(3) A final version of this worry concerns the implications of envy-avoidance regarding other antisocial sentiments such as spite.¹⁸ Following Rawls, spite is simply the reverse of envy: the spiteful is willing to accept a loss in order to maintain or increase the discrepancy between herself and some rival that is worse off (1999: 467–468). Now, spite, just like envy, plausibly connects to self-esteem. Therefore, you could argue that if envy-avoidance is legitimate, then so is spite-avoidance. To see the trouble, suppose I come from a privileged social background and, considering my social advantages, have formed strong expectations about doing very well in life, and attaining the prestige associated with that. However, some egalitarian policy program that largely realizes fair equality of opportunity and consequently (let us assume)

envy-avoidance happens to be implemented. I become spiteful as a result: I experience that my position is threatened by the new opportunities of those below me and spite them.

One problem is that my spite does not seem like a valid reason against the egalitarian policy. The main objection from a Rawlsian point of view would be that it clearly violates the ideal of reciprocity—social goods ought to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution favors everyone, and the worst off in particular (Rawls, 2001: 123). A related problem is that the conjunction of the two ideals would undermine social unity. Spite-avoidance alone is bad enough (how could the worst off accept it?), and the two ideals seem to pull in different directions in ways that correspond to the interests of different social groups. Citizens are put at odds with one another.

Fortunately, my defense of envy-avoidance does not extend to this kind of spite. For it is hard to see how the spite in question can be reasonably unavoidable (Moral hostage-taking and reasonable unavoidability section). First, if I am a privileged person in modern society, then I would presumably have several realistic opportunities to attain recognition for excellence in my social environment and/or join a suitable one. Doing very well in life according to some society-wide standard of esteem would just be one. Second, it would be unlikely that doing relatively well would be the by far most meaningful option available to me with respect to my natural inclinations and talents. Third, it would not be the case that the difference that success would make in terms of what I could expect in life would be nearly as significant as in the case of Rajeev. Therefore, I would be personally responsible for my spite and not entitled to concern from the perspective of justice.

Concluding remarks

I have now defended envy-avoidance of certain occurrences of envy, namely those that are in a certain sense rational, not reasonably avoidable, and relatively burdensome. At least those concerned about the social bases of self-esteem have good reasons to accept this defense. By way of conclusion, I shall close with a few points about the implications of my argument for a political theory of recognition.

I believe my argument deepens the theoretical understanding of the various social threats to self-esteem. The social circumstances that lead to morally relevant envious feelings are not adequately grasped in terms of stigmatization or unwarranted and ideological de-evaluations of ways of life, which in the first instance threaten shame and demoralization (Anderson and Honneth, 2005: 135–137; Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 110–160; Honneth, 1995: 5; Zurn, 2015: 42–43). There are at the very least analytical distinctions here. However, this does not mean that a standard politics of esteem on the lines sketched in the basic argument section would not suffice to minimize the relevant forms of envy (as far as this is possible and just all-things-considered). Effective freedom of association that secures a rich and viable pluralism of promising options for self-realization, fair equality of opportunity, etc. arguably goes a long way. At the very least, this paper gives an extra reason for such measures. However, the paper also supports compensating envious individuals, which—to wit—is a policy of esteem that only Bankovsky advocates. Furthermore, in theory, preventing morally relevant envy can require more than

reasonable protection against shame and demoralization do. If so, this paper provides grounds for a more comprehensive politics of esteem.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to my supervisors, Ivar Russøy Labukt and Jonas Jakobsen. I also wish to thank the research groups *Ethical Research Group* and *Pluralism, Democracy and Justice* at The Arctic University of Norway.


Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Vegard Stensen  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2573-6669>

Notes

1. Ronald Dworkin employs an “envy test” in the justification of his ideal theory, but this test concerns a hypothetical initial distribution of goods and not the levels of envy in a society corresponding to his theory (1981).
2. The main reason is that envy is a negative feeling that we would wish to avoid in Rawls’ original position.
3. Knapp does not draw this distinction. Bankovsky draws it differently than I do.
4. This falls short of—but does not exclude—Rawls’ strong view that we should “... at almost any cost avoid the social circumstances that undermine self-esteem” (1999: 386) or Axel Honneth’s hyperbolic suggestion that a fully just society is one free from the pains of a wounded self-image (1995: 171).
5. The word in the text is “self-respect,” but Rawls uses this interchangeably with “self-esteem.”
6. Honneth and Anderson frame the value of self-esteem ultimately in terms of autonomy.
7. Here I largely follow Arto Laitinen’s analysis (Laitinen, 2015).
8. This view on the relevant rivals corresponds loosely to what is variously called the “similarity” and “proximity” factor(s), which influences who the envious takes to be relevant rivals in her self-assessment.
We tend to envy those that are similar to us in some relevant sense, and physically and emotionally close. One reason, as Salice and Sánchez note, is arguably that they are competitors in the struggle for esteem (2019: 236–237).
9. There is arguably some ambiguity here between reasons for being envious in the first place and reasons for acting on one’s envious feelings ex-post.
10. Regarding the difference between prudence and fittingness, I largely follow D’Arms and Jacobson (2000) (see next section).

11. See Colin Bird's discussion of the reasons we have to care about recognition from others (2010).
12. This is not to say that Rajeev's envy is *primarily* a reaction to disappointed expectations of recognition. In the example, his envy is primarily a reaction to failing to achieve a goal that is intrinsically important to his self-esteem as a measure of his worth to himself.
13. Granted, the perception of having *some* control arguably matters psychologically to whether we feel envy, how intensively and to how others recognize us. Bankovsky illustrates this perspicuously in a version of the Rajeev-scenario where his coach fails to send in Rajeev's application for uptake in the national cricket team (2018: 8). Nonetheless, the perception of having some control is only one psychologically salient factor. It is not hard to think of cases of envy where the envious feels that the discrepancy is completely out of his control, like when we envy certain genetic traits.
14. The example is not perfect for my purposes since the difference does detract from his material advantages too, i.e. his opportunities to do cricket and generally succeed in life.
15. Keller uncovers them in an analysis of the "expensive tastes" objection against welfare egalitarianism.
16. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this concern.
17. I here draw on Frye's criticism of Jeffrey Green's broadly Rawlsian case for "reasonable envy" (Frye, 2016: 509–516; Green, 2013).
18. I thank a different anonymous reviewer for pointing to these implications.

References

- Anderson J and Honneth A (2005) Autonomy, vulnerability, recognition, and justice. In: Christman J and Anderson J (eds) *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 127–149.
- Bankovsky M (2012) *Perfecting Justice in Rawls, Habermas and Honneth – A Deconstructive Perspective*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Bankovsky M (2018) Excusing economic envy: On injustice and impotence. *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 35(2): 257–279.
- Ben-Ze'ev A (1992) Envy and inequality. *The Journal of Philosophy* 89(11): 551–581. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/2941056>.
- Bird C (2010) Self-respect and the respect of others. *European Journal of Philosophy* 18(1): 17–40.
- D'Arms J and Jacobson D (2000) The moralistic fallacy: On the 'appropriateness' of emotions. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61(1): pp. 65–90.
- D'Arms J and Kerr AD (2008) Envy in the philosophical tradition. In: Smith RH (ed) *Envy: Theory and Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 39–60.
- Dworkin R (1981) What is equality? Part 2: Equality of resources. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 10(4): 283–345.
- Fraser N and Honneth A (2003) *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. London: Verso.
- Frye HP (2016) The relation of envy to distributive justice. *Social Theory and Practice* 42(3): 501–524.
- Green JE (2013) Rawls and the forgotten figure of the most advantaged: In defense of reasonable envy toward the superrich. *American Political Science Review* 107(1): 123–138.

- Honneth A (1995) *The Struggle for Recognition – The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Translated by J. Anderson. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Honneth A (2002) Grounding recognition: A rejoinder to critical questions. *Inquiry: A Journal of Medical Care Organization, Provision and Financing* 45(4): 499–519.
- Jakobsen J (2015) Contextualising religious pain: Saba Mahmood, Axel Honneth, and the Danish cartoons. In: Jakobsen J and Lysaker O (eds) *Recognition and Freedom: Axel Honneth's Political Thought*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, pp. 169–193.
- Keller S (2002) Expensive tastes and distributive justice. *Social Theory and Practice* 28(4): 529–552.
- Knapp M (2014) Economic envy. *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 31(2): 113–126.
- Laitinen A (2002) Interpersonal recognition: A response to value or a precondition of personhood? *Inquiry: A Journal of Medical Care Organization, Provision and Financing* 45(4): 463–478.
- Laitinen A (2015) Recognition, solidarity, and the politics of esteem: Basic income as a test case. In: Lysaker O and Jakobsen J (eds) *Recognition and Freedom: Axel Honneth's Political Thought*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, pp. 57–78.
- Norman R (2002) Equality, envy, and the sense of injustice. *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 19(1): 43–54.
- Nozick R (1974) *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Protasi S (2016) Varieties of envy. *Philosophical Psychology* 29(4): 535–549.
- Rawls J (1999) *A Theory of Justice*. rev ed. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Rawls J (2001) *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Erin Kelly). Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Salice A and Sánchez AM (2019) Envy and us. *European Journal of Philosophy* 27(1): 227–242.
- Scanlon TM (2018) *Why Does Inequality Matter?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor C (1994) The politics of recognition. In: Gutman A (ed) *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 25–75.
- Tomlin P (2008) Envy, facts and justice: A critique of the treatment of envy in justice as fairness. *Res Publica (Liverpool, England)* 14(2): 101–116.
- Vallentyne P (2002) Brute luck, option luck, and equality of initial opportunities. *Ethics* 112(3): 529–557.
- Van den Brink B (2011) Recognition, pluralism and the expectation of harmony: against the ideal of an ethical life ‘free from pain’. In: Petherbridge D (ed) *Axel Honneth: Critical Essays – With a Reply by Axel Honneth*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, pp. 155–177.
- Walsh GV (1992) Rawls and envy. *Reason Papers* 17(3–28): 3–28.
- Zurn CF (2015) *Axel Honneth – A Critical Theory of the Social*. Cambridge: Polity Press.