Australasian Journal of Philosophy

ISSN: 0004-8402 (Print) 1471-6828 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rajp20

The Philosophy of Envy

Protasi, Sara, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. xv + 247, $141.95 (hardback).

Adam Piovarchy

To cite this article: Adam Piovarchy (2022) The Philosophy of Envy, Australasian Journal of Philosophy, 100:2, 425-426, DOI: 10.1080/00048402.2022.2032226

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2022.2032226

AUSTRALASIAN JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY
2022, VOL. 100, NO. 2, 425–427

BOOK NOTES

Protasi, Sara, *The Philosophy of Envy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021, pp. xv + 247, $141.95 (hardback).

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 21 November 2021

Sara Protasi's *The Philosophy of Envy* is a very thorough work. Drawing from philosophy, psychology, literature, and our personal lives, Protasi illuminates a range of issues, including how to distinguish envy from jealousy, whether envy focuses on a person or what they possess, when it motivates us to 'level up' to the envied's status or to ensure that they 'level down' to us, the relationship between envy and love, and whether egalitarianism is motivated by envy.

Protasi's central contribution is to identify four sub-types of envy, which differ according to whether they focus on the agent or the good that she possesses, and whether that good is perceived to be obtainable or unobtainable. *Emulative* envy focuses on the good itself, which is perceived to be obtainable, and it has the action tendency of self-improvement. *Inert* envy focuses on the person, with their good being unobtainable, and has the action tendency of sulking. *Aggressive* envy focuses on the envied agent with an obtainable good, and has the action tendency of stealing said good. Finally, *spiteful* envy focuses on agents with unobtainable goods. Its action tendency is to spoil the good: if I can't have it, neither can you.

With these foundations set, each subsequent chapter considers an important question. Can envy be prudentially or morally good? Can it be virtuous? Can it be a useful political emotion? Protasi's answer to these is 'yes', mostly by building on the argument that emulative envy is a *bona fide* species of envy, rather than mere admiration. This narrows the distance between herself and those inclined to argue 'no', as most treatments of envy focus on its aggressive form and would presumably agree that self-improvement can be valuable.

In an appendix, Protasi provides a comprehensive history of envy, invaluable for anyone wanting to learn how envy has been thought of over time. Humbly described as 'short', despite occupying a quarter of the book, keeping the contemporary philosophical analysis distinct from the historical is a very welcome format as, while both are worthwhile goals, readers do not always hold them concurrently.

Analysing emotions can be messy work, given the number of interacting considerations and questions, but Protasi manages to give us a precise map of the terrain without compromising accessibility. The thoroughness with which she details this history and presents her own analysis is itself worthy of being envied (emulatively) by anyone writing on the emotions.

Adam Piovarchy
The University of Notre Dame, Australia
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5169-2030

https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2022.2032226

Watson, Lani, *The Right to Know: Epistemic Rights, and Why We Need Them*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2021, pp. xiii + 109, £44.99 (hardback).

We are profoundly dependent on one another for epistemic goods—information about the world, understanding of complex topics, and knowledge about our bodies. These dependencies make us vulnerable: newspapers spreading false information lead to uninformed choices, putative experts misrepresenting complex topics can foster ignorance, and doctors withholding information can lead to worse clinical outcomes. (For an intriguing exploration of the right to know about mortality, see Ira Glass's 'In Defense of Ignorance', *This American Life* 585, 22 April 2016: https://www.thisamericanlife.org/585/transcript.)

In *The Right to Know,* Lani Watson makes the case that our intellectual vulnerabilities create the need for epistemic rights. A doctor withholding information doesn't only medically harm her patients; she violates their epistemic rights. Watson presents epistemic rights as rights to the provision of epistemic goods. Picking up on article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Watson suggests that epistemic rights concern the seeking, reception, and imparting of information, creating positive and negative rights. Her main example is the right to receive information (the eponymous right to know), but the framework has broader application, including to rights to inquiry (positive right to seek), rights to privacy (negative right for others not to seek), and freedom of speech (positive right to impart).

Chapter 1 sets out the background conception of rights, drawing on debates in moral and legal philosophy. Chapter 2 considers the scope of epistemic rights. Watson contends that any agent with non-epistemic rights also has epistemic rights, arguing that one can have a right to know without being able to know, and proposing that epistemic claim-rights correspond to enforceable duties. Chapter 3 considers rights violations, focusing on Purdue Pharmaceutical's misinformation about the effectiveness of OxyContin, and Edward Snowden's appeal to the right to know in his defence of leaking. Chapter 4 considers the harms of epistemic rights violations, arguing that these both injure and insult, leading to epistemic and practical harms. Chapter 5 is more programmatic, building the case for rights-talk in the epistemic domain, arguing that epistemic rights tie together important concerns, while providing a rhetorically effective form of defence against informational harms.