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On the place of self-respect and self-esteem in the justification of a theory of social justice

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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Scope and focus	7
2.1	Political philosophy	8
2.2.1.	Social distributive justice	9
2.2	Rawls – self-respect and the original position	10
2.2.1.	The original position	11
2.2.2.	Stages and sessions in the position	13
2.2.3.	The description of the position	14
2.2.4.	Some relevant contrasts between the stages and sessions	16
2.2.5.	Changes in Rawls’s theory	19
2.2.6.	Implications	20
2.3.	Honneth and political theories of recognition	21
2.3.1.	Political theories of recognition	22
2.3.2.	The ideas I discuss	23
2.3.3.	Internal and external conditions for autonomy	25
2.3.4.	Moral progress	26
2.3.5.	Implications	27
2.4.	The dialogical thesis	28
2.4.1.	Meaning and grounds	29
2.4.2.	Critical perspectives	30
3.	Methodology	32
3.1.	Facts and ideals in wide reflective equilibrium	32
3.2.	Ideal and non-ideal theory: moral desirability and feasibility	35
3.3.	Envy under non-ideal circumstances	39
4	Key Terms	44
4.1.	Recognition	44
4.2.	Respect and esteem – overall remarks	45
4.2.1.	Recognition (self)respect	46
4.2.2.	Evaluative (self)respect	48
4.2.3.	(Self)Esteem	50
4.3.	The subjective/objective distinction	51
4.4.	Basal self-respect	52
4.5.	A sense of competence	53

4.6.	Envy	54
5.	Principles of justice and self-respect	59
5.1.	The value of self-respect	59
5.1.1.	Evaluative self-respect/self-esteem – motivation	59
5.1.2.	Recognition self-respect – relational autonomy	62
5.2.	Self-respect and economic inequalities – the Rawlsian debate	65
5.2.1.	How can economic inequalities undermine self-respect?.....	68
5.2.2.	Economic inequalities and Rawls’s status argument.....	69
5.2.3.	The economy objection to the status argument	70
5.2.4.	Types of status, affirmation, and support	73
5.2.5.	Envy, justice, and inequality	78
5.2.6.	Associations and self-respect	84
5.2.7.	Summary	86
5.3.	Self-respect and basic liberties	87
5.3.1.	Rawls and respect for personhood.....	88
5.3.2.	Honneth – Rights and respect.....	89
5.3.3.	Semiotic arguments	91
5.3.4.	Critical perspectives	92
5.3.5.	Summary	95
6.	Summary of articles, discussion, and limitations	96
6.1.	Summary of articles.....	96
6.1.1.	Self-respect and the Importance of Basic Liberties.....	96
6.1.2.	The Irrelevance of Self-respect in the Original Position	97
6.1.3.	Envy, Self-esteem, and Distributive Justice	99
6.2.	The overall position of the dissertation	100
6.2.1.	A sense of competence and the superfluousness thesis.....	101
6.2.2.	Envy-avoidance and the negative point.....	102
6.3.	Limitations and further research avenues.....	105
	Works cited	109
	Individual papers	116
	Article 1. Self-respect and the Importance of Basic Liberties.....	117
1.	Introduction.	117
2.	Evaluative self-respect and basic liberties – Rawls.	120
3.	The personhood account of self-respect and basic liberties – Honneth.....	125
4.	A sense of competence.	132

5.	A sense of competence and basic liberties.....	135
	References	138
	Article 2. The Irrelevance of Self-Respect in the Original Position.....	141
1.	Introduction	141
2.	Preliminaries – Personhood, the original position, and Justice as Fairness.....	143
3.	The argument from self-respect.....	145
3.1.	Self-respect and its value according to Rawls	145
3.2.	Why Justice as Fairness secures the social bases of self-respect.....	146
4.	The argument from alignment	148
5.	The argument from egalitarianism.....	151
5.1.	Recognition self-respect and equality	154
5.2.	Evaluative self-respect and equality	157
6.	The argument from freedom of association.....	160
7.	The scope of the argument.....	163
	References	164
	Article 3. Envy, Self-esteem, and Distributive Justice	166
1.	Introduction	166
2.	Envy, self-esteem, and resentment	170
3.	The basic argument.....	171
4.	The imprudence objection	175
4.1.	Two prudence requirements – social esteem and impotence	176
5.	Why should the envious care about undeserved social esteem?.....	179
5.1.	Can envy be fitting?	180
5.2.	Envy can be rational all things considered.....	182
6.	The fairness objection(s).....	184
6.1.	Moral hostage-taking and reasonable unavoidability	185
6.2.	Indulgence and burdensomeness	186
7.	The vice objection	188
8.	Concluding remarks.....	189
	References	190

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1 Introduction

This dissertation discusses the place of self-respect, self-esteem, and related self-attitudes in the justification of a theory of social distributive justice. Since John Rawls's groundbreaking work *A Theory of Justice (ATJ)* in 1971, where he argued that self-respect was "perhaps the most important" good that a theory of justice ought to secure, this issue has been widely discussed (Rawls 1971, 440). It is broadly agreed that self-respect is a highly important good, and that it relies, to a large extent, on a supportive social environment (Dillon 1995, 1–2). Many argue that self-respect/self-esteem is therefore relevant to determine the content of social justice. It is not particularly controversial to say that the justness of society ought to be measured at least partly by how well it secures the social bases of self-respect or self-esteem. Different authors within widely different traditions have taken up this idea and appealed to self-respect or self-esteem to ground a wide group of principles, policies, and ideals of social justice. These range from the value of rights and opportunities, economic equality, pluralism, restrictions on hate speech etc. (Dillon 1995, 3).

This dissertation discusses these general ideas. The core of the dissertation consists of three articles. What ties these articles together is that they all concern the place of self-respect and related attitudes towards oneself (henceforth: self-attitudes) in the justification of a theory of justice. More specifically, each of the articles takes up one or more of the following issues:

First, does it matter how well principles of justice support self-respect, self-esteem etc. in the first place? Arguably, not everything that involves a sense of self-worth is worth protecting and promoting from the perspective of justice. Which self-attitudes are valuable in a way that give us a reason to secure their social bases? Second, there is the question of how we should demarcate personal and social responsibility. Certainly, individuals are to some extent responsible for their own self-attitudes. Third, which principles and policies do support self-respect, self-esteem, and related self-attitudes, and in what way? This bears indirectly on the moral relevance of these self-attitudes. For if securing them has repugnant implications, then such a commitment lacks intuitive support. Fourth, what is the place of self-respect etc. in the *overall* justification of a theory of justice? This is, of course, partly a matter of how important self-respect is. It is also a matter, however, of how much independent force an argument from self-respect can have apart from the overall case for a conception of justice.

These issues are worth taking up for two main reasons. For one thing, as I will get back to in a moment, they are still widely contested. This dissertation aims to contribute to a clarification on these matters. Furthermore, the place of self-respect and other self-attitudes in the justification of a theory of justice is worth investigating because the answer might have implications for how we should think about justice. Many authors think that considerations of self-respect have such implications. For example, some argue that democracy has an important advantage vis-à-vis epistocracy in terms of self-respect (e.g., Krishnamurthy 2013; Griffin 2003, 120). It is worth knowing if this is true.

Much of the literature on these issues, including this dissertation, is indebted to John Rawls's or Axel Honneth's works. These authors provide us with some of the most developed accounts of the place of self-respect and/or self-esteem in the justification of a theory of justice. Both Rawls and Honneth argue that the social bases of self-respect/self-esteem is a highly valuable good that a just society ought to secure, and that this good is best secured by their respective theories of justice.

Rawls states that the social basis of self-respect or self-esteem (Rawls uses these words interchangeably) is "perhaps the most important primary good" (Rawls 1999, 386), i.e., perhaps the most important good that the distribution of social goods ought to secure. The reason is that "Without self-esteem nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them." (Rawls 1999, 386). Rawls is therefore concerned to show that his own theory of justice – Justice as Fairness (henceforth: JF) – secures the social conditions for self-respect/self-esteem. In addition, he argues that JF has an important advantage in this regard vis-à-vis rival accounts of justice: "The fact that justice as fairness gives more support to self-esteem than other principles is a strong reason ... to adopt it." (Rawls 1999, 386).

Honneth, at least in his earlier works, likewise shares the commitment that an important desideratum of the distribution of social goods is that it secures the social conditions for self-respect and self-esteem. Indeed, he appears to hold an even stronger version of this commitment: "The justice or well-being of a society is proportionate to its ability to secure conditions of mutual recognition under which personal identity-formation [including self-respect and self-esteem] ... can proceed adequately." (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 174).

The central argument of the dissertation is that self-respect and related self-attitudes have an important place in the justification of a theory of social distributive justice, but not quite in the way that Rawls, Honneth and others standardly imagine. Before elaborating on this, it is useful with some further remarks about the state of the literature.

The literature is rather divided about the relationship between justice and self-respect. Some are sympathetic to Rawls and Honneth's basic ideas. They agree with these authors that, for example, self-respect/self-esteem (or its social bases) is indeed an important good, and that this gives us a strong reason to favor a system of equal basic liberties. According to Meena Krishnamurthy (Krishnamurthy 2013), considerations of self-respect give a strong reason for democracy and political liberties such as the right to vote etc. – at least on Rawlsian premises. It is Rawls's most important argument according to Krishnamurthy. Similarly, Antti Kauppinen believes that Honneth's argument for equal legal rights mostly succeeds and that it gives a good reason for democracy in particular (Kauppinen 2011, 289–91).

On the other hand, there is no lack of scholars who think there is something deeply problematic about this line of reasoning. One set of criticism maintains that, at least certain kinds of self-respect based arguments for principles of justice run into problems like circularity or give no support to any specific principles (e.g., Massey 1995; Schemmel 2018; Brennan 2016, chap. 5). Another set holds that the commitment to secure the social bases of self-respect, or at least some versions of it, has repugnant implications. This is a common complaint in the specifically Rawlsian literature. The critics often argue that because economic goods are at least as important to self-respect as rights and liberties, self-respect is best supported by an equal distribution of economic goods rather than anything resembling JF or even a liberal theory. Several of Rawls's critics maintain that his account of self-respect therefore constitutes a deep flaw in his theory (e.g., Zaino 1998; Eyal 2005).

Another complaint, or worry, targets the place of envy in the moral justification of Rawls's theory. For even though Rawls officially rejects that envy matters apart from in connection to stability, it seems to follow that it does from his commitment to protect the social bases of self-esteem (Tomlin 2008; Walsh 1992). This is because envy involves low self-esteem. The worry, according to some authors, is that envy is an irrational vice and as such a morally irrelevant consideration when it comes to justifying the distribution of social goods such as income and wealth (e.g., Tomlin 2008; Walsh 1992; Frye 2016). This connects with the more

general charge that is sometimes levelled against egalitarian theories, namely that they are based on envy (e.g., Hayek 1960, 93).

I have said that the most overall point of the dissertation is that self-respect and related self-attitudes have an important place in the justification of a theory of social distributive justice, but not quite in the way that Rawls, Honneth and others standardly imagine. To elaborate, I agree with the critics that there are some problems with some standard ways of appealing to self-respect to ground principles of justice. Yet, I do not go so far as some do. It is also argued that the basic ideas nonetheless have merit, and that there is more potential in them than what is commonly thought or readily admitted. This overall point can be broken down into two parts, one negative part and one positive:

(1) Negatively, it is argued that several standard types of self-respect based arguments for distributive principles are problematic, and that, pace Rawls, considerations of self-respect are superfluous to the choice of basic principles within his framework of an original position.

(2) Positively, it is argued that considerations of self-respect and related concepts still have an important role in the justification of distributive principles and policies, and that such considerations encompass more than what is commonly argued (at least in detail) or readily admitted.

The first two articles primarily establish the first and negative point. Together, they provide supplementary criticisms of various appeals to self-respect and point to some general problems with such arguments. The first article “Self-respect and the Importance of Basic Liberties” discusses what I call “the self-respect argument for basic liberties”. This is that self-respect is an important good, best supported by an equal distribution of basic liberties (the liberty principle), and that this gives us a reason to think that it is important to secure an equal distribution of such liberties. Rawls and Honneth are used as representatives of two main versions of this argument. It is argued that the versions they defend fail. The second article “The Irrelevance of Self-respect in the Original Position” supplements this criticism. It concentrates more fully on the role considerations of self-respect play in the justification of basic principles of distribution within Rawls’s framework of an original position. It contends that, within Rawls’s original position, arguments from self-respect are either unconvincing or

superfluous in the specific sense that they fully rely on the assumption that JF is the best choice also if we ignore considerations of self-respect as such.

The third article, and to some extent the first, establish the positive point. The first paper argues that even though some standard versions of the self-respect argument for the liberty principle fail, we can give a similar but more modest version of it based on a self-attitude I call “a sense of competence”. This shows that the basic idea in the self-respect argument for the liberty principle is not without merit. While the first two articles are mostly critical, the third “Envy, Self-esteem, and Distributive Justice” broadens and to some extent defends the frameworks of Honneth, Rawls and others. It discusses the moral relevance of envy and contends that envy-avoidance is an ideal that the distribution of social goods should satisfy. More specifically, it argues that anyone committed to the idea that the distribution of social goods should secure the social bases of self-esteem, e.g., Rawls and Honneth, have good reasons to also care about the levels of envy that different principles and policies reliably generate. There are no strong reasons for excluding envy-avoidance from this more general commitment.

The following chapters serve to introduce and situate these articles within the surrounding literature. Chapter 2 briefly situates the dissertation within normative political theory and specifically the literature on social distributive justice. The chapter also explains the ideas of Rawls and Honneth with which I engage and considers the implications of the dissertation for their overall theories. It also accounts for how the view that humans rely on recognition is understood in this dissertation and considers some critical perspectives on this claim.

Chapter 3 explains, situates and to some extent defends the methodological aspects of the dissertation. In particular, it places the project within ideal theory. This means, in short, that most of the arguments I make and discuss concern just and well-ordered societies inhabited by informed, normally rational, and reasonable citizens who comply with the demands of justice. It also explains how the dissertation nevertheless supplements earlier works within non-ideal theory.

Chapter 4 defines key concepts and terms used in the dissertation and situates these definitions within the literature. The dissertation follows a common practice of distinguishing between two types of self-respect: 1) personhood/recognition self-respect and 2) evaluative

self-respect/self-esteem. The former pertains to our moral status and the fact that we are persons, the latter to our character, conduct and traits.

It is clearly unfortunate to have four terms for two concepts, and so I will already at this stage give a brief explanation of why that is the case and what I shall do about the issue in the following chapters. In short, the reason is that the articles engage various debates where self-respect, self-esteem etc. have different meanings and, relatedly, the borders between these concepts vary. Perhaps my solution is not ideal, but I saw no suitable way of achieving parsimony. In the following chapters, I will use the term “self-respect” when I refer to both concepts. I will also mostly use “recognition self-respect” to refer to the first concept.

Returning now to the structure and content of the following chapters, chapter 4 also explains what I mean by “envy” and “a sense of competence”. Chapter 5 gives a brief overview of the literature about the relationship between self-respect and justice and situates the dissertation within it. It concentrates on various arguments and positions concerning (1) the value of self-respect. (2) The relationship between economic inequalities and self-respect, and (3) the relationship between basic liberties and self-respect. In chapter 6, I give a summary of the articles and discuss their unity and contribution considered together. I also point to some limitations of the dissertation and further research avenues.

2 Scope and focus

At the most general level, this dissertation belongs to the field of normative political theory, also called “political philosophy”. Such theory can be understood in several different ways, but as the name implies it is essentially normative. It is about how society should be organized, not about describing it. Political philosophy covers many different subfields and approaches. Just to mention a few, it includes democratic theory, multiculturalist theories, the politics of recognition, contract theory etc. This dissertation belongs in the first instance to the group of theories of social distributive justice. That is, the field of inquiry that concerns how social goods ought to be distributed in a society. I examine how considerations relating to self-respect are relevant in this regard. However, the different fields within political theory are closely intertwined, and the dissertation therefore participates, by implication, in several of them.

To narrow it down even further, we might say that the dissertation largely concentrates on Rawls’s and Honneth’s accounts of the relationship between social justice and self-respect. However, the dissertation does not just interpret their theories. Nor do all the points I make apply only to their specific frameworks. The first and third article discuss general issues about the relationship between self-respect and justice and engage Rawls’s and Honneth’s accounts in order to do so. The second article is an evaluation of Rawls’s theory, but that article too makes general points about this relationship. In addition, all the articles support more general points about the place of self-respect in the justification of a theory of social distributive justice. Nonetheless, the dissertation does evaluate some of Rawls’s and Honneth’s ideas and this chapter takes up the implications of my arguments for their wider theories. How the dissertation is situated in the more specific discussions about their accounts of self-respect as such, and the more general debate about self-respect and justice, is taken up in more detail in chapter 5.

In this chapter I elaborate on the preceding remarks such that the scope and focus of the dissertation becomes clear. The chapter is organized as follows. I start with some brief remarks about normative political theory and which specific features and traditions of this field of theorizing that this dissertation reflects. Next, I clarify what I mean by saying that this dissertation belongs to the subfield of social distributive justice. After that, I turn to Rawls’s theory of social justice: Justice as Fairness. Here I will essentially clarify which overall parts

of his theory that this dissertation discusses and consider the implications of my arguments for Rawlsian liberalism in particular. This is followed by a section that does the same regarding the politics of recognition and Honnethian recognition theory. Finally, I take up the dialogical thesis – the thesis that humans need recognition. I explain how this thesis has been understood and grounded by various authors and how this dissertation understands it. I also take up some critical perspectives on the dialogical thesis and explain my stance on them.

2.1 Political philosophy

I have said that political philosophy is essentially normative. As such, it contrasts with descriptive sciences such as economic theory, political science, and social theory. Now, there are many ways of carving up this field. We can distinguish between subfields or types of political philosophy according to the questions they ask, the traditions they work within, the methodology they use etc. (e.g., List and Valentini 2016; Adam and White 2008).

Methodological issues are considered later. I have already said that this dissertation, in the first instance, is situated in the subfield of social distributive justice.

It is worth mentioning that the dissertation draws on two traditions of social criticism. Honneth describes his mode of theorizing as “social philosophy” and “critical” theory, which he contrasts with mainstream political theory such as we find in Rawls and others within the, roughly speaking, Anglo-Saxon tradition. The former has a broader scope and applies another type of normative standard than political theory according to Honneth. It is also an immanent form of criticism, in contrast to mainstream political theory, including Rawlsian liberalism, on Honneth’s account. And it is more attentive to facts about human nature and society according to Honneth (J. Anderson and Honneth 2005; Honneth 2007c). A final contrast that is often noted (if not in the following terms) is that whereas mainstream political theory works within ideal theory, Honnethian social philosophy works within non-ideal theory (Bankovsky 2012, 169–73; Zurn 2015, 95; Honneth 2007a). Therefore, some brief remarks about how the dissertation is situated within these traditions are in order. The articles take up questions and ideas we find in both traditions. How these are approached is explained in more detail in the methodology chapter. Suffice it to say here that I believe the aforementioned contrasts between the two traditions are exaggerated (Bankovsky 2011; Claasen 2014). I do not believe my arguments presuppose a very specific stance on these issues. Perhaps the closest I come to taking a specific stance is in my choice of working within ideal theory rather than non-ideal

theory, but I believe this choice is between two supplementary as much as competing approaches. Again, I return to this in the methodology chapter.

2.2.1. Social distributive justice

This dissertation is in the first instance concerned about issues of social distributive justice. That is, how social goods broadly construed such as income, rights, power, wealth, opportunities etc. should be distributed among citizens. We can distinguish between two overall questions that theories of social distributive justice try to answer (Lamont and Favor 2017, sec. 1). First, what are the relevant social goods? Suggestions include primary goods (Rawls), capabilities (Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum), welfare, opportunities for welfare, negative rights (Robert Nozick) etc. Though there are obviously substantive overlaps between these proposals, there are also important differences. Second, what are the just criteria for their distribution? Proposals include equality of outcome, prioritarianism (the worst off are prioritized), sufficientarianism (the distribution ought to secure some minimum amount for all citizens) etc. (Lamont and Favor 2017).

The primary subject of distributive principles (their field of application) is somewhat disputed, but it is often considered to be something close to what Rawls calls “the basic structure of society”. In short, the basic structure is the main social, political, and economic institutions, and the way they fit together in a system of social cooperation (Rawls 1999, 6–7). One feature of social goods – indeed, it is part of what makes them social – is that their distribution is largely determined by the basic structure of society. The primary subject of *social* justice is how central social institutions distribute social goods, and not individual conduct. That said, a theory of social justice indirectly applies to persons and actions in so far as just institutions rely on individual conduct, attitudes etc. (Rawls 1999, 6–10).

The social bases of self-respect are often included on the list of relevant social goods. This does not mean that self-respect does not have more personal bases too, however, or that it is not also a matter of personal responsibility (e.g., Doppelt 2009, 131–35). The substantive claim is only that self-respect largely depends on a supportive social environment. An important feature of these bases is that they largely overlap with other social goods. Or, put differently, we can consider a specific good such as income as a social basis of self-respect and as, say, a means to pursue your projects (e.g., Zaino 1998, 742). This dissertation is fundamentally concerned with the relevance of these bases to how other social goods that they

encompass should be distributed. I do not discuss the more overall issues of which goods distributive justice *ultimately* concerns or the specific criteria of their just distribution. That is, I do not take up whether the social bases of self-respect should ultimately be construed as primary goods, capabilities, etc. A final point about these bases is that it is common to distinguish between two types. First, we can speak of means of attaining self-respect. Income, for example, can be used to develop one's talents which in turn is a ground for self-respect. Second, we can speak of recognitional bases that support our self-respect by signaling or affirming our value in the eyes of others. (J. Cohen 1989, 737; Doppelt 2009, 135–37; Eyal 2005, 207; Rawls 1999, 477–80).

Before proceeding I wish to resolve an issue that arises from the fact that I focus on distributive justice and also on the social bases of self-respect, which include recognition. For some working within the field of recognition theory explicitly reject the “distributive paradigm”, which they take to mean that justice is ultimately a matter of securing a fair distribution of social goods. Nancy Fraser argues that while distributive issues are important, they do not encompass all dimensions of justice. Therefore, a theory of distribution must be supplemented with a theory of recognition (Fraser and Honneth 2003, chap. 1). Honneth argues that justice at the most fundamental level concerns the quality of relations of mutual recognition, and that the distributive understanding is, accordingly, basically flawed (J. Anderson and Honneth 2005). These positions are plausibly construed as part of the broader debate between “distributive” and “relational” theories of justice, the latter including recognitional theories (E. S. Anderson 1999; Scheffler 2003; Lippert-Rasmussen 2018).

Therefore, to prevent misunderstandings, I wish to emphasize that though I use the word “distribution” I do not mean to take a specific stance in these debates. I do not believe my arguments hinge on whether the ultimate subject of social justice is the distribution of goods or the quality of social relations. I leave such matters largely open. What I do mean is that the dissertation concerns questions of distributive justice. As such, it takes a stance in the debates within social distributive justice, but without implying that this is what social justice is ultimately about.

2.2 Rawls – self-respect and the original position

Much of the dissertation engages Rawls's ideas about justice and self-respect. The first article uses him as a representative of a particular version of the self-respect argument for basic

liberties. The second investigates the role of self-respect in justifying the choice of principles within his methodological framework, specifically the original position. The third discusses Rawls as a proponent of securing the social bases of self-esteem (evaluative self-respect) but opponent to the idea that the levels of envy that distributive principles reliably lead to is morally relevant. Why this focus on Rawls's ideas? In short, Rawls is without a doubt the by far most influential author within modern theorizing on social justice. In addition, his account of the relationship between self-respect, envy and justice in particular is also widely influential (Dillon 1995, 2). Most of the work on this relationship today operates in the shadow of Rawls's account (if not Honneth's). Given this, I believe my particular attention to Rawls is justifiable.

The following sections explain which overall parts of Rawls's account of justice that this dissertation engages with. In the final section, I briefly consider the implications of my arguments for Rawlsian liberalism. How these arguments are situated in the more specific discussions about his account of self-respect as such is taken up in more detail in chapter 5.

2.2.1. The original position

The part of Rawls's theory that the articles engage or bear upon is mainly his notion of the "original position" (henceforth: OP). Here is a brief sketch of the basic idea. To ground his principles of justice, Rawls follows the social contract tradition wherein principles are valid in virtue of the fact that the citizenry consent to them. "My aim is to present a conception of justice which generalizes and carries to a higher level of abstraction the familiar theory of the social contract as found, say, in Locke, Rousseau, and Kant." (Rawls 1999, 10). To this end, he devises a thought experiment that he calls "the original position". The original position is an idea of a hypothetical contract that is perfectly fair, i.e., one where the terms are rational for each party and where all the parties relate to each other as equals. The parties make a rational and informed choice, and no one has greater bargaining power etc. This justifies the terms they agree to as principles of justice:

"... the principles of justice ... are the object of the original agreement. They are the principles that free and rational persons concerned to further their own interests would accept in an initial position of equality ..." (Rawls 1999, 10).

To elaborate, the position is an idea of an appropriate situation of choice for selecting principles of justice. That is, a situation imagined in a way that makes the agreement reached

fair and binding whatever it is. In designing his “favored interpretation” of OP, Rawls appeals to conditions that it seems reasonable to impose on the choice of principles and shows how OP incorporates them. The function of the position is to express certain philosophical ideas about justice, fair agreements etc. and to show how these, when appropriately represented for the purpose of principle selection lead us to favor certain principles of justice. “The idea here is simply to make vivid to ourselves the restrictions that it seems reasonable to impose on arguments for principles of justice, and therefore on these principles themselves.” (Rawls 1999, 16). So, we might say that the most basic function of OP is to facilitate our reasoning around principles of justice. We can “at any time enter this position ... simply by reasoning in accordance with the appropriate restrictions.” (Rawls 1999, 119).

To properly understand and situate my criticism of Rawls, we must distinguish OP from other parts of his theory. For example, some have argued that considerations of self-respect yield additional reasons for the later Rawls’s requirement that principles of justice ought to be grounded in public reason (e.g., Whitfield 2017).¹ The dissertation does not address this issue. We should also note that the position is part of a more overall framework of justification: reflective equilibrium. I take up this connection in a later chapter, but it is worth mentioning here that the articles have little or no bearing on the role of self-respect within other parts of Rawls’s framework. That said, OP is a central part of Rawls’s overall method of justification.

To clarify and situate my engagement of OP within the wider literature, it is useful to divide complaints about this thought experiment, or how Rawls performs it, into three groups. 1) Criticisms of the idea of such a thought experiment as part of a sound method of justification. 2) Criticisms of the specific way in which Rawls describes the position to model reasonable ideas about justice. 3) Criticisms of how Rawls thinks the parties reason given how he describes the position.

The second article, which investigates the role self-respect has in justifying principles in OP, clearly belongs to the third set of criticism. The argument for envy-avoidance in the third article does not discuss OP as such but it has implications for how the parties might plausibly reason about self-esteem and envy, and additionally on how the position is described. For, as

¹ Very briefly, the requirement is that principles of justice must be justified by arguments that can, in principle, be accepted by all citizens as free and equal (Rawls 2001, 26–29).

we shall see, Rawls assumes that the parties are not envious and that they ignore the human propensity to envy (except in relation to stability). The first article (which discusses the self-respect argument for basic liberties) does not directly discuss OP either, but it has implications for how the parties might reason around self-respect and basic liberties.

So, the dissertation does not object to the place of OP as part of a sound method of justification. By way of contrast, Honneth argues that facts about the importance and social conditions of self-respect show that the idea of OP is misguided. It is described in such a way that the parties cannot adequately consider these facts in the choice of principles, and this problem cannot be remedied. Therefore, he argues, we need an alternative way of justifying principles (J. Anderson and Honneth 2005; for discussion see Bankovsky 2011). This dissertation is not incompatible with this position, but it does not support it. The problems I identify with Rawls's theory are not of a kind that suggest, at least not on the face of it, that such radical revisions of Rawls's basic methodological framework are warranted.

2.2.2. Stages and sessions in the position

I have said that a significant part of this dissertation discusses or bears upon the choice of basic principles in OP. However, the deliberation of the parties is divided into two overall parts or stages of justification. I shall call them 1) "the moral justification" and 2) "the check for stability".² The moral justification is the part where the parties choose between different principles of justice. It is this part that gives us moral reasons for preferring JF. The moral stage of justification is divided into three stages, or sessions. 1.1.) First, the parties select basic principles of justice. 1.2) Then, in the constitutional session, they choose from a list of constitutions the one that would best realize these principles given general facts about the society in question. 1.3) Next, at the legislative stage, they choose specific laws. 2) In the check for stability, they consider the feasibility (in contrast to moral desirability) of the principles chosen in the moral stage of justification.

The articles discuss, or bear on, 1) the first stage, the moral stage of justification, and mostly 1.1) the choice of basic principles, though the defense of envy-avoidance also bear on the constitutional and legislative stage (1.2. and 1.3). The role of self-respect in the check for

² Rawls simply calls them the first and second part of the argument for JF.

stability as such is not considered in depth.³ It is important to understand the differences between these stages in order to appreciate the meaning and implications of the arguments in the articles. I shall therefore briefly account for how Rawls describes the position before explaining some relevant contrasts.

2.2.3. The description of the position

Let us start by considering how the parties in the position are characterized (Rawls 1999, 123–26). First, they are perfectly rational. On this score, Rawls closely follows the traditional meaning of rationality associated with social and economic theory. Very briefly, on this conception you are rational to the extent that you choose the most effective means to your end(s). The only (explicit) addition Rawls makes to this conception of rationality in his description of the parties is that they are not envious. Secondly, and closely related to the previous point, the parties are characterized by a “mutual disinterest” in each other. They do not feel any benevolence, pity, or sympathy with the fate of one another. Nor do they feel hostility, hatred, or the like. In essence, the parties seek to advance their own interests in the most effective way possible.⁴ A third feature is that they have a capacity for a sense of justice. This means that they will comply with whatever principles they end up agreeing on and will not enter into agreements they know they cannot keep.

The parties are described in this way to represent the idea that just principles are those that all rational persons would consent to on the basis of their own interests. Yet, the choice of principles must not only be rational but also fair. Specifically, the position must represent the fact that people are morally equal: that their interests have equal weight. To put it another way, the set-up must exclude the possibility that the choice is rational only for some. The choice of principles must be impartial in an important sense. As already indicated by the fact that OP is a hypothetical contract, Rawls suggests that the appropriate form of impartiality is reached through securing a fair bargaining process where the parties relate to one another as equals. “The aim is to rule out those principles that it would be rational to propose ... only if one knew certain things that are irrelevant from the standpoint of justice.” (Rawls 1999, 17).

³ I return to this issue in section 2.2.4, chapter 3, and chapter 6.

⁴ This does not mean that their interests only concern themselves, however (Rawls 1999, 111–12, 127).

As an example, Rawls mentions knowledge of the fact that one is wealthy which makes it rational to favor principles that do not allow social welfare measures (Rawls 1999, 17).

To secure that the bargaining process is fair, the deliberation between the parties is characterized by “a veil of ignorance” (Rawls 1999, 118–23). The veil of ignorance entails that the parties do not know any particular facts about themselves, or the society in question (except for the fact that the circumstances of justice apply⁵). They do not know their social position, their gender, level of health, their conception of the good, i.e., their view on the good life, religious issues and so on. That said, the veil permits knowledge of all general facts, such as general economic theory, facts about human psychology etc. necessary to make an informed choice of principles. “There are no limitations on general information, that is, on general laws and theories ...” (Rawls 1999, 119). The parties need to know such facts to consider how conducive various principles are to their interests, and to assess their stability.

That the choice of principles is fair is secured by the veil of ignorance and not by the parties’ compassion or sympathies. The veil ensures that the deliberation is impartial – no one has more bargaining power than anyone else, knowledge of how the choice would play out for them specifically etc. Moreover, since they do not know anything about themselves, the parties are not even capable of favoring their own interests. They are, in effect, forced to think impartially: they must, in a certain sense, ascribe equal weight to everyone’s interests since they do not have sufficient knowledge about their aims and social situation to favor themselves.

Let us now consider how the parties arrive at the choice of JF. As a first point, it is crucial to understand that the parties do not design principles of justice. Instead, they select JF from a list of different alternatives already given to them, as it were, by us when we apply the thought experiment. Rawls compares his theory to a list of “traditional conceptions of justice” drawn from the history of philosophy (Rawls 1999, 105–6, 108). Importantly, this means that the justification of JF that the OP yields is relative: JF is better than those on the list of

⁵ “[I]n brief ... the circumstances of justice obtain whenever persons put forward conflicting claims to the division of social advantages under conditions of moderate scarcity” (Rawls 1999, 110). Absent such circumstances, there is no need for justice.

traditional alternatives that it is compared with, not necessarily the best of all possible conceptions.

I shall not go through exactly how the parties end up with their ranking of different conceptions of justice. We should note, however, that they assess the alternatives based on what they can expect in terms of primary social goods. In *ATJ*, these goods are “... things which it is supposed a rational man wants whatever else he wants.” (Rawls 1999, 79). The idea here is that since the parties do not know their specific aims, they desire to have the largest possible amount of primary goods since, whichever desires and interests they find themselves to have, they are likely to need primary goods to realize them. As Rawls puts it: “With more of these goods, men can generally be assured of greater success in carrying out their intentions and in advancing their ends, whatever these ends may be.” (Rawls 1999, 79). The main primary goods are basic liberties, income, opportunities, social power – and the social bases of self-respect (Rawls 1999, 123). In *Political Liberalism (PL)*, the account of primary goods is more inclusive (Rawls 1993). It also encompasses social goods normally essential to exercise and develop either of the moral powers (see section 2 in the second article) (Rawls 1993, 75). I refer to the latter and broader account in the articles.

It is also worth noting that Rawls thinks the parties would consider the “maximin rule” of choice to be the rational strategy when they reflect on what the various conceptions offer to different social groups in terms of primary goods (Rawls 1999, 132–35). In short, the maximin rule tells us to choose the alternative where we risk the least. So, the parties favor the conception of justice where the worst possible outcome is better than the worst possible outcome in the alternatives. Put differently, they choose the alternative where the worst off are guaranteed the most. Rawls argues that JF is the rational choice thus understood, given the other alternatives the parties are presented with.

2.2.4. Some relevant contrasts between the stages and sessions

The preceding description of OP allows me to explain the differences between the various sessions more precisely. The moral part of the justification is the stage just described – the parties select the conception that maximizes what the worst off can expect in terms of primary goods.

1) Two contrasts between the session where the parties select basic principles, and the constitutional and legislative stages are worth considering. One concerns what the parties choose between. First, the parties choose between *basic* principles of justice. Second, in the constitutional and legislative stages, they choose between ways of *implementing* them, i.e., they discuss their specific interpretations and institutional forms. They ask how they can be best realized, or approximated, in a specific constitution and set of laws. It is worth mentioning that at this stage, the veil of ignorance is partly lifted, allowing the parties to know general facts about the society in question (Rawls 1999, 172–73). Thus, the constraints on the kind of arguments they can make is relaxed.

It is important to see that these are different types of questions, and that my arguments about self-respect in relation to basic principles do not imply that I think it is problematic or superfluous in the context of legislation. To see this, let us briefly consider Rawls's formulation of the two principles qua basic principles.

a) In *PL*, Rawls's formulation of the liberty principle goes as follows: "Each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which is compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all." (Rawls 1993, 291).

b) In *PL*, the difference principle is formulated thus: "Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions. First, they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they must be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society." (Rawls 1993, 291).

Such basic principles may be satisfied, or approximated, in various ways. Taking the difference principle as an example, Rawls discusses how taxation, policies aimed towards full employment, a fixed minimum wage etc., could be arranged or instituted as a means to approximate it more or less effectively (Rawls 1993, 291). This is essentially an empirical, or social scientific, line of inquiry.

Furthermore, "The nature of the principles themselves may leave open a range of options rather than singling out any particular alternative." (Rawls 1999, 318). For example, when applying the difference principle, we must determine the relative weight of various primary goods. How heavily one good should count, such as the social basis of self-respect, "... is to

be decided in view of the general features of the particular society and by what it is rational for its least favored members to want as seen from the legislative stage.” (Rawls 1999, 318).

Whereas Rawls and his commentators (myself included) mostly concentrate on the role of self-respect in justifying the choice of basic principles, some argue for specific ways of implementing them based on considerations of self-respect. For example, Catriona McKinnon “... mounts a Rawlsian argument for universal basic income on the grounds that it maximins the distribution of income and wealth understood as a social basis of self-respect.” (McKinnon 2003, 143). This seems to be an argument both about how the difference principle should be approximated, and about how heavily the social bases of self-respect should count. Though this dissertation argues that considerations of self-respect are irrelevant to the choice of basic principles in OP, this does not mean that McKinnon’s argument is incorrect. It should also be mentioned that while the second article suggests that the moral relevance of envy in OP (in so far as it pertains to self-respect) is superfluous regarding the choice of basic principles, it need not be irrelevant to the choice of legislation. I return to this issue in chapter 6.

2) So much for the first part of the justification of JF, the moral stage of justification. The second part, the check for stability, concerns another type of question. “The second part asks whether the well-ordered society corresponding to the conception adopted will actually generate feelings ... and ... psychological attitudes that will undermine the arrangements it counts to be just.” (Rawls 1999, 465). In short, Rawls thinks JF is stable for two main reasons. First, it does not give raise to a problematic level of such destabilizing attitudes just mentioned since it is congruent with our good. The reasoning is that we would experience life in a well-ordered society⁶ corresponding to JF as good for us and therefore not develop feelings that would motivate us to act unjustly (Rawls 2001, 202). Second, JF is stable in part because it provides for social mechanisms that would make us develop an effective sense of justice that would motivate us to comply with the demands of justice even if we were to develop some antisocial feelings (Rawls 1999, 434–41, 2001, 184). These reasons are

⁶ Briefly put, a well-ordered society is one where all citizens understand and accept the same conception of justice, this is public knowledge, and this conception is operational in the basic structure of society (Rawls 2001, 8–9).

interconnected, because we are inclined to accept JF as fair in part because we experience it as good (Freeman 2003; Rawls 1999, 496–97).

James R. Zink argues that even if the account of self-respect is insufficient to establish the moral acceptability of Rawls’s theory, it still has an important function in the argument for stability (Zink 2011).⁷ As I note in the second article, Zink responds to different problems than the ones I identify, however. More generally, I believe that such self-respect arguments for stability are mostly covered in the articles since most of them seem to presuppose the arguments I do discuss. There are some remaining issues, however, which I take up in chapter 6.

2.2.5. Changes in Rawls’s theory

Before turning to the implications of the dissertation for Rawlsian liberalism, it is worthwhile with some remarks about which stage of Rawls’s authorship that I engage with. Since the first publication of *ATJ* in 1971, Rawls has revised and developed his theory several times. The most central change is the move from a “comprehensive” theory of justice (in *ATJ*) to a “political” one (in *PL*). Very briefly, Rawls’s motivation for this move is to solve a problem of stability. In *ATJ*, the well-ordered society corresponding to JF is thought to be stable because citizens endorse JF on the basis of one comprehensive doctrine. But Rawls came to think of this as unrealistic, since modern societies are characterized by a plurality of reasonable doctrines (roughly speaking different worldviews). In *PL* (and the preceding lectures), he sets out to solve this problem by reformulating JF in such a way that it can gain support from all reasonable doctrines (Rawls 1993, xvi-xviii). This reformulation involves many changes, e.g., a change in the account of personhood and primary goods – including the account of the social bases of self-respect.

The articles refer to several of Rawls’s works representing different stages of his authorship. For example, I focus on Rawls’s account in *PL* regarding the conception of personhood and primary goods for the sake of brevity, but I believe my case also targets his earlier view. I also

⁷ He argues that growing up under the well-ordered society that corresponds to JF, our self-respect would be shaped in such a way as to make living under just institutions a constitutive part of our good. Thomas Hill makes a similar point, noting that one of Rawls’s main arguments for the stability of JF is that it secures the social conditions of self-respect. (Thomas E. 2014, 206–8).

discuss the Aristotelian principle⁸, which is crucial to *ATJ*, but which Rawls rejects as too comprehensive in *PL* (Rawls 1993, 203 note 35). The implications of the dissertation for Rawlsian liberalism should hold whether we understand it in accordance with *ATJ* or *PL*.

2.2.6. Implications

So, what does the dissertation imply for Rawlsian liberalism? The main conclusions are, basically, 1) that Rawls's self-respect arguments for JF are either unconvincing or offer no meaningful support to JF within the framework of OP. And 2) Rawls has good reasons to care about envy too since he is committed to protecting the social bases of self-esteem (evaluative self-respect). These conclusions entail two overall implications for Rawlsian liberalism.

First, it follows that one set of Rawls's arguments for the choice of JF fails. The obvious follow up question is what this means for the overall case. Rawls says the argument(s) from self-respect gives us a "strong reason" to prefer JF but is not clear on its exact importance (Rawls 1999, 386). The literature is marked by stark disagreement on this issue. At one extreme, there are authors who argue that the appeal to self-respect is necessary to justify JF overall. Perhaps the strongest proponent for this view is Nir Eyal. He contends that the self-respect argument(s) for the liberty principle is Rawls's only valid argument (Eyal 2005). Henry Shue also argues that the appeal to self-respect is Rawls's ultimate reason for favoring the liberty principle (Shue 1975). It seems more common to hold, however, that the argument(s) from self-respect is an important part of the overall justification but without claiming that it is essential (e.g., Doppelt 2009; Zaino 1998). A third set of views holds that the appeal to self-respect is completely unnecessary to justify certain parts of JF, such as the liberty principle and its priority (R. S. Taylor 2014). Without engaging these debates, I think the strongest we can say in this regard is that the overall case for JF is weakened.

Second, another important implication is – perhaps surprisingly – a partial defense of Rawls's commitment to self-respect against a common objection. For if the argument in the second article is correct, it follows that the commitment to protect the social conditions for self-respect does not have repugnant consequences. It does not follow from this commitment, as several scholars have argued, that we should favor equality of wealth, "an illiberal form of

⁸ This is that "... other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities ..."
(Rawls 1999, 374).

extreme socialism” (Eyal 2005, 210). It does not constitute a deep flaw in the ethical foundations of Rawls’s theory (Zaino 1998), or a problem that must be fixed (Doppelt 2009). Everything else being equal, it is less of a problem that the commitment is superfluous (in the specific sense that I am contending) than that it has unacceptable implications. We can live with the former problem, but the latter gives stronger reasons for structural revisions of how the position is described. Especially if the commitment to protect the social conditions for self-respect has the high priority that some suggest it does due to the set-up of the position (e.g., Eyal 2005; Penny 2013; Zaino 1998; Shue 1975). Generalizing from Patrick Tomlin’s discussion of how Rawlsians could modify OP to avoid the closely related commitment to envy-avoidance (which Tomlin argues the parties hold), it seems fair to say that such a revision would be most troublesome. In short, Tomlin argues that it can only be done at an exorbitant cost in terms of basic theoretical desiderata (Tomlin 2008, 108–13).

The argument for envy-avoidance in the third article also provides a partial defense of Rawls’s commitment to self-respect against an objection. For even though Rawls officially rejects that the parties care about envy apart from in connection to stability, it seems to follow that they do from the commitment just mentioned. Several commentators consider envy-avoidance to be part of it, though to wit only Tomlin offers a thorough defense of this point (Tomlin 2008). Though the third article does not directly concern OP, it supplements Tomlin’s case on this score. Now, if the defense of envy-avoidance holds, then I have shown that Tomlin’s argument does not necessarily point to a problem with OP. It is not necessarily a repugnant feature of Rawls’s theory that the choice of principles is, in part, based on a desire to avoid envy – as some have argued (e.g., Walsh 1992).

Bringing these points together, we see that the implications of the dissertation for Rawls’s account are more constructive than they might appear to be at first glance. Though I criticize Rawls’s work, I also provide responses to other and more serious problems identified by his commentators.

2.3. Honneth and political theories of recognition

In addition to Rawls, this dissertation also takes up some ideas in Honneth’s theory of recognition. The first article uses Honneth as a representative of a version of the self-respect argument for basic liberties. The third defends envy-avoidance by connecting it to the less controversial and common commitment to protect the social bases of self-esteem, a

commitment which Honneth and others within the politics of recognition share (see next section). In effect, the dissertation engages Honneth's early theory of recognition, as he expresses it in *The Struggle for Recognition* (Honneth 1995) and in some of his subsequent works such as *Redistribution or Recognition* (Fraser and Honneth 2003). This phase of Honneth's authorship is characterized by a particular emphasis on the psychological conditions for living a good life that relate to self-respect and self-esteem, and how they depend on just institutions that secure recognition.

The following sections clarify and situate the part of Honneth's theory that this dissertation concerns. The final section discusses the implications of the arguments I make for Honneth's wider theory. However, (as with Rawls's account of self-respect) how these arguments differ from, and supplement other criticisms, is taken up in more detail later.

2.3.1. Political theories of recognition

To get a sense of Honneth's wider theory and this dissertation's relation to it, let us start by noting that Honneth's theory of justice can be described as a political theory of recognition. Political theories of recognition are here understood in accordance with Simon Thompson's definition:

“Political theories of recognition are a subspecies of all political theories. These particular theories contend that, although other ideas such as freedom, equality and community may have a role to play, it is the idea of recognition which holds the key to determining the nature of justice. The principal aim of such a theory, then, is to justify a set of political principles which are derived from a particular conception of recognition.” (Thompson 2006, 9).

In short, political theories of recognition are the subset of theories of justice that are centered on a conception of recognition. But why is recognition so important? A main reason is that it is a condition for having positive self-attitudes (Iser 2019). So, recognition has a key role in determining the nature of justice at least in part because of its importance to the self-relation and thus psychological health of the citizenry. This means that the connections between self-

respect and self-esteem and principles of justice are central to most political theories of recognition, including Honneth's.⁹

It is this idea in the politics of recognition that interests me, and which I concentrate on in my engagement of Honneth and others within this field. The most extensive modern work that has been done on the relationship between justice and self-respect is that of Honneth. He contends that justice is above all a matter of securing everyone the possibility of developing a healthy identity by securing the social conditions for mutual recognition: "The justice or well-being of a society is proportionate to its ability to secure conditions of mutual recognition under which personal identity-formation, hence individual self-realization, can proceed adequately." (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 174). In *The Struggle for Recognition*, an ideal society is a society with unlimited recognition, and which consequently is free from the pain that follows from misrecognition or the absence of recognition (Honneth 1995, chap. 8).

Though there are other works within the politics of recognition (e.g., Charles Taylor's (C. Taylor 1994)) that also have this focus, Honneth's theory is by far the most developed. I believe this provides a sufficient reason for concentrating largely on his account alongside Rawls's, though I also take up ideas from other political theories of recognition concerning the politics of esteem in the defense of envy-avoidance.

2.3.2. The ideas I discuss

According to Honneth, people are dependent on partaking in three forms of mutual recognition for a positive self-relation and thus self-realization/autonomy (Honneth uses these terms interchangeably). These forms are relations of "respect", "esteem" and "love". Each of these terms refer to specific modes of social interaction, where different aspects of the participants are recognized. (Honneth 1995, chap. 5; J. Anderson and Honneth 2005). I concentrate on Honneth's account of respect and esteem. Specifically: a) the self-respect argument for equal basic liberties and b) the commitment to protect relations of mutual esteem.

⁹ Nancy Fraser's theory – the "status model of recognition" – being an important exception (Fraser 2001).

a) My reading of Honneth's self-respect argument for basic liberties goes as follows. Self-respect, understood as a sense of having an equal moral status in virtue of being autonomous, is important to autonomy. Attaining and maintaining self-respect requires participation in relations of mutual respect characterized by a system of equal legal rights, including equal basic liberties. Therefore, we have a reason to favor such a system. The issue I have with this argument is with the claim that self-respect, at least the form that is a condition for autonomy, depends not only on partaking in mutual relations of respect, but that the necessary form of respect requires a system of equal basic liberties. This, I argue, is not plausible.

That said, my objection concerns the superiority of equal basic liberties to other reasonable conceptions of moral equality ("reasonable" meaning worthy of serious attention in contrast to caste systems, racist doctrines, feudal systems etc.). For example, that the success of the civil rights movement and the increasement in gender equality has had good effects on the self-respect of blacks and women (which is part of what Honneth tries to establish) is not questioned. What I do claim is that the self-respect argument does not give us a reason to favor one specific reasonable conception of moral equality e.g., epistocracy, utilitarianism etc. more than another. I return to this in section 5.3.

b) The basic idea in the commitment to protect relations of mutual esteem that I build upon in the defense of envy-avoidance is that everyone should have a reasonable chance of developing a healthy level of self-esteem (evaluative self-respect). To have self-esteem, on Honneth's account, means to view your own projects and traits as worthy of pursuit (Honneth 1995, 134, 137–38). The absence of self-esteem entails demoralization, a lack of ability to pursue your projects wholeheartedly (J. Anderson and Honneth 2005, 137–137). Therefore, there is a moral-political duty to combat stigma and invisibility of social contributions to protect citizens' self-esteem. This line of reasoning, I argue, extends to a commitment to minimize and compensate for certain occurrences of envy.

Before I consider the implications of my arguments, it is necessary to briefly clarify how the argument from self-respect connects with the rest of Honneth's theory. The next section examines how it is related to another argument, or theme, in Honneth's works: that to justify claims for recognition, we must appeal to norms of recognition and not feelings of misrecognition.

2.3.3. Internal and external conditions for autonomy

The various relations of mutual recognition are governed by different norms of recognition. Respect is governed by the norm of equality, esteem by the norm of achievement. These norms are Honneth's principles of justice: "... the content of what we call 'just' is measured here in each case by the different kinds of social relations among subjects ..." (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 181).

The norm of equality says that all persons are entitled to "equal respect for their dignity and autonomy as legal persons ..." (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 141). It demands that all persons are granted equal legal rights, including equal basic liberties. The norm of equality is grounded in an understanding of the moral status of persons and the corresponding moral obligations we have towards such beings. Honneth writes that in modern times, it is moral autonomy that is considered to be the "respect-worthy core of a person" (Honneth 1995, 119).

So, Honneth appears to give two arguments for equal legal rights. There was some discussion in the wake of *The Struggle for Recognition* over how the argument from self-respect and the argument from the norm of equality are related. Several commentators understood Honneth to have, roughly speaking, an instrumental view on the norms of recognition wherein they are ultimately justified because following them is conducive to people's self-relation (Laitinen 2002, 468–69; Kauppinen 2002, 492–93). Honneth answered that proper recognition should be understood as a correct response to evaluative traits such as autonomy. But he adds that recognition thus understood is also a condition for the development of these features, because it enables the corresponding self-relations (Honneth 2002, 510,516).

Here is how I understand Honneth's position. In a sense, the argument from self-respect for equal legal rights is simply a part of the argument from the norm of equality that requires recognition of our moral status as autonomous. Honneth's reasoning is that because humans are morally equal in virtue of being autonomous, we are entitled to recognition of our autonomy (the norm of equality). Proper recognition of people's autonomy requires securing the social conditions of autonomy. Self-respect is one precondition for autonomy. Therefore, persons are entitled to protection of their self-respect on the basis of the norm of equality. Moreover, protection from undue interference is also a precondition for autonomy. Equal legal rights are necessary both to protect self-respect and to avoid undue interference. Therefore, the norm of equality mandates equal legal rights for two reasons. In short, the

norm of equality mandates protection of both the external (absence of undue interference) and internal (self-respect) conditions of autonomy.¹⁰

In principle, one line of reasoning could work without the other. My claim, then, is that while the argument about the external conditions for autonomy might be plausible (indeed, I presuppose it in the argument based on a sense of competence, see section 5. in the first article), the contention that the liberty principle is necessary to secure self-respect, or at least the form that is a condition for autonomy, is not plausible. However, Honneth's account of moral progress adds some complications to this picture that are important to consider.

2.3.4. Moral progress

The core of the theory of moral progress are the two standards of individualization and inclusion. Individualization means, roughly, the number of evaluative features that are recognized. Inclusion means the relative amount of people that are included in the relation of recognition. These standards tell us which interpretations and ways of implementing the norms of recognition that constitute moral progress and which that constitute regress. "What can count as a rational or legitimate demand emerges from the possibility of understanding the consequences of implementing it as a gain in individuality or inclusion." (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 187). For example, with respect to the norm of equality, individualization means "materialization": increased sensitivity to what citizens need to make use of their basic liberties by an expansion of social rights (Honneth 1995, chap. 5). Inclusion means the number of people included in the class of subjects that are entitled to equal rights. The implementation of universal suffrage is an obvious example. Moral progress is understood as an increase in the level of individualization or inclusion (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 186).

The aforementioned complication is that one of the arguments for these standards is that norms that entail a higher degree of individualization and inclusion correspond to a higher sense of self-evaluation: "With every value that we can affirm by an act of recognition, our opportunities for identifying with our abilities and attaining greater autonomy grow." (Honneth 2007b, 334). This argument shows that part of the case for the two standards of

¹⁰ As I quote in the first article, "... on the recognitional approach, guaranteeing rights does not ensure autonomy only directly (in the negative sense of blocking interference) but also supports autonomy *via* the support for self-respect" (J. Anderson and Honneth 2005, 133 emphasis in original).

moral progress depends on that moral progress thus understood corresponds to psychologically superior self-relations. The first article questions that the form of self-respect that corresponds to the liberty principle is more valuable in terms of autonomy or welfare than, say, the form that corresponds to utilitarianism or epistocracy.

2.3.5. Implications

What is the implication of the criticism of the self-respect argument for equal basic liberties? It is difficult to say exactly how important this argument is for Honneth's overall case.

Christopher F. Zurn suggests that Honneth's authorship is marked by a tension between 1) a recourse to a historical line of reasoning where the norms of recognition are affirmed by the fact that they are, in a sense, built into social life. And 2) appeals to universal recognitional needs related to self-respect etc. to justify the norms of recognition (Zurn 2000, 2015, 207–8). It is worth mentioning that Honneth, in his later works such as *Freedom's Right* (Honneth 2015), emphasizes the historical line of reasoning. The first article gives an additional reason for this move by criticizing the latter line of reasoning.

It is worth briefly relating the objection to the self-respect argument to other and more common complaints about Honneth's theory. Several authors doubt the force of Honneth's arguments for the two standards of moral progress, and the arguments for the value of modern self-respect. Specifically, they criticize Honneth's attempt to ground the theory of moral progress on a reading of modern history and an account of hurt feelings wherein they evidence violations of norms of recognition, and an interest in inclusion and individualization (Honneth 1995, chaps. 4–6). The trouble, they argue, is that the historical and anthropological evidence that Honneth gives for the two standards of moral progress seem to be compatible with a wide range of normative ideals. Thompson, referencing several others, notes that hurt feelings can be taken to evidence a variety of interests and not just the interest in the modern norms of recognition (Thompson 2006, 172–76). Zurn notes that we can arguably read a general tendency towards individualization and inclusion, and more specifically social democracy, in modern history. Yet, we can also read modern history as being directed towards libertarianism etc. (Zurn 2015, 195–200). The historical evidence does not clearly support one reading more than another according to Zurn. In short, much of the evidence that Honneth provides underdetermines the view of moral progress and even the specifically modern norms of recognition.

In short, others mostly appear to criticize Honneth's historical line of reasoning and his account of hurt feelings to ground the modern norms of recognition. What I raise doubts about is the strength of the argument that these norms correspond to self-relations that are superior in terms of autonomy when it comes to justifying a specific and reasonable interpretation of moral equality.

I turn now to the implications of the defense of envy-avoidance in the third article. I argue that Honnethians and other proponents of the commitment to secure the social basis of self-esteem should care about envy too. The matter of envy is arguably a blind spot in political theories of recognition (but see Thompson and Hogget 2011; Bankovsky 2012, chaps. 3, 6, 2018), but mostly in the sense that it is undertheorized. Some of the practical implications of my defense of envy-avoidance are considered in chapter 5 and 6. I believe it could be worthwhile to explore how (and if) morally relevant occurrences of envy can be explained in terms of deficits in social relations of recognition, which is how Honneth understands injustice in general. It is such deficits that motivate struggles for moral progress (individualization and inclusion) (Honneth 1995, chap. 5; Fraser and Honneth 2003, 136–37).

2.4. The dialogical thesis

That humans have a need for recognition is a supposition that runs through all the articles. Following Charles Taylor, who I believe has the classical formulation, we can refer to this as “the dialogical thesis”:

“The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.” (C. Taylor 1994, 25 emphasis in original).

This idea is strongly associated with Hegel, Fichte, etc. However, I do not assume some specific Hegelian view on recognition (which, say, Honneth does). The articles do not discuss directly whether this thesis is true, or its exact meaning or grounds. Rather, like Rawls, I take it as a commonsense fact – or at least assume it for the sake of the argument. However, why humans need recognition, in what sense and how fundamental and important this need is, are important questions in this context. They bear on the social bases of self-respect and our

duties to secure them. This section gives an account of some main positions on this issue and clarifies my stance. I shall also briefly discuss some critical perspectives on this thesis.

2.4.1. Meaning and grounds

Why and in what sense do our self-attitudes depend on recognition? Arto Laitinen notes that there are two main explanations.¹¹ One explanation is that we have a need for feedback, which constitutes a form of recognition, for “non-illusory self-realisation” (Laitinen 2015, 72). The perspectives of others have normative authority in the sense that they give us *reasons* for having, or not having, specific self-attitudes. This is because no one can be the sole judge of his or her merit or worth. Therefore, as I interpret it, feedback from others is necessary for having *warranted* self-attitudes (e.g., Margalit 1994).

Another explanation is that recognition is a necessary, or close to it, condition for having positive self-attitudes as a matter of empirical fact (Laitinen 2015, 72; Kauppinen 2011, 266–68). At least some forms of recognition and misrecognition will affect our self-attitudes whether it warrants it or not simply in virtue of our human nature. In some cases, we just cannot help it, or it might be particularly hard to resist internalizing the gaze of others even though we have no normative reasons to care and indeed plenty of reasons not to. This is the explanation that Rawls, on the face of it, offers. He simply notes that “...our self-respect normally depends upon the respect of others. Unless we feel that our endeavors are respected by them, it is difficult if not impossible for us to maintain the conviction that our ends are worth advancing ...” (Rawls 1999, 154). Honneth also subscribes to this view, though his argument for the dialogical thesis relies on a wide array of normative, conceptual, and empirical considerations (Honneth 1995, chap. 5; J. Anderson and Honneth 2005; Fraser and Honneth 2003, 246).

Since I draw on and discuss Honneth’s and Rawls’s theories, this dissertation too understands the dialogical thesis in empirical terms – as an empirical claim about human nature. The implication is that it is not sufficient that recognition, or other social bases of self-respect, rationally warrants positive self-attitudes. It must also, as a matter of fact, support them. However, empirical support is not sufficient either. Some constraints on the relevant kinds of

¹¹ Laitinen concentrates on explaining the need for esteem (evaluative respect) as opposed to recognition respect. I take a more general perspective in this section.

support are appropriate since, as I shall return to in the next chapter about methodology, we design principles for informed, rational, and reasonable persons. As Rawls explains, certain ways of dealing with, say, the problem of envy, is closed to a liberal and well-ordered society. We cannot support people's self-worth by promulgating false beliefs, for example (Rawls 1999, 480). This much surely holds not just for a Rawlsian but for any reasonable theory of justice.

2.4.2. Critical perspectives

Critical perspectives on the significance of the dialogical thesis for a theory of justice often derive from a loosely stoic hold. To understand this criticism, we can start by noting that normal adults obviously have some control over which forms of (mis)recognition that matter to them (or not). It is not the case that misrecognition, or the lack of recognition, is always damaging to one's identity. The stoic position is that we should live and think in such a way that how others value us, as such, affects us as little as possible. For there is never a reason to care about the mere fact that you are recognized or misrecognized. It does not warrant any changes in your self-attitudes that someone affirms or denies them per se. To take an example of this criticism, Colin Bird criticizes Avishai Margalit's case for the need for recognition for failing to show why the rival stoic position is mistaken (Bird 2010; Margalit 1994). The stoic also holds that not caring about recognition or misrecognition is, at least in principle, possible for humans.¹²

In a similar vein, Christian Schemmel argues that one of the things that makes self-respect valuable is that it is robust: not fully dependent on adequate recognition (Schemmel 2018). To be fair, neither Schemmel nor Bird holds that the empirical difficulty of resisting the effects of misrecognition is irrelevant from the perspective of justice. Their arguments bear, however, on where we should draw the line between personal and social responsibility for self-respect. I take the idea to be that everything else being equal, a burden, such as a blow to self-esteem, that is rooted in irrationality or moral weakness count for less from the perspective of justice (Bird 2010, 19).

¹² "Stoics ... argue that, in principle, agents always retain ultimate control over their own self-respect ... it is always possible to resist outside assaults on one's worth." (Bird 2010, 19).

Morgan Knapp's argument that envy is unfitting – which I discuss in the defense of envy-avoidance – also connects with this loosely stoic criticism, though he does not couch his case in stoic terms (Knapp 2014). To see this, we first need a rough understanding of fittingness. “It is commonly assumed that emotions ... involve a way of taking the circumstances – a thought, construal, appraisal, or perception of circumstances – which can then be assessed for accuracy.” (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 51). Briefly put, an emotion is fitting to the extent that it is accurate. For example, fear of x is fitting to the extent that x is dangerous. Knapp argues that it is not fitting to take things that are not within your control to reflect negatively or positively on your worth such as we do when we are envious (see section 4.5.). This would, in a sense, be inaccurate: things that are not within your control do not really reflect on your worth. Knapp's case echoes a main motive in stoicism: what we have reasons to value and care about is first and foremost that which is under our control, our own agency (Bird 2010, 35). This relates to the stoic belief that all emotions are unfitting. As Justin D’Arms and Alison Duncan Kerr formulate it, the critique is “roughly” that: “... emotions are unfitting because emotions involve judging various worldly things to matter that do not really matter.” (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 52). What we should care about is our agency, *will*.

The third article addresses parts of this criticism by considering which ideals of self-esteem (evaluative self-respect) it is reasonable to impose on the citizenry. I argue that even though it might be possible, it is not reasonable to demand that people base their self-esteem only on things they have control over. Even if an attitude is not fully fitting, there may be other grounds for having it that make it rational, or rational enough, all-things-considered.

3. Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to explain, to some extent defend, and situate in the literature some of the more critical parts of the methodological framework of the dissertation. I shall concentrate mainly on the general methodological relationship between empirical facts on the one hand and normative and conceptual considerations on the other. The chapter begins with relating this dissertation to the broadly Rawlsian framework of wide reflective equilibrium and the basic relationship between facts and ideals in this method. Next, I explain the methodological aspects of the dissertation that relate to the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory. This should further clarify the place of empirical facts in this dissertation, and how such facts may bear on my arguments. Following that, I account for some of the works on envy under non-ideal methodological assumptions and explain how this dissertation complements them.

3.1. Facts and ideals in wide reflective equilibrium

This section explains some of the underlying methodology of the dissertation that relates to the broadly Rawlsian method of wide reflective equilibrium, with a particular emphasis on how empirical facts figure in this framework. The dissertation conforms to this methodology, and my purpose here is mainly to explain how.

That a theory is in a wide reflective equilibrium means that there is a coherence between three elements: 1) intuitions, also called “considered moral judgements”, 2) What Norman Daniels calls “background theories” about justice (Daniels 1979, 258–64). An example is Rawls’s conception of persons as free and equal (Rawls 1993, 29–35). And 3) principles of justice. What distinguishes wide from narrow reflective equilibrium is that the latter is only a coherence between principles and intuitions (Daniels 1979, 258).

The method of wide reflective equilibrium is to strive for a coherence between these elements, a coherence which in turn justifies the theory as a whole. “A conception of justice cannot be deduced from self-evident premises or conditions on principles; instead, its justification is a matter of the mutual support of many considerations, of everything fitting together into one coherent view” (Rawls 1999, 19). Following Daniels and Rawls, the coherence we are looking for is that the principles must be both consistent with our intuitions

and at the same time supported by the background theories. A theory is in wide reflective equilibrium when this coherence obtains.

Let us briefly consider Rawls's theory as an example. The original position can be seen as an "expository device" (Rawls 1999, 19) which represents relevant background theories about justice, such as the idea of rationality, reasonability, society as a fair system of cooperation between free and equal persons etc. Its purpose is to connect and clarify these ideas in a way that makes it evident which principles of justice they support. The justification of the principles that the position yields is a matter both of how plausible these background theories are, and of whether the principles match our considered moral judgements. Thus, in justifying the principles we work "back and forth, sometimes altering the [description of the position], at others withdrawing our judgements and conforming them to principle ..." (Rawls 1999, 18). This process stops when we have reached a coherence.

There is much more to be said about the method of wide reflective equilibrium.¹³ I shall concentrate, however, on how factual claims such as the thesis that humans need recognition to attain and maintain positive self-attitudes figure in the various stages of justification within this broadly Rawlsian methodology. This should serve as a first step towards clarifying a critical part of the dissertation's methodology – the place of empirical facts – which I also take up in the next section and in chapter 6.

An important feature of the original position is that the parties know all general facts about the world (Rawls 1999, 119, 137–39). They must have knowledge about the general laws of human nature, general facts about the workings of social life and so forth. The parties' reasoning crucially depends on the knowledge of such facts in two main ways. First, they need this knowledge to give an account of the needs of citizens: what people need to satisfy their interests considered as citizens (Rawls 1993, 307–8). Specifically, without knowledge about human nature, the parties have little grounds for specifying the list of primary goods – the goods that are normally essential to realize the ideal of personhood, i.e., the higher-order interests.¹⁴ That the goods are "normally essential" arguably means normally essential given

¹³ See (Rawls 1999, 15–19, 2001, 29–32) for how Rawls interprets it.

¹⁴ These interests are the interest in developing and exercising our moral powers of rationality and reasonability respectively, and the interest we have in pursuing our conception of the good (Rawls 1993, 74).

human beings as they are, however reasonable and rational. Social recognition, for example, is part of the primary good of the social bases of self-respect since, as a matter of fact about human nature, humans rely on recognition to attain self-respect and since self-respect is important to our higher-order interests.

This means that also the moral case for the choice of principles is partly based on empirical facts. In Rawls's specific framework, this is because the justification of this choice is that the selected principles, all-things-considered, would do the best job of securing our interests in a fair way (Rawls 1993, 73–75). Second, the case for feasibility is also in part based on empirical facts such as the dialogical thesis. According to Rawls, a theory of social justice must be feasible in the sense that we can have a warranted realistic hope of realizing it, and to expect that the prescribed state of affairs would be stable over time (Rawls 2001, 184–85). Indeed, he describes JF as “realistically utopian” (Rawls 2001, 4). According to Rawls, JF is feasible in part because it secures a congruence between the good and the right. This, in turn, is partly because it secures the social bases of self-respect (Rawls 1999, 464–80, 496–97, 508).

Factual claims such as the dialogical thesis are in this way part of the entire argument from OP, and more generally the Rawlsian method of wide reflective equilibrium. They inform the background theories of justice such as the account of primary goods, and thus indirectly the choice of principles and the justification of their feasibility. However, notwithstanding this important role, such facts about human nature do not *determine* the theory of justice – at least not on Rawls's view (Rawls 1993, 87, 1999, 138). Methodologically speaking, the theory is only constrained and informed by empirical facts and not determined by them. It should be clear that the stages of justification considered also include normative premises. How strict these constraints are, is partly a methodological question and partly a substantive question about the current knowledge in the human sciences. Rawls's view is that human nature is “permissive”.¹⁵ I return to this issue in chapter 6.

¹⁵ “Human nature and its natural psychology are permissive: they may limit the viable conceptions of persons and ideals of citizenship, and the moral psychologies that may support them, but do not dictate the ones we must adopt. That is the answer to the objection that [Justice as Fairness] is unscientific.” (Rawls, 1993, 87).

As previously mentioned, the dissertation conforms to this broadly Rawlsian methodology. Importantly, it concentrates on how background theories concerning self-respect, which are partly based on facts, figure in the specifically moral stage of justification. We can associate this stage with ideal theory, which takes us to the next section.

3.2. Ideal and non-ideal theory: moral desirability and feasibility

Another aspect of the dissertation's methodology that is worth investigating is how it relates to the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory. The articles generally follow the ideal theoretical methodology. My intent here is to clarify this aspect of the dissertation, to some extent defend it, and situate it in the literature. Let us begin with a brief examination of this distinction. Though it has been carved up in several ways, I believe Laura Valentini's analysis of the distinction and the corresponding debates, provides a suitable starting point for my purposes (Valentini 2012). On her analysis, the difference can be understood in three analytically distinct ways, although there are substantive overlaps:

1. Realistic/utopian theory.
2. Partial/full compliance theory.
3. Transitional/end-state theory.

The first distinction concerns which feasibility constraints we place on our theorizing. This is a matter of degrees. At the realistic end, we find relatively pragmatic and practically oriented modes of theorizing that only consider policies and principles that have a good chance of being implemented. Utopian theories operate under fewer or less demanding constraints than realistic theories. Some authors operate with no feasibility constraints. Their accounts might be described as fully utopian (e.g., G. A. Cohen 2003) (Valentini 2012, 656–57).

The distinction between partial and full compliance theory concerns the assumptions we make about whether people comply with the demands of justice and about whether it is possible to realize justice. As Valentini puts it, drawing on Rawls:

“In this context, ‘ideal theory’ stands for theory designed under two assumptions: (i) all relevant agents comply with the demands of justice applying to them; and (ii) natural and historical conditions are favourable – i.e., society is sufficiently economically and socially developed to realize justice (Rawls 1999a: 8, 215 1999b: 4–6). ‘Non-ideal theory’ corresponds to the negation of (i) and/or (ii).” (Valentini 2012, 655).

Full compliance theory seeks to answer, for example, what you should do if everyone else does their part too and partial compliance theory what you should do if this is not the case (think of poverty, global warming). The third distinction is between theories that seek to answer the question of what we should aim towards – what a fully just society would look like (the end-state) – and theories that seek to answer how we should get there (how we should transition from the current state of affairs to the end-state). Transitional theory concerns such things as feasibility constraints on which changes that we should focus on at the moment and moral constraints on how we can work towards the end-state. (Valentini 2012, 660–62).

This dissertation falls mostly on the ideal side with respect to each of these distinctions. It generally assumes full compliance, it theorizes the end-state (or the arguments in this debate) and it is relatively utopian. This is clearest in the second article where I examine the role considerations of self-respect have in justifying the choice of basic principles in Rawls's OP. For when the parties consider this choice, they assume full compliance, that justice is possible to realize, and the choice concerns the principles that would regulate a fully just society (the end-state) (Rawls 1999, 7–8, 215). The third article is also a work within ideal theory since it defends envy-avoidance as an ideal of the distribution of social goods in a fully just society. That said, it also argues for one prescription that falls within partial compliance theory, namely that crime (non-compliance) motivated by (morally relevant) envy should be punished more mildly. The methodological choices in the first article that connect to the ideal/non-ideal distinction are more implicit, but that article too concerns ideal theory.

I turn now to the general motivation of these methodological choices. Let us first note that the relative merits of ideal and non-ideal theory are a highly contested topic with sharp fronts. Central contributions in this debate include Amartya Sen's criticism of Rawls where he rejects Rawls's claim that ideal theory, in the sense of end-state theorizing, has priority over non-ideal theory understood as transitional theory, and John A. Simmons's response to this criticism where he defends Rawls (Sen 2006; Simmons 2010; Rawls 1999, 215–16). This debate turns on whether and to what extent we need an account of the end-state to give an account of which changes we should focus on here and now. Another contribution is Joseph H. Carens's defense of ideal theory in the sense of prescriptions that are unlikely to be followed (utopian theory) (Carens 1996). To explain some of my motivation for working within ideal theory, it is useful to start with an observation from Valentini. According to her,

the conflict between realistic and utopian theory is exaggerated. This is because, strictly speaking, the two modes of theorizing tackle different questions:

“Realists and Rawlsian liberals are not in disagreement about how to answer the same question. Rather, they seem to be more aptly seen as answering different questions.”
(Valentini 2012, 660).

Generalizing from Valentini’s observation, the methodological choices pertaining to ideal/non-ideal theory mostly inform the choice of the overall questions that the articles attempt to answer – *what* I seek to answer – and not *how* I attempt to answer them within the articles. The assumption of full compliance etc. is already entailed in most of the questions that the articles seek to answer. Again, this is clearest in the case of the second article. Since I examine the choice of basic principles in OP, the ideal theoretical assumptions are part of the question rather than the way in which I answer it.

It remains to be explained why I have chosen to take up issues within ideal theory rather than non-ideal theory. Saying that the two modes of theorizing largely answer different questions does not so much involve a dissolution of the current debate as a reformulation: which questions should political philosophy attempt to answer? Which questions are most important? As Valentini notes, there are other issues too, such as the matter of whether end-state theory has priority over transitional theory, as Rawls claims (Valentini 2012, 660–62).

I do not wish to take a specific stance regarding which lines of inquiry that are most important, whether Sen’s criticism of Rawls is convincing etc. What I shall maintain regarding these overall questions is instead the weaker claim that both forms of theorizing are, in general, worth doing and that they in important ways can complement each other (Carens 1996; Valentini 2012, 655, 660–62). Furthermore, at least when it comes to *defending* the place of envy in a theory of justice, I believe the most important contributions to be made are at the level of ideal theory. For earlier works defending the place of envy are mostly within non-ideal theory. One aim of the third article is to complement these earlier works. The next section elaborates on this motivation by examining Miriam Bankovsky’s and Harrison P. Frye’s works about envy under non-ideal circumstances.

It is worthwhile to further clarify the methodological aspect of the dissertation that relates to the distinction between realistic/utopian theory. This will complement and make more

complete the analysis of how factual claims figure in the broader framework of wide reflective equilibrium. It will also shed light on a limitation on my overall argument.

The articles discuss various kinds of self-respect based arguments for preferring specific principles of justice. Most of them fall under the moral stage of justification of end-state principles (see section 2.2.2). This means that they are arguments for the moral desirability of the well-ordered societies (end-states) that correspond to these principles. In short, a well-ordered society is one where ideal circumstances apply: the citizens accept and comply with the conception of justice in question, this conception is fully realized, and the citizens are normally rational and reasonable (Rawls 2001, 8–9).

This should clarify some of the empirical assumptions underlying most of the arguments I discuss and make about how well different principles of justice support self-respect. They assume, for example, that citizens are normally rational, reasonable and that they accept the principles in question. This is important since, for example, if being subject to some principle of justice is experienced as disrespectful or not arguably depends on whether we think it is just.

In the check for stability, we examine whether the well-ordered society that corresponds to the conception that we have chosen in the moral stage of justification is feasible. According to Rawls, the end-state must be possible to realize, and when realized stable over time and for the right reasons (Rawls 2001, 184–86). Importantly, the two stages of justification are distinct. The cogency of the moral case for principles of justice does not depend on facts about their feasibility (Rawls 1999, 441). Therefore, we can associate this stage with utopian theory. For example, I argue that if the parties in OP think that utilitarianism is the best choice, from a moral point of view, apart from considerations of self-respect as such, then they would also think that the well-ordered society that corresponds to utilitarianism offers the best support to self-respect. The plausibility of this argument does not hinge on the assumption that this well-ordered society is feasible. Suppose utilitarianism is not feasible, i.e., that it does not pass the check for stability. A possible objection, then, would not be that the argument fails. It would rather be of a kind that is often raised against utopian theory in general: it has no practical import (Valentini 2012, 658–59).

However, this does not mean that issues of feasibility do not bear on my more overall negative point about various kinds of self-respect based arguments. For the overall justification of a theory of justice is arguably a matter both of its moral desirability and feasibility. If a theory of justice does not pass the check for stability we must return to the moral stage and choose another alternative according to Rawls (Rawls 1999, 465). This means that self-respect could have an important justificatory role in virtue of explaining the feasibility of various end-states even if it does not have a role in grounding their moral desirability (e.g., Zink 2011; Thomas E. 2014). Though I believe such self-respect based arguments for feasibility per se are mostly covered in my discussion since most of them seem to presuppose those arguments I do discuss, there are some remaining possibilities that I return to in chapter 6.

What about the positive point of the dissertation? The ideal of envy-avoidance might be impossible to fully realize. A society completely free from envy, or just the specific occurrences of envy that I defend as morally relevant, might very well be unrealistic. The extent to which we can realize it obviously depends on what it requires. I consider some of the practical implications of envy-avoidance in chapter 5 and 6. Importantly, I defend envy-avoidance as but one ideal of social justice (albeit a significant one). So, I am not, in any case, arguing that complete envy-avoidance is necessarily just all-things-considered. Regarding the argument from a sense of competence for the liberty principle, I do not think realizing this principle is very unrealistic. It has already been achieved more or less in several societies.

3.3. Envy under non-ideal circumstances

This section sketches the works of Bankovsky and Frye on envy under non-ideal circumstances. One purpose is to illustrate Valentini's point that ideal and non-ideal theory largely answer different questions. I will show that there is no conflict associated with that distinction between my third article (which is a work within ideal theory) about how envy relates to justice, and Bankovsky's and Frye's works on the same overall subject but under non-ideal assumptions. These works do not offer contrary answers to how we should approach one and the same object but are better seen as being engaged in slightly different lines of inquiry. I will also show how my work within ideal theory nevertheless contributes to

the *overall* literature on justice, self-esteem, and envy by complementing them. That is my second purpose here.

I shall concentrate mostly on Bankovsky (Bankovsky 2012, chap. 3,6) who, to wit, has the most developed account of envy under non-ideal circumstances. Bankovsky provides an ingenious critique of Rawls's account of envy and non-ideal theory. She argues that Rawls's theory, because it neglects how envy and resentment (a sense of injustice) – albeit distinct feelings – are empirically interwoven, lends itself to a view of envy driven riots as mere criminality. This is problematic, according to Bankovsky, because under conditions of permanent injustice with no feasible way forward proper resentment oriented toward fairness may very well develop into antisocial envy (Bankovsky 2012, 94–94, 169–73). By calling it “antisocial” Bankovsky means to highlight that envy is not directed towards mutual advantage, as resentment is on her reading, but rather to alleviate feelings of inferiority in problematic ways (see section 4.6).

This transformation of resentment into envy might happen because conditions of permanent injustice and political impotence distorts the development of a sense of justice (Bankovsky 2012, 94–95). Marginalized groups may internalize the expectations of the dominant majority, attaining a distorted self-image as inferior which prevents them from forming clear convictions about the moral wrongness of their situation. In that case, they would no longer feel resentment, at least not clearly. However, because they feel inferior, they engage in antisocial behavior such as violence and crimes (Bankovsky 2012, 166, 170).

Bankovsky derives two main points from this causal story of how envy can develop under unjust circumstances. First, when caused by unjust circumstances envy is a politically relevant harm. Society bears responsibility for it. This is important to partial-compliance theory regarding permissible disobedience of the law and the punishment of envious rioters that belong to permanent economic minorities. Because of the very real possibility of permanent and politically impotent socio-economic minorities, the notion of morally permissible disobedience must be expanded. Furthermore, this should be reflected in more lenient punishment of rioters that belong to such minorities. (Bankovsky 2012, 84, 94–95).

Second, this is important methodologically regarding how we should think of envious actions and individuals in relation to moral progress and learning. We should always try to perfect

our account of justice and how it can be realized in a constitution. Rawls, at least in *PL*, agrees with this view. Very briefly, Rawls emphasizes that the shared set of considered moral judgements and ideals that ought to inform the account of justice is historically contingent. New considered and settled judgements arise as circumstances change, and this normally involves moral progress. Social protests driven by resentment has an important role in this process to the extent that they bring new moral judgements and ideas to the public's attention. (Rawls 1993, 400–402). Riots and other criminality driven by envy, however, do not have this positive role on Rawls's view – according to Bankovsky. Protests must have a clear moral goal based on the shared political culture. If they do not, then Rawls's theory lends itself to the view that they amount to mere criminality (Bankovsky 2012, 169–73).

Bankovsky's second point, as I read her, is that we have a duty to consider not merely the explicit moral claims of protesters and rioters; we also have a duty to examine cases of seemingly amoral sentiments such as envy. "The important point ... is that, against Rawls, the basis of the feeling can still be traced to a moral experience of unfair disadvantage which is relevant to the project of justice." (Bankovsky 2012, 94). We should try to uncover the moral experiences that may be their root cause, not condemn them out of hand as mere criminality just because we are not already aware of reasons to think that their circumstances are unjust. Frye provides a similar argument for the usefulness of envy under non-ideal circumstances. He notes that envy may trigger moral reflection, both in oneself and in others (Frye 2016, 522–23). To generalize, envy is important in the context of discovery.

Frye also shows how envy is relevant to transitional theory. Recall that transitional theory, roughly speaking, concerns how we can and should get from a less just to a more just state of affairs. It concerns such things as feasibility constraints on which changes that we should focus on at the moment and moral constraints on the kinds of actions that could lead to more justice. Frye argues that envy can be useful to bringing about a more just state of affairs. One reason is that it triggers reflection, as just mentioned. In addition, envy can also provide an extra motivation to fight against unjust inequalities. On this basis, Frye suggests that appealing to and cultivating envy can be permissible when doing so is useful to level such inequalities. In sum, he argues that envy may be useful in motivating action against injustice by supplementing resentment as a source of motivation and by triggering reflection (Frye 2016, 503).

The works of Bankovsky and Frye convincingly show how envy can be useful under unjust circumstances by triggering moral reflection and by providing an extra motivation to fight for a more just state of affairs.¹⁶ Bankovsky also makes a plausible case for a collective duty to acknowledge that our (inevitably) imperfect institutions will generate envy (or at least warrant it) and take responsibility for this fact by a) letting such sentiments inform our continuous attempt to perfect our conception of justice, and b) by being sensitive to this in relation to partial compliance theory (criminality) (Bankovsky 2012, 84, 94–95).

It should be stressed that the arguments just considered concern the context of discovery, and the justification of non-ideal principles. Bankovsky provides a valuable criticism of Rawls's non-ideal theory and account of moral learning, but it does not quite bear on the context of justification in ideal theory. Specifically, I do not see how it provides a reason for thinking that any specific account of the end-state is valid. This is a different question. Indeed, Frye explicitly rejects that envy is relevant in the justification of ideal theory – on this point there is a conflict with my work (Frye 2016, 509–16). By contrast, the third article argues that one important desideratum that a distributive scheme should satisfy is envy-avoidance, i.e., prevent and compensate for envious sentiments, although there are certain qualifications. It thereby contributes to a more complete discussion of the relationship between envy and justice.

It should also be mentioned that the arguments about envy that bear on non-ideal principles largely assume agreement on ideal theory. Frye and Bankovsky both address Rawlsian justice. Their arguments have less bearing on those that do not share this view of the ideal end-state. Libertarians such as Robert Nozick would reject, for example, that redistribution is a legitimate goal and thus reject the notion that envy is valuable to the extent that it helps bring that goal about. To be clear, this is not a criticism of their works but rather a clarificatory point about what it amounts to on my reading. The defense of envy-avoidance in the third article has a broader scope in a certain sense. It applies, at the very least, to everyone that accepts some version of the commitment that a distributive arrangement should protect

¹⁶ It is worth mentioning that we find similar claims in Honneth's account of struggles for recognition regarding hurt feelings in general (which Bankovsky notes) (Honneth 1995, chap. 6, 2007a, 2007c).

the social bases of self-esteem. It applies, for example, to Nozick who seems to share this commitment (Nozick 1974, 232–46).

4 Key Terms

This chapter concerns some of the most central terms used and discussed in the articles. It explains and to some extent defends the specific conceptions I operate with and situates them within the wider literature. It is worth noting at the outset that respect and self-respect, for example, are highly contested concepts, and that this dissertation does not say anything new about them. Instead, it follows a common practice of making a distinction between two kinds, largely drawing on Stephen L. Darwall (Darwall 1995) and Robin S. Dillon (Dillon 1992). The motivation for this distinction is merely to simplify the discussion. It should not be read as an endorsement of Darwall's or anyone else's specific analyses. In other words, the conceptions I operate with are working accounts tailored to my specific purposes. Therefore, I will defend my choice of definitions as appropriate in this sense, and not as the best accounts of the nature of self-respect etc. for all purposes. In a sense, then, this chapter gives an account of my analytical framework.

Before examining the terms, I should mention a potential drawback to this approach to the definitions that I use. By essentially defining the terms in the way that is most useful to me, I risk that the argument(s) does not match common interpretations of these terms. I accept this as a potential limitation. That said, I do believe my *conceptions* (specifications) of the overall (vague and indeterminate) *concepts* of self-respect/esteem and envy (List and Valentini 2016, 9) are reasonably close to common accounts of their nature. The following sections should make that clear. I do not believe anything important in my basic arguments relies on the specific definitions.

4.1. Recognition

“Recognition” is one of the more basic terms that runs through the articles. This section explains what it means in my articles and briefly situates this meaning within the literature. I do not have a very specific definition of recognition, but on my usage, it has two features. a) It involves a positive affirmation or signaling of the subject's worth. b) There are several types of recognition, distinguished on the basis of which aspect and value of the subject it is directed against. The articles discuss how various principles of justice can convey recognition, and which kinds.

This much coheres with how recognition is commonly defined in the literature on recognition, especially in political theories of recognition (Honneth 2002, 505–6, 2007b; Laitinen 2002; Honneth 1995, chap. 5; Iser 2019, sec. 1).¹⁷ I divide the types of recognition that I concentrate on into two kinds of respect:

1. Recognition (self)respect. I also call accounts of recognition self-respect “personhood accounts” of self-respect.
2. Evaluative (self)respect, which I also call “(self)esteem” in the third article.

These terms are broad, and thus allow the arguments to have a broad scope, but they do not cover everything that has been argued fall under the concept of recognition or (self)respect. For example, they do not cover love which is one subtype of recognition on Honneth’s account. Love, and the corresponding self-attitude, is not considered in this dissertation. Nor do they cover what Dillon terms “basal self-respect” (I return to this in section 4.4). Before getting into the conceptions of (self)respect/esteem I use, it is worthwhile to start, in the next section, with some overall remarks about the concept of respect and self-respect.

4.2. Respect and esteem – overall remarks

Respect is a controversial notion that has been carved up in many ways. Whereas some consider it to be one unified thing, others distinguish between different types or concepts (e.g., Dillon 1995; Darwall 1995). In her review of the literature on self-respect in particular (Dillon 1995, 18–21), Dillon notes that it is typically considered to involve an objective moral valuation of the self, and that this valuing stance has been characterized in two broad ways. One line of characterization stresses that self-respect involves properly acknowledging the *importance* of being a person (or someone with a particular status) – however “person” is specified. This importance is something we must consider in our thinking and actions. Here self-respect is essentially a matter of understanding and following duties of self-respect. We might say that it is a person’s dignity that is respected on this line of reasoning. Another line characterizes self-respect as being directed towards the *quality* of our character and actions to the extent that they bear on our character. It involves a positive evaluation. As Dillon notes, this distinction connects to the kind of worth that is respected:

¹⁷ Honneth and Laitinen give more comprehensive accounts.

“... however the self as object is conceived, respect for oneself is generally regarded as the appreciation of one or the other of two kinds of worth: a kind of worth that is unearned, invariable, and inalienable, often called ‘dignity’, and a kind of worth that individuals earn more or less of and that is subject to diminishment and loss as well as enhancement, which may be called ‘merit’.” (Dillon 1995, 21).

Dillon goes on to explain how some understand self-respect in accordance with only one of these characterizations, others that they relate to different types, some that they belong together in a unified whole and some explains the notion in a way that does not correspond to them (Dillon 1995, 18–19). One debated issue is whether evaluative forms of valuing fall exclusively under the concept of esteem (as on Honneth’s account), or if it makes sense to speak of an evaluative form of respect (as on Darwall and Dillon’s accounts). In the latter case, the grounds for esteem are typically considered to be broader than those that are morally relevant and/or relate to your character, the latter falling under respect (Dillon 1995, 18-19,30-31). This dissertation makes much use of the distinction between non-evaluative and evaluative forms of valuation. It is reflected in my choice of terms: recognition (self)respect pertains to the first line of characterization, evaluative (self)respect – which I also call esteem – to the second.

4.2.1. Recognition (self)respect

Two of the central terms in this dissertation are “recognition self-respect” and “personhood accounts” of self-respect. Personhood accounts of self-respect are simply accounts of recognition self-respect and are used to denote self-respect for the fact that you are a person. For the sake of simplicity, I will henceforth only use the word “recognition (self)respect” in this and the following chapters that precede the articles. I largely follow Darwall’s analysis of how this form of respect is to be understood.

What I call “recognition (self)respect” is the same as what Darwall calls “recognition (self)respect for persons as persons” (Darwall 1995, 183). To have recognition respect for a person is to be dispositioned to pay proper consideration to the fact that you are dealing with a person when you are deliberating about what to do. Specifically, it is to regard this fact as placing moral constraints on your actions. “Recognition respect for persons ... is identical with respect for the moral requirements that are placed on one by the existence of other persons.” (Darwall 1995, 191). Such respect is directed at those qualities that are common to

all persons and which constitute their personhood. This is the kind of respect that is owed equally to all persons simply because they are persons. It does not admit of gradation because personhood does not come in degrees. Which qualities that are respected, and what respecting them amounts to, depends, of course, on our particular conception of personhood and our idea about what respect for persons requires of us. (Darwall 1995, 183, 185, 191).¹⁸

To have recognition self-respect as a person is to pay proper consideration to the fact that you are a person when you deliberate about your own actions. This involves having certain moral standards of conduct that constrain your behavior: “... behavior may be degrading in expressing a conception of oneself as something less than a person, a being with a certain moral status or dignity.” (Darwall 1995, 193). It also includes standing up to one’s rights as a person: “To acquiesce in the avoidable denial of one’s rights is to fail to respect one’s rights as a person.” (Darwall 1995, 193).

It is worth noting in this context that I in the first article distinguish between different forms of recognition (self)respect in accordance with the reasonable conceptions of moral equality and personhood that they are based upon. My motivation for doing so is that it helps me to discuss the merit of the version of the self-respect argument for basic liberties that is based on recognition self-respect.

It is also worth mentioning that on Darwall’s analysis, recognition respect and self-respect also come in amoral forms and can concern other things than the fact that we are persons. Our life projects include other standards than those relating to our moral status as persons, typically those attached to our social roles. There are certain things that, say, a doctor, qua doctor would not do. When doctors follow these standards because they judge them worthy of respect, they have recognition self-respect as doctors according to Darwall’s definition. Conversely, you can have recognition respect for someone in some particular capacity, such

¹⁸ As an example, we may say that Rawls presents JF as a conception of recognition respect for persons where “person” is understood in accordance with his political ideal of personhood. For it is an account of how the fact that we have the moral powers of rationality and reasonability and a determinate plan of life (i.e., the fact that we are persons) in conjunction with the fact of reasonable pluralism places moral constraints on the use of state power. To have recognition respect for persons (in the political sense) is simply to act in ways consistent with his two principles of justice out of moral concern.

as a judge, a police officer etc. When I, say, acknowledge the (legitimate) authority of a police officer and constrain my actions accordingly, I have recognition respect for her qua police officer – precisely put for the authority she has in virtue of this role. Recognition respect can also be motivated by the fact that someone or something is dangerous and indeed any feature of the object that requires that you constrain your actions. (Darwall 1995, 186–93).

4.2.2. Evaluative (self)respect

On my usage evaluative (self)respect covers all forms of positive evaluation of persons, though I concentrate on those that relate to the projects that persons may have. As we will see, this broader sense also includes what Darwall (and others such as Honneth) would say fall under the concept of esteem. To clarify and situate this definition, we can distinguish between four modes of such valuing. I do not claim that these are exhaustive or mutually exclusive, but they should serve to clarify my definition.

A) One part of evaluative (self)respect, on my usage, are moral evaluations of persons. This is what Darwall calls moral “appraisal” (self)respect. To respect persons in this sense, is simply to appraise their excellence as persons (Darwall 1995, 184) The basis for this type of evaluative respect is, in short, the person’s moral virtuousness. However, moral evaluative self-respect is more a matter of not failing to live up to the standards of personhood and being self-confident that you will be able to continue to do so, than pride and contentment. It does not imply self-indulgence nor feeling particularly good about oneself (Dillon 1995, 31). As Dillon puts it, “... what is important is not that we score highly but rather, as Hume puts it, that we be able to ‘bear our own survey’.” (Dillon 1995, 31).

This connects with recognition respect because being virtuous is to have proper recognition respect for those things that merit it. For example, having the virtue of reasonability simply means to have recognition respect for the reasonable, i.e., regarding the reasonable as something that constrains the range of morally permissible actions and acting accordingly (Darwall 1995, 192–93). Rawls talks about failures to comply with the demands of justice (the reasonable) as causing an injury to one’s self-respect that he terms “moral shame”. “Moral shame and guilt, it is clear, involves our relations to others, and each is an expression of our acceptance of the first principles of right and justice.” (Rawls 1999, 391). More generally, being virtuous according to his political conception of personhood means having the political virtues that constitute excellence as such a person, or at least involve living up to

the ideal of personhood (Rawls 1993, chap. 5).¹⁹ The basic point is that moral evaluative respect concerns the extent to which we realize and are living up to the ideal of personhood, whereas the object of recognition respect is the mere fact that we are such persons.

Having moral evaluative self-respect is thus dependent on having recognition respect.

Without any standards (recognition self-respect), I have no basis for self-evaluation. If I did not think that the fact that something is reasonable constrains my actions, then I would not be ashamed by failing to be reasonable. Conversely, having recognition self-respect makes you liable to moral shame. Your evaluative self-respect is what is at stake when it comes to having proper consideration for those things that merit it (Darwall 1995, 193–94).

B) Evaluative respect can also concern how we are doing in our particular social roles, specifically the extent to which we follow the normative standards attached to them. This part also aligns with Darwall’s account. He uses the example of a tennis player who we can appraise for following the ideal of good sportsmanship and so forth (Darwall 1995, 187–88). The tennis player can, conversely, respect himself in the evaluative sense *qua* tennis player based on his success in following the standards associated with this role (these are standards of recognition self-respect on Darwall’s broader definition).

C) In contrast to Darwall, I also use evaluative (self)respect to denote gradable evaluations of the moral or otherwise worthwhileness of people’s plans of life, and their success in pursuing them. This conforms to the two normative bases of esteem on Laitinen’s analysis (Laitinen 2015, 73). On my usage, I can respect one tennis player more than another because she is simply more successful, even though the two players are equally diligent in following the relevant standards of conduct attached to this sport. This is the part of evaluative (self)respect that Honneth concentrates on, though he calls it “(self)esteem” (see next section).

¹⁹ Indeed, Rawls states that one “element” of self-respect is precisely our “... our self-confidence as a fully cooperating member of society rooted in the development and exercise of the two moral powers.” (Rawls 1993, 318). In other words: our self-confidence that we are living up to the ideal of personhood. The two elements of self-respect that Rawls mentions in *PL* can also be understood as a form of recognition self-respect. This is because they entail the belief that, because you have a rational plan of life and have developed the moral powers to the requisite degree, you are a person which in turn gives rise to the associated duties of self-respect (Eyal 2005, 205). This should become clear in the following paragraph.

D) On the way I use it, evaluative respect can also be directed towards those excellences that Rawls says make us liable to “natural shame” (Rawls 1999, 389–90). These are traits that are conducive to pursuing your plan of life, and which also benefit others, but which you cannot be held responsible for, and which does not bear on the quality of your character. Examples include natural talents, to some extent your health etc. This usage also differs from Darwall’s definition since, according to Darwall, having such traits does not give grounds for evaluative respect since that concerns our agency and character. “... purely ‘natural’ capacities and behavior manifesting them are not appropriate objects of appraisal respect ...” (Darwall 1995, 188).

In short, on my usage evaluative respect and self-respect are all forms of positive evaluation, though I concentrate on those that relate to the projects that persons may have. Though this broader understanding of evaluative (self)respect differs from Darwall’s, and how many would define the evaluative form of respect, it closely aligns with Rawls’s account. Specifically, the two aspects of self-respect:

“...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).

If anything, the view just quoted is slightly narrower than my working conception of evaluative self-respect since it does not include a sense of success in pursuing one’s aims (though it might be based on it). My motivation for this broad working account of evaluative self-respect is that it allows my arguments to have a broad scope and that it is conducive to discussing the normative claims that are made about self-respect in the debates I engage. Importantly, if my basic arguments hold for this broader conception, it should also hold for narrower conceptions such as Darwall’s.

4.2.3. (Self)Esteem

The third article operates with the terms “esteem” and “self-esteem” and not “(self)respect”. The conception of esteem I operate with is based on a common view of esteem found in the literature on recognition, specifically the Honnethian literature (Honneth 1995, chap. 5; Laitinen 2002). As I write in the third article, “Esteem is conditional and differential in the

sense that it depends on a gradable evaluation of the traits, activities, and performance of the recognized.” (pp. 172). In effect, then, this notion of esteem is the same as the notion of evaluative respect that I use in the other articles. I chose the term “esteem” for the sake of simplicity in that context, and because that is common in the literature that the article engages. It is worth mentioning that in his works after *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth mostly concentrates on esteem of different lines of work in accordance with the extent to which they contribute to the social good(s) (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 140–59). As mentioned in the previous section, I have a broader focus.

It is also worth noting that this broad conception of esteem where it covers all evaluative forms of valuation is relatively common also outside the literature on recognition. It aligns with classical definitions such as Sachs’s (Sachs 1981) and William James’s (Dillon 1995, 30). Those that distinguish between esteem and evaluative forms of respect and self-respect (which I do not) typically follow Darwall in conceptualizing respect as oriented towards one’s character – the kind of person one is. The grounds for esteem are, to reiterate, broader: it might be any, or nearly any, feature. On Darwall’s view, the basis of self-esteem is just “... any feature such that one is pleased or downcast by a belief that one has or lacks it.” (Darwall 1995, 194). Also, esteem typically concerns achievements and success, whereas the essential thing for evaluative self-respect is not scoring highly but “... to assure oneself that one comes up to scratch.” (Dillon 1995, 31).

4.3. The subjective/objective distinction

It might be clarifying to briefly sketch the distinction between subjective and objective concepts of respect and self-respect – or “empirical” and “normative”/ “reasonable” notions as they are often called in the Rawlsian literature. I do not use it, but it relates to the distinctions considered in the previous sections. This distinction derives from Stephen J. Massey (Massey 1995). On the subjective concept of self-respect, it is both sufficient and necessary to have a positive sense of self-worth to have self-respect. Anything goes, even forms of self-valuing that are highly problematic from a moral point of view or uninformed, based on false beliefs about the world or otherwise problematic. In essence, the grounds for your positive sense of self-worth are irrelevant. On the objective concept of self-respect, there are certain objective moral constraints on the kinds of self-valuing that merit the name “self-respect”. Simply put, we are talking about *proper* (self)respect (Massey 1995, 199).

As Schemmel notes (Schemmel 2018, 7), this distinction between subjective and objective concepts of self-respect is analytically independent from those we have considered in the previous sections. The distinction between recognition/evaluative respect, and the one between subjective/objective respect, are cross-cutting. Regarding their content however, many would say that recognition self-respect is an objective concept (Dillon 2018, sec. 4.1.). Not just any standards of conduct based on whatever beliefs about personhood suffice. Esteem and self-esteem, on the other hand, are typically considered to be more subjective.

I do not take a stance on this issue. Instead, I discuss various conceptions of self-respect, some of which are subjective and some of which are objective. However, the distinction connects with my discussion in the third article about reasonable ideals of self-esteem (chapter 2). It also relates to my assumptions about the citizens whose self-respect I discuss in the articles: they are informed, normally rational and reasonable (chapter 3).

4.4. Basal self-respect

A possible problem with my terms is that they do not cover what Dillon terms “basal self-respect”. On my definitions, self-respect pertains to either moral status or merit/excellences, but Dillon convincingly argues that there is a more basic and non-cognitive form of self-respect – basal self-respect. Basal self-respect is not based on moral status or merit. The cognitive content, to call it that, is just “I matter” (Dillon 2001, 68 note 45).

Very briefly, Dillon argues that the cognitive forms do not adequately capture certain emotional phenomena that we would say are instances of lacking self-respect. In these instances, the agents “know but cannot feel their worth” (Dillon 1997, 227). Dillon presents cases where the agents diligently follow reasonable standards of conduct (recognition self-respect), which should translate to a satisfactory level of self-appraisal (evaluative self-respect), but where they experience shame and a sense of inadequacy instead (Dillon 1997, 232–43). Dillon contends that the best way to explain these cases is through “... positing a third kind of self-respect, an emotionally laden substratum for the other two that structures their possible enactments.” (Dillon 1997, 227). In other words, a third form of self-respect that enables the recognitive and evaluative kind. Furthermore, Dillon argues that this form of self-respect is relevant from the perspective of justice (Dillon 1997, 247–48). As such, it represents one potential blind spot in the dissertation, which I briefly take up in the second article. I return to this issue in chapter 6.

4.5. A sense of competence

Another central concept in the dissertation is what I call “a sense of competence”. I use it in the first article to offer an alternative way of making an argument for the liberty principle based on this principle’s effects on our self-attitudes, an argument that I believe avoids the problems I identify with arguments based on recognition and evaluative self-respect. Here I wish to explain what this term means, and how it differs from the other self-attitudes that we have considered.

A sense of competence is a self-attitude that I isolate by drawing on the concepts of recognition self-respect, evaluative self-respect, and the literature on personal autonomy. It is included in various accounts of self-respect and relational autonomy.²⁰ I construe its relation to other self-attitudes somewhat differently, however, and use it to make an argument for the liberty principle. To have a sense of competence is to trust your own capacity for procedural autonomy. Most procedural accounts of autonomy specify it as the ability to reflectively endorse preferences, values, and choices in some sense (Christman and Anderson 2005). To be able to exercise this ability, we need to trust our own competence to make sound judgements and act on them. Therefore, a sense of competence is valuable to autonomy.

A sense of competence differs from recognition self-respect because trusting your capacity for autonomy does not entail any specific moral beliefs and views on the standards that are appropriate for persons, the treatment that you are entitled to as a person, or even the respect worthy features of persons. To trust your capacity for autonomy is conceptually distinct from respecting yourself as a person by adhering to certain standards of conduct and standing up for your rights. That said, it is included in certain forms of recognition self-respect (those wherein moral status is based on the capacity for autonomy) since it is a firm conviction that you have, as a matter of fact, the capacity for rational action that makes you a person.

A sense of competence also differs from evaluative self-respect because it does not *essentially* involve a positive self-evaluation. To trust your capacity for autonomy does not logically entail positively evaluating it, as, say, an excellence conducive to your plan of life. Nor does it entail taking autonomous behavior to be an important moral ideal of conduct. Nor does it

²⁰ To wit, Trudy Govier provides the clearest articulation of it in her account of “self-trust”, though that account covers more than a sense of competence (Govier 1993).

imply that you satisfy any other evaluative standards. That said, a sense of competence is required for positive self-evaluations based on autonomous thinking and behavior. Therefore, if you base your self-evaluation on being autonomous or exercising capacities for autonomy, then a sense of competence is an important basis of your evaluative self-respect. In addition, as Trudy Govier points out, trusting your capacity for autonomy is arguably also generally conducive to evaluative self-respect because it makes you more inclined to trust your own positive self-evaluations (Govier 1993, 111).

4.6. Envy

I shall now explain and situate the conception of envy that I operate with, starting with a few overall remarks about the concept. Most understandings of envy in the philosophical literature follow Aristotle in stressing that it involves “pain at the good fortune of others” (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 39). It is also commonly agreed that, relatedly, the envious harbors ill will towards the person that she envies. A standard take on the feeling is that envy is a vice and, closely related, irrational. Classical examples include Satan’s envy of God in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (Smith and Kim 2008, 3–4), Cain’s envy of Abel in the Bible (Protasi 2016, 544), Salieri’s envy of Mozart (Knapp 2014, 118) etc. In the third article, the account of envy is largely based on Knapp’s definition (Knapp 2014) and has four essential features:

1. The envied has some good that the envious lacks, or more of it.
2. This difference is taken to be bad for the envious. It is not the good itself that is important, or most important, to the envier, but the fact that the rival has more of it. The envious is willing to harm herself in order to reduce the discrepancy.
3. The difference is taken to reflect poorly on the envier’s self-esteem. It involves a harm to self-esteem.
4. The envious believes that the difference is undeserved in one way or another, but not necessarily that it is unjust.

As I explain in the third article (section 2), I conceptualize envy in this way for the sake of the argument. It is to ensure that my case targets the kind of envy that is the primary concern in the debates surrounding the envy charge to egalitarian theories of justice. I will not directly defend the appropriateness of this specification any further here. Instead, I shall briefly consider the extent to which my working account conforms to the consensus in the literature about how we should define envy, and some of the corollary issues in these debates. This

should contribute towards clarifying the scope and relevance of the argument to the wider literature on envy and emotions outside distributive social justice.

The first thing that needs to be said is that this is an account of malicious envy. In everyday talk, we often use “envy” in a more benign sense, sometimes as simply synonymous with desiring what another person has, and without indicating any ill will or desire to take the good away from the envied person. Everyday talk can be misleading, however (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 45–46). One of the major points of contestation regarding the definition of envy is whether it makes sense to speak of a benign type. I return to this in a moment.

The first feature of my conception is uncontroversial. We do not envy those that have less or equal shares of the good in question (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 41). The matter is more complex regarding the second feature. Most accounts agree that the envious is concerned with the difference *per se*. Envy should be distinguished from greed and mere desiring or longing. Knapp notes that it is not the lack of the good that matters, at least not first and foremost, but the fact that the rival has it and that you do not (Knapp 2014, 114). D’Arms and Kerr provide a useful specification of this aspect of envy. They argue that what is essential to envy is what they call the “envious preference”: “... a preference for the situation in which neither the agent nor the rival has the good to the one in which the rival has it and the agent does not ...” (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 53). Importantly, if this is the case, then there is no such thing as benign envy. To make this case, D’Arms and Kerr ask us to consider whether the envious sentiments and associated pain would go away if this preference were satisfied – if the rival lost the good one way or another. They think the answer is yes and take this as a reason for considering the envious preference as essential to envy (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 48).

Even if we accept D’Arms and Kerr’s argument for the envious preference, it is not clear that it is also essential that the envious is willing to harm herself in order to reduce the discrepancy. This is how Rawls accounts for envy, and indeed must account for it for the sentiment to pose a potential problem for his difference principle.²¹ It is also how I define it. This stronger understanding of the concern for the difference *per se* seems controversial. George V. Walsh notes that it does not cohere with how envy is defined in dictionaries or

²¹ The reason is that if the difference principle is satisfied, then reducing the expectations of the better off will also reduce the expectations of the worst off (Rawls 1999, 68).

traditional accounts of envy (Walsh 1992, 10–15). Nor is this a condition that D’Arms and Kerr find in their review of the philosophical literature on envy (D’Arms and Kerr 2008). What is important for me, however, is that if the argument in the third article holds for Rawls’s stronger condition, it should also hold for the weaker version where the envious is not (necessarily) willing to harm herself.

The third feature concerning a lowered sense of self-worth aligns with many standard conceptions of envy. This aspect is related to the fact that envy is painful (Smith and Kim 2008, 4). It should be mentioned, however, that there are not many explicit arguments for the claim that this lowered self-evaluation specifically concerns self-esteem and not recognition self-respect (but see Salice and Sánchez 2019). On my definition, envy involves a harm to self-esteem, though I let it be an open question whether low self-esteem is only a cause of envy or also a constitutive part of it.

The fourth feature, the sense of desert and the relationship between envy and resentment – a sense of injustice – is a point of contestation and is worth dwelling on. These issues bear on the rationality of envy and its moral relevance from the perspective of justice. For example, the envy charge to egalitarian theories, which I discuss in the third article, does not make sense if envy is the same as resentment (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 50–51).²² Let us first consider if envy essentially involves some sense that the difference is undeserved. There are at least two reasons for thinking that it does. As Knapp notes, if the difference is deserved, then it seems that shame is the proper emotion – on the assumption that envy does involve a lowered self-evaluation. Second, as Knapp also notes, paradigmatic cases of envy involve a sense that the difference is undeserved (Knapp 2014, 118).

On the other hand, you could argue that an essential sense of injustice and/or that the difference is undeserved is not supported by a plausible conception of envy that D’Arms and Kerr call the “competitive function account”. They argue that envy is a response to some rival within a status hierarchy having an advantage over the envier, and that it motivates us to take actions to improve our comparative position within this hierarchy. Envy is therefore an amoral emotion: not as such concerned with justice or desert but rather about your own position in the status hierarchy. (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 49). In reply we might ask why,

²² I return to the envy charge in section 5.2.5.

then, does envy involve ill will towards the rival instead of (only) self-criticism? Alessandro Salice and Alba Montes Sánchez argue that the best explanation of this is that envy includes a sense that the difference is undeserved in some way or another. The rival has committed the offense of possessing the envied good without deserving it (Salice and Sánchez 2019, 231). D’Arms and Kerr, however, reject that hostility towards the rival is a necessary component of envy. Hatred and dislike of the envied person are not essential to the desire to level the discrepancy, they argue (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 49). I leave the reader to consider whether a lowered self-evaluation can be explained as envy and not better explained as shame absent a sense that the difference is undeserved.

Granting that envy does essentially include a sense that the discrepancy is undeserved, as I assume for the sake of the argument, is it the same as resentment? Or, more precisely put, does it involve a sense of injustice? Let us first get clear about what resentment is. Rawls writes:

“If we resent our having less than others, it must be because we think that their being better off is the result of unjust institutions, or wrongful conduct on their part. Those who express resentment must be prepared to show why certain institutions are unjust or how others have injured them. What marks off envy from the moral feelings is the different way in which it is accounted for, the sort of perspective from which the situation is viewed.” (Rawls 1999, 467).

This, I take it, is a very natural definition of resentment that can easily be distinguished from the notion of desert. It goes without saying that I am not talking about “desert” in the general sense that is equivalent to or derives from an independent notion of justice (Scanlon 2018, 118–20). I can deserve good or bad things or forms of approval/disapproval in the sense that it would be appropriate considering my actions or character, without this directly translating into claims for justice – claims about how others should act. As I point out in the third article, something can be undeserved in the sense of being the result of bad luck. Bad luck, conceptually, is not the same as nor implies wrongful conduct by others or unjust institutions. Simply put, resentment is the feeling that you are being *treated* unjustly. As such, the only proper object of resentment is the individual and institutional actions of others. Undeserved back luck, in contrast, need not involve any actions at all. You might think that others should, morally speaking, compensate for bad luck to secure that everyone gets what they deserve, but that is not necessary for thinking that the luck in question is undeserved.

5. Principles of justice and self-respect

The dissertation discusses the place of self-respect, self-esteem, and related self-attitudes in the justification of a theory of distributive justice. So far, I have mostly considered the broader theoretical background of the dissertation, and the basic methodological and analytical framework. This chapter further introduces the substantive part of the dissertation by giving an overview of the various positions and arguments concerning the relationship between self-respect and principles of justice, situating the dissertation among them. My examination is structured around three general issues, though there are some overlaps. (1) The value of self-respect and self-esteem. (2) The relationship between economic inequalities and self-respect. (3) The relationship between basic liberties and self-respect.

5.1. The value of self-respect

This section considers the value of self-respect. None of the articles discuss whether evaluative self-respect is valuable such that we have reasons to care about it from the perspective of justice. The first article states that it is hard to deny its value, however. And the defense of envy-avoidance – that everyone committed to some version of the idea that the distribution of social goods should protect the social conditions for evaluative self-respect – loses much of its critical bite if this is wrong. The first article criticizes some ideas about the value of recognition self-respect. This section situates these assumptions and arguments about the value of self-respect within the literature. I start by explaining why Rawls and Honneth think evaluative self-respect (self-esteem) is valuable. Next, I account for some objections to this view that we find in the Rawlsian literature and attempt a modest defense of my assumption about its value. The following section situates Honneth's argument for the value of recognition self-respect, and my criticism of his position, within the debates about personal autonomy.

5.1.1. Evaluative self-respect/self-esteem – motivation

Rawls and Honneth both understand the value of evaluative self-respect in terms of its importance to motivation, though Honneth ultimately explains its value in terms of autonomy. The basic idea is that without a sense that our projects and aims are worthwhile and that we have the capacities and dispositions necessary to pursue them, it is hard to pursue them wholeheartedly. As Rawls frames it, self-esteem has psychological value in terms of our

ability to achieve our interest in pursuing a rational plan of life. “The importance of self-respect is that it provides a ... firm conviction that our determinate conception of the good is worth carrying out.” (Rawls 1993, 318). Rawls’s position is that self-respect, or its social bases, is the perhaps most important primary good (Rawls 1999, 386). I explain this basic idea more thoroughly in the articles.

This section examines some doubts concerning the status of evaluative self-respect as such an important primary good. One set of worries targets the aforementioned two aspects of Rawlsian self-respect (section 4.2.2.) – the secure conviction that our plan of life is worth pursuing and that we have the capacities necessary to pursue it.

Massey questions the status of Rawlsian self-respect thus understood, or its social bases, as the most important primary good. He rejects the notion that one cannot enjoy anything without self-respect: “It is surely an excess of rationalism to claim that a person cannot enjoy going to the beach or to a baseball game unless he respects himself.” (Massey 1995, 211). He also doubts that such self-respect may be the most important good because other goods diminish in value without it, since this is true of all goods (Massey 1995, 211). Furthermore, he aims to show that this claim must be wrong due to its implications. On Massey’s interpretation, the claim means that higher levels of other primary goods cannot compensate for a lower level of self-respect. But this implies that “... a society promoting self-respect ... to a greater extent than another society is to be preferred, even when the gains in terms of self-respect are achieved at the cost of a significant loss of other important goods.” (Massey 1995, 211). To argue against this, Massey envisions a hierarchical society where people are educated to fill specific social roles, to accept their position, and to believe that their activities have worth. They thus have a high level of self-esteem but are not autonomously choosing their plan of life and are only experiencing a very limited range of possibilities (Massey 1995, 211–12).

Massey’s point is that in such a society, the high level of evaluative self-respect would perhaps not compensate for the lack of other primary goods. That is, in terms of their abilities to pursue their plan of life, people in such a society are worse off than they would have been with lower self-respect but with a larger share of other primary goods. Therefore, such self-respect cannot be the most important primary good.

There is also another kind of worry over the value of Rawlsian self-respect pertaining to its exact relationship to simply having a plan of life. Specifically, what is the relationship between having a firm conviction that one's plan of life is worthwhile and simply having a plan of life? Cynthia A. Stark clearly elucidates this concern with the imaginary case of "Marty", who takes gourmet cooking as an end:

"Surely it follows directly from the fact that Marty has taken gourmet cooking as an end, that he values (in some sense) gourmet cooking. Given that gourmet cooking is at the center of Marty's conception of the good, to state that he values it is not to make an additional claim about his relation to gourmet cooking, for the claim that one values the components of one's conception of the good is plausibly counted a conceptual truth." (Stark 2012, 241).

Stark's point is that the first aspect of self-respect – the firm conviction in the value of one's plan of life – is "an empty concept" (Stark 2012, 241). It is already entailed, conceptually, in having a plan of life. This is a problem because it makes it unclear how self-respect could be an important *means* to execute a plan of life.

The articles do not discuss the issues that Massey and Stark raise but assume that this part of evaluative self-respect is valuable, if not the most important primary good. To defend this assumption (and to some extent Rawls), we could argue the following. Though the critics might be right that evaluative self-respect is not the *most* important primary good, and that it is impossible to have a plan without believing that it is *somewhat* feasible and worth pursuing, there seems to be relevant differences of degree. It still seems fairly intuitive that a healthy *level* of self-esteem is important both to our motivation and to our psychological well-being, and that a healthy level of self-esteem is not conceptually entailed in having a plan of life in the first place.

Another set of complaints regarding the status of evaluative self-respect as a primary good targets the "two elements" of self-respect that Rawls refers to in PL:

"...the first element [of self-respect] is our self-confidence as a fully cooperating member of society rooted in the development and exercise of the two moral powers [...]. The second element is our secure sense of our own value rooted in the conviction that we can carry out a worthwhile plan of life." (Rawls 1993, 319).

These elements mostly fall under the specifically moral part of evaluative self-respect on my definition. They involve a confidence that we are living up to Rawls's moral ideal of personhood. Some doubt that this part of our self-respect is a primary good. Eyal argues that what is important to pursue one's determinate conception of the good is not confidence in one's moral powers, but rather the firm conviction that one's personal projects are worth pursuing and that one's character is suited to pursue them:

“Confidence in one's minimal capacity for a conception of the good includes more than confidence in the ample value or the ample feasibility of one's plan of life (if it includes that at all). [...] By subsuming both these elements, which are not necessary for the rational pursuit of a conception of the good, within self-respect, Rawls's later writing makes self-respect as a whole unnecessary for that pursuit.” (Eyal 2005, 205–6).

I think Eyal is essentially correct about what we need to pursue our determinate conception of the good.²³ However, we can defend the value of self-confidence as rational and reasonable in terms of the moral powers. Let us focus on the moral power of rationality for the sake of brevity. It is “... the capacity to form, revise and pursue a rational plan of life” (Rawls 1993, 318). Now, it seems intuitive that absent a healthy level of self-confidence that we can in fact develop and exercise this power, it will be difficult for us to do it. If such a self-confidence is “generally necessary” for developing and exercising rationality, then its social bases qualify as a primary good on Rawls's account in *PL* (Rawls 1993, 75).

5.1.2. Recognition self-respect – relational autonomy

I turn now to the value of recognition self-respect. While you can reconstruct a Rawlsian account of recognition self-respect (see section 5.1. in the second article), I shall focus on Honneth's claims about the value of such a self-attitude. He clearly connects the value of the various positive self-attitudes, including recognition self-respect, to a conception of autonomy, particularly in his 2005 paper co-authored with Joel Anderson (J. Anderson and Honneth 2005). Recognition self-respect is defended as a condition for exercising our capacity for reflective judgements.

²³ See Gregory Whitfield (2017) for an argument to the contrary (Whitfield 2017, 448–50).

This places Honneth's understanding of autonomy in the broad family of relational approaches to autonomy. The basic idea here is that our autonomy depends on our relationship to other people (Westlund 2009; Mackenzie 2008; Christman 2004). More specifically, it places him within the subset of relational theories that argue that autonomy specifically depends on certain self-attitudes that in turn has social conditions. I elaborate on some of the main points in this literature in the first article. Here I wish to concentrate more on the underlying motivation of this approach to autonomy, its challenges, and how this relates to my dissertation.

The literature on autonomy is characterized by disagreement about how thick or substantial the concept of autonomy is. Procedural theories are content neutral in the sense that they say nothing about which values and beliefs a free agent must have or cannot have. This contrasts with substantive accounts. Substantive accounts are not content neutral but require that autonomous agents have specific values and/or beliefs. Such accounts are criticized for being moralistic, paternalistic, and generally incompatible with the liberal commitment to neutrality among conceptions of the good. Procedural accounts are criticized for being unable to account for problematic phenomena involving adaptive preferences, false consciousness and the like, such as in the case of the submissive housewife or the happy slave, neither of which intuitively count as autonomous. (Benson 1994; Westlund 2009; Mackenzie 2008; Oshana 1998).

Some relational theories are motivated by an attempt to strike a balance between procedural and substantive accounts. According to Paul Benson (Benson 1994), we need a sense of self-worth as a "worthy actor" to *exercise* our autonomy as it is understood on procedural accounts. That is, we need a certain sense of self-worth to satisfy the procedural requirements for correct reasoning. This places "weak substantial" constraints on which attitudes a free actor can have. It does not rule out any specific values or beliefs, but only those combinations that entail that you are not worthy of exercising your autonomy capacities. It excludes beliefs and values that imply "psychologically if not logically" that the person is not worthy of partaking in the activity in question (Benson 1994, 664).

In a similar vein, Honneth attempts to strike a balance between "formal Kantian" theories that say little (according to Honneth) about the good life and communitarian and perfectionistic approaches that are problematic considering the fact of reasonable pluralism. He suggests that

the account of recognition self-respect, self-esteem and self-trust and the corresponding forms of mutual recognition required to attain and maintain them strikes an appropriate balance on this issue. This is because it identifies a set of conditions for *any* good life, yet without privileging any specific conception. “[This account] is detailed enough to say more about the general structures of a successful life than is entailed by general references to individual self-determination.” (Honneth 1995, 174).

Following Antti Kauppinen (Kauppinen 2011, 266–67) I note in the first article that this can be interpreted as a theory of the conditions for *exercising* latent procedural capacities for autonomy. In that respect Honneth’s theory shares some overall similarities with Benson’s, though Honneth gives a different account of which self-attitude(s) that is required. It is worth noting that Honneth and Anderson’s account (2005) has been developed by Catriona MacKenzie (Mackenzie 2008). She endorses their account and argues that

“... an agent must have a conception of herself as the legitimate source of that authority; as able, and authorized, to speak for herself. What underwrites this self-conception, as we have seen, are certain affective attitudes toward oneself—attitudes of self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem.” (Mackenzie 2008, 527).

We should also observe that Mackenzie acknowledges that this conception involves a form of perfectionism, but argues – pace Joel Christman (Christman 2004) – that this is not a decisive objection. I can agree with Mackenzie and Honneth in so far as we are talking about recognition self-respect *simpliciter*, which is what Mackenzie at least seems to have in mind: we are persons with equal moral status and this fact places moral constraints on our personal conduct and treatment of others.²⁴ I do not question that this is a condition for autonomy. However, I argue in the first article that the specific form of recognition self-respect that we have reason to think is supported better by the liberty principle than reasonable alternatives, is not plausibly a condition for autonomy. This is because it involves having very substantive moral beliefs – including a belief in the conception of equal basic liberties and their special importance that the liberty principle is based upon. Such an idea of autonomy excludes the possibility that, say, those that think epistocracy is just, are fully autonomous. And this is not

²⁴ On my analysis, Mackenzie’s conception of self-respect is recognition self-respect *simpliciter* and a sense of competence or what she calls “a sense of normative authority”.

plausible. Yet Honneth seems committed to such a view, or this is at least a position that is close to his explicit stance.²⁵

It is worth mentioning that this is in a sense opposite of a common criticism of Honneth (and recognition theory in general) where his notion of a “positive self-relation” (including self-respect) is taken to be subjective. The concern I raise is not that his notion of self-respect is merely a “subjective sense of dignity” whose protection might require illiberal policies (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 227). My point is that it is too demanding regarding which beliefs and values a fully autonomous person must have.

That said, I also argue that the more basic intuition that autonomy depends on certain self-attitudes is plausible and that it can be fleshed out in a better way. Specifically, I identify a self-attitude that I call “a sense of competence” in the literature and argue that this self-attitude is important to exercise procedural autonomy. I also argue that we can give a more modest version of the self-respect argument for the liberty principle based on that concept.

5.2. Self-respect and economic inequalities – the Rawlsian debate

This section examines some of the various positions and arguments concerning the relationship between self-respect and the distribution of economic goods. I shall concentrate mostly on the broadly Rawlsian debate about whether the economic inequalities that JF permits are compatible with an equal, or reasonably equal, distribution of the social bases of self-respect, situating this dissertation within it. Doing this should clarify how my criticism of Rawls’s arguments and ideas differ from and adds to more common complaints about his theory.

The present subsection gives a brief sketch of Rawls’s argument for thinking that though JF permits economic inequalities, it still distributes the social bases of self-respect equally. It also explains the main objection to this argument in the literature, which I shall call the “economy objection”, and briefly contrasts this complaint with the superfluosity thesis in the second article. The subsequent subsections examine Rawls’s argument, the economy

²⁵ Honneth argues that the historical expansion and equalization of rights and liberties has led to self-attitudes that are superior in terms of autonomy (Honneth 2007b, 334, 2002, 1995, 118–21). It is not clear from his writings whether Honneth would say that this specific form of self-respect is also superior to epistocratic or utilitarian self-respect. But it is at least close to his explicit stance.

objection, and the corollary debates more closely and situate my dissertation within these discussions.

First, however, we need an idea of which inequalities that JF permits. JF places three overall restrictions on economic inequalities. First, the inequalities must maximize what the worst off can expect in terms of primary goods (which include economic goods). Second, differences in primary goods must be attached to offices and positions which are open to all under conditions that secure fair equality of opportunity. Third, these inequalities must not undermine the fair value of the political liberties – in short, the legal right to influence political decisions. Rawls thinks that these restrictions, in practice, only allow relatively small differences. (Rawls 1993, 291, 327, 1999, 137, 470).

Rawls gives many reasons for thinking that the economic inequalities that JF permits do not undermine the self-respect of the worst off (Rawls 1999, 469–70).²⁶ This is important to Rawls because – as is commonly noted – he is, arguably, committed to an equal distribution of the social bases of self-respect (e.g., Penny 2013; Eyal 2005; Zaino 1998). It is also one of his arguments for the stability of JF. For my purposes, it is useful to organize the main reasons into the following case:

1. JF, particularly the liberty principle, a) conveys recognition of everyone's equal status and b) does not express that anyone is inferior. Therefore, the worst off have no cause to consider themselves inferior.
2. To the extent that there would still be a connection between economic position and social status, the relatively small differences that JF allows in practice should not pose a problem.
3. There is effective freedom of association which ensures recognition of what we do in everyday life, and which prevents problematic comparisons across different social strata.
4. Therefore, though JF permits economic inequalities, it still ensures an equal distribution of the social bases of self-respect. And largely for this reason, it should

²⁶ See (Penny 2013; Eyal 2005; Zaino 1998; Zink 2011; Stark 2012) for useful analyses.

not provoke envy to such a degree that the social arrangements it prescribes becomes unstable either.

The critics generally argue that these reasons are either implausible or do not provide sufficient grounds for thinking that JF is compatible with an equal distribution of the social bases of self-respect. Indeed, the most discussed and contested part of Rawls's account of self-respect is his claim that equal basic liberties matter more to self-respect than economic goods such that the economic inequalities that JF allows would not threaten the self-respect of the worst off. Many authors think that this claim is outright implausible, or at the very least doubt Rawls's case for it, in light of the significance of economic goods to our sense of self-worth. I will call this the "economy objection". The strongest version of this objection goes as follows. Economic goods matter at least as much as basic liberties to our sense of self-worth. Therefore, i) equality of basic liberties is not sufficient to secure an equal distribution of the social bases of self-respect, and ii) equality of wealth is necessary to secure an equal distribution. Therefore, a commitment to equalizing the social bases of self-respect does not support JF, but rather leads us to favor an egalitarian distribution of all primary goods and to forfeit the priority of the liberty principle. (e.g., Eyal 2005).

In the second article, "The Irrelevance of Self-respect in the Original Position", I argue that there is a more basic problem with Rawls's account of self-respect. The most basic problem, I claim, is not to establish that self-respect is best secured by JF rather than equality of wealth, but to show that the appeal to self-respect plays a meaningful role in justifying the choice of basic principles within OP. It is superfluous in the specific sense that it fully relies on the assumption that JF is the best choice also if we ignore considerations of self-respect as such, and in such a way that a critic would say that it is her preferred alternative that best supports self-respect. Put differently, whereas others mostly argue that JF cannot offset the effects of economic inequalities on self-respect, I argue that Rawls's arguments for this claim are either implausible or do not provide meaningful support to the choice of JF. Importantly, if the arguments in this dissertation are correct, then the commitment to secure the social bases of self-respect does not have such "repugnant" and "illiberal" implications as requiring an equal distribution of wealth either (see section 2.2.6.). Unless, that is, equality of wealth would be chosen in OP even ignoring considerations of self-respect as such.

In the following section, I start by noting some reasons for thinking that economic inequalities pose a threat to self-respect in the first place. I then briefly explain the first two premises in Rawls's case for thinking that JF mitigates this threat, which relate to the worst off's sense of status. I briefly characterize and situate my own worry over the first two premises which is inspired by Honneth's theory of recognition in section 5.2.4. Before, that, however, I explain the economy objection in more detail in 5.2.3. Though this is not strictly necessary in order to explain or situate my argument, it is worth doing because there are objections to the superfluousness thesis that those sympathetic to the economy objection could raise that I have not considered in the articles. I return to this towards the end of section 5.2.4. and the following section about envy. Section 5.2.5. about envy situates the defense of envy-avoidance in the third article in the debate about the envy charge to egalitarian theories. It also examines the relationship between envy and the distribution of economic goods, which bears on the implications of envy-avoidance and the Rawlsian debate about economic inequalities and self-respect. As we will see, the literature on this relationship gives us a reason to doubt the force of the economy objection. Finally, I consider the debate about the argument from freedom of association in section 5.2.6.

5.2.1. How can economic inequalities undermine self-respect?

Before getting into the various arguments about how we might prevent economic inequalities from undermining the self-respect of the worst off, it is useful to briefly consider why such inequalities pose a threat in the first place. It is generally acknowledged that economic inequalities, particularly poverty, can undermine the self-respect of the worst off. As Thomas Scanlon notes, this is traditionally counted as one objection to economic inequalities (Scanlon 2018, 29–31). He provides us with a good starting point for understanding why this is the case, and why it is objectionable.

“The mechanism through which this happens, I take it, is this. The ways that individuals dress, how they live, what they own ... may mark them as eligible or ineligible for certain roles and, particularly, as more or less eligible for associational goods ...” (Scanlon 2018, 29).

The basic idea is that relative economic poverty may mark you as less eligible for holding valued positions and roles, including associational goods such as the role of friend, co-worker etc. This amounts to marking you as inferior, which threatens your self-respect. For example, if you lack the means of wearing clean clothes, then others may not wish to associate with

you and if so, you cannot go out in public without shame (Scanlon 2018, 26, 29). This, in turn, makes it reasonable to feel inferior. And feeling inferior constitutes a harm to self-respect.

Following Jiwey Ci (Ci 2013), Scanlon terms this harm of relative poverty “status poverty”. “[It] occurs when lack of money makes it impossible for a person to live in the way that is required, in his or her society, in order to be respected.” (Scanlon 2018, 30). To the extent that economic inequalities cause this kind of harm, we have a moral pro tanto reason to desire a more egalitarian distribution according to Scanlon. He notes, however, that status poverty, depends on the prevailing attitudes in society. Therefore, it is possible to prevent it both by removing the relevant economic inequalities and by correcting these attitudes (Scanlon 2018, 31–32) (we will get back this idea in the following sections).

Economic inequalities can also threaten self-respect by undermining the fair value of political liberties, equality of opportunity, the practical ability to pursue one’s plan of life etc. Yet, these threats are less directly related to inequality of wealth per se, and I shall not consider them further here.

5.2.2. Economic inequalities and Rawls’s status argument

I have now outlined some reasons in the literature to think that economic inequalities, particularly large ones, pose some threats to the self-respect of the worst off. We are now able to consider whether these potential effects can be prevented or at the very least mitigated such that all citizens are still provided with both adequate and reasonably equal support for his or her self-respect. The following sections examine two reasons for thinking that JF mitigates these effects related to the recognition that it conveys. Specifically, the Rawlsian idea that JF protects self-respect from being undermined by economic inequalities because a) JF, particularly the liberty principle, provides positive recognition of everyone’s equal worth, status. And b) JF does not convey that anyone is inferior. It will be useful to think of these reasons as the “status argument”.

Regarding a), Rawls writes that:

“The basis for self-respect in a just society is ... the publicly affirmed distribution of fundamental rights and liberties. And this distribution being equal, everyone has a similar and

secure status when they meet to conduct the common affairs of the wider society.” (Rawls 1999, 477).

Regarding b), Rawls’s position is that “... no one supposes that those who have a larger share are more deserving from a moral point of view.” (Rawls 1999, 470). This is because considerations of desert, merit and perfectionistic value are excluded from the original position, which provides the justificatory framework of the basic distribution of social goods (Rawls 1999, 470). Therefore, the public justification of the distribution of social goods does not imply that anyone is inferior. In that sense, JF has an advantage vis-à-vis other conceptions of justice that also permit economic inequalities for desert-based or perfectionistic reasons.

5.2.3. The economy objection to the status argument

The most common objection to the status argument is that it is unclear why our status as equal citizens would matter more to our sense of self-worth than our economic position, and why it would suffice to meet the need for status (the economy objection). Let us briefly consider just one example before turning to how we might answer this charge.

Gerald Doppelt claims that people today base their sense of self-worth primarily on their relative economic success. “The problem for Rawls’s paradigm of self-respect as equal political status is that a person’s relative socio-economic status looms much larger than her position as citizen in shaping her recognition.” (Doppelt 2009, 139). Relative economic success is, as a matter of fact, the dominant standard of recognition and self-respect in contemporary society (Doppelt 2009, 139). Therefore, Doppelt argues, equalizing the social bases of self-respect would require economic equality (Doppelt 2009, 141). Moreover, if the dominant standard of recognition and self-valuation is economic success, we have no reason (that has to do with self-respect) to prioritize the equal distribution of basic rights and liberties above economic equality. In making this argument, Doppelt relies on an interpretation of Rawls where the account of self-respect is largely empirical: “Rawls’ conception of justice depends on empirical claims about self-respect, the social bases of self-respect in modern society, and the best route to a well-ordered society.” (Doppelt 2009, 131).

Doppelt himself and some others argue that we can avoid the economy objection if we limit ourselves to a “reasonable” conception of self-respect. They take the problem to be that

Rawls's conception of self-respect is empirical in the sense that it refers to the actual standards of self-respect and recognition in contemporary society. In contrast, reasonable self-respect is our self-respect as it would be shaped in a just society. It is this kind of self-respect that a theory of justice should promote and protect. We do this by cultivating reasonable standards of self-worth, and by making economic status and other problematic standards less salient as support for people's sense of self-worth. An ideally just society "... will aim to realize equality in the reasonable social bases of self-respect, transforming unreasonable and unfair standards of self-worth into the standards that ought to prevail in an ideally just society." (Doppelt 2009, 141).

In essence, we should try to instill in citizens the kind of self-respect that Rawls refers to in *PL* – self-respect as an equal citizen rooted in our moral powers and our capacity to pursue a worthwhile plan of life (Rawls 1993, 318–19). "Persons' basic moral powers will constitute the proper bases of recognition respect in a just society." (Doppelt 2009, 144). Some take this to be Rawls's basic idea: "Rawls mostly describes self-respect *as it would be shaped in a society organized by his principles of justice*." (Zink 2011, 331 emphasis in original).

Henry Shue (Shue 1975) gives a similar interpretation of Rawls's argument in *ATJ*. Shue concedes that self-respect as such may be supported equally well by equality of wealth and JF. What is important to ensuring equality in the social bases of self-respect (as far as it pertains to status at least) is only that some important good is distributed equally. Therefore, if we are committed to equalizing the social bases of self-respect, and if the primary source of self-respect today is wealth, we have two options. "Obviously the possibilities include: (a) trying to equalize the wealth and (b) trying to break the psychological connection between wealth and self-respect." (Shue 1975, 201). We should choose to equalize basic liberties, the argument goes, because it is irrational to prefer an equal distribution of economic goods above the maximin principle. On this reading, Rawls's argument from self-respect is not part of the grounds for preferring JF above equality of wealth. It serves, however, to ground the choice of JF above alternatives such as maximization of all primary goods wherein there is no

guarantee that any good is distributed equally. There are certainly textual grounds for such an interpretation.²⁷

In short, on a more charitable reading, Rawls does not claim that humans in general (or in our current societies) care little about their economic position. What he argues is only that the citizens in the well-ordered society corresponding to JF would care very little. One's economic position could be the main source of recognition and self-respect, but this is undesirable (Rawls 1999, 478). Not all the critics would accept the defense just described, however. Some worries concerning the relative importance of wealth are not based on accidental cultural contingencies that we can abstract away when theorizing a well-ordered society but are better interpreted as questioning, say, the feasibility or reasonableness of this ideal of "reasonable self-respect."²⁸

Jeanne S. Zaino, for example, states that "... the assumption that there is no relationship between self-respect and socioeconomic conditions is ... potentially problematic because it may conflict with what we know to be socially possible, general facts about the world and the principles of social science." (Zaino 1998, 743 note 12). In other words, Rawls's ideal might not be feasible. Indeed, Zaino argues that though having basic rights and liberties is important to self-respect, it is not clear that it is more important than having social and economic goods. "... it is conceivable that the disadvantaged would rather have greater wealth and power than equal rights and liberties." (Zaino 1998, 748). Consequently, Rawls may have to advocate an equal distribution of all primary goods or give up on the idea that self-respect should be at the core of any theory of justice (Zaino 1998, 752). Scanlon raises the same kind of worry in his discussion of status poverty. He doubts the feasibility of a society where economic inequalities do not threaten the self-respect of the worst off (Scanlon 2018, 31–35).

²⁷ Rawls writes, for instance that "Having chosen a conception of justice that seeks to eliminate the significance of relative economic and social advantages as supports for men's self-confidence, it is essential that the priority of liberty be firmly maintained." (Rawls 1999, 478). As Zink notes, Rawls reasons that the lexical priority itself should make liberty the primary status indicator that individuals consider when evaluating their worth (Zink 2011, 333).

²⁸ Others argue that this turn to "reasonable self-respect" fails because such self-respect is not a primary good (Eyal 2005, 205–6). We considered that criticism in section 5.1.1.

Eyal insists that economic goods are still a social basis for self-respect, and therefore – on Rawlsian premises – must be equalized. Moreover, he contends that economic goods fare no worse than basic liberties as a means of conveying positive recognition (Eyal 2005, 208). It is worth noting that Eyal, in contrast to Zaino, does not argue that this connection between wealth and self-respect is merely empirical. On Eyal’s interpretation, Rawls’s account of the social bases of self-respect is largely normative, concerning what rational and reasonable people take as *reasons* for having or not having self-respect: “Rawls does not presume mere empirical correlation between self-respect and what he calls the ‘social bases’ of self-respect [...]. ... disrespect of oneself supposedly includes certain self-evaluations that rationally *warrant* low confidence in one’s plans and capacities.” (Eyal 2005, 203–4 emphasis in original).

Regarding b) in particular, the argument that JF does not convey that anyone is inferior, we should pay attention to Scanlon’s discussion of whether a perfectly fair meritocracy can lead to status poverty. Scanlon argues that valuing certain offices and positions, the excellences required to attain them and their benefits, is not irrational. This, however, does not give any grounds for the best off to feel superior, nor the worst off to feel inferior. Being relatively accomplished does not entail being superior to other people in the sense of “more important” or in the sense suggested by the phrase “the smart and the dumb”, according to Scanlon (Scanlon 2018, 35). Scanlon, however, doubts the feasibility of a meritocratic society where people do not make this kind of evaluative error. The two ways of valuing privileged roles and offices and appraising the people that hold them are hard to distinguish in practice (Scanlon 2018, 32–35).

5.2.4. Types of status, affirmation, and support

So far, we have considered what I take to be the most common kind of complaint against Rawls’s case for the claim that JF satisfies our need for status despite allowing for economic inequalities. Namely, that it neglects the importance of economic goods to our sense of status. I shall now briefly characterize my own worry over Rawls’s status argument for the claim that JF prevents economic inequalities from undermining the self-respect of worst off and situate it within the literature. In short, I think Rawls’s case is unconvincing to the extent that it pertains to evaluative self-respect (it is superfluous if understood to concern recognition self-respect. I take this up in section 5.3.). The basic idea, put simply and without nuance, is that

the kind of recognition that JF (including the restrictions on economic inequalities) can and should convey is that of recognition respect. Therefore, it does not offer significant recognitional support or protection of citizens' evaluative self-respect. Therefore, this kind of recognition does not mitigate the (alleged) effects of economic inequalities on the evaluative self-respect of the worst off.

This line of reasoning raises an issue that merits some attention in this context. We must distinguish between the notion of “affirm” and the notion of “support”. What a given arrangement affirms is a matter of the message that it gives, which attitude it signals. For example, I argue that the liberty principle, in conjunction with its public justification, expresses no significant evaluation of your traits or conduct, or the objective value of your particular plan of life. This is a conceptual inquiry. Support, on the other hand, is an empirical matter. In theory, the liberty principle can, in fact, provide recognitional support to evaluative self-respect even though it does not signal evaluative respect. Stark expresses this point nicely: “... the fact that civil inferiority can *cause* diminished self-respect ... does not entail that the content of self-respect is (or is only) a belief in one's civil equality.” (Stark 2012, 255 emphasis in original). She considers it likely that violations of the liberty principle (civil inferiority) will cause diminished evaluative self-respect. So, for my arguments to work it seems that affirmation must be important to support.

So, why cannot the liberty principle provide significant recognitional *support* to evaluative self-respect even though it does not *affirm* such self-respect? My position largely accords with Honneth's on this issue, and what I take to be a standard view in the literature on recognition (Zurn 2015, 41; Thompson 2006, chap. 4; C. Taylor 1994). Before clarifying my view, it is useful to examine Honneth's position and some critical correctives to it.

As I understand him, Honneth's theory is that a certain correspondence is required between the self-attitude that is supported and the act of recognition – the practical expression of an attitude – that supports it. In other words, recognition supports self-respect by affirming it. The two attitudes must fall under the same type of recognition (recognition respect, esteem, or love). To respect ourselves as autonomous, we must be respected as autonomous; to esteem ourselves as contributors to the social good, we must be esteemed as contributors to the social good and so on. As Honneth writes in connection to self-esteem: “Persons can feel themselves to be ‘valuable’ only when they know themselves to be recognized for accomplishments that

they precisely do not share in an undifferentiated manner with others.” (Honneth 1995, 125). This explains why, when discussing the recognitional conditions for self-esteem (evaluative self-respect), Honneth explicitly rejects that instituting equal legal rights suffices to meet the need for status in the sense related to esteem: “... whereas modern law represents a medium of recognition that expresses the universal features of human subjects, [esteem] demands a social medium that must be able to express the characteristic differences among human subjects ...” (Honneth 1995, 122).

Honneth does not elaborate much on this correspondence requirement, however. Now, this requirement certainly aligns with the historical examples that he provides of struggles for recognition (Honneth 1995, chap. 5). However, Honneth does not, to wit, discuss the extent to which such a correspondence is necessary²⁹, or say much about *exactly* why the liberty principle cannot convey evaluative respect. The articles discuss this latter issue.

Doppelt offers an interesting critical corrective to this position:

“Any plausible conception of recognition respect should acknowledge that appraisal-respect and recognition-respect are interdependent. [...] Put differently, persons need to exercise their general moral powers (for the good, and the just) in the way they live, in order to gain recognition respect for these moral powers.” (Doppelt 2009, 134).

On Doppelt’s account, then, recognition respect from other individuals *de facto* depends, at least somewhat, on merit and virtue. If I take no heed of my moral status, you are also less likely to have proper consideration for it. For example, if I refuse to be a reasonable and responsible citizen – I never adhere to my moral duties pertaining to public civility and so on – it is less likely that others will behave reasonably towards me. I will still have my legally protected rights, but recognition respect is not just a matter of respecting each other’s legal rights but also a matter of informal civility. Moreover, the point is not how I behave *per se* but how I am evaluated. Status hierarchies that are, by default, evaluative can therefore cause deficits in recognition respect too:

²⁹ To be fair, Honneth acknowledges that there are some important nuances here. He says that sometimes we can convey that we care to children by affirming their autonomy through granting them rights (Honneth 2002, 511).

“Social deficits in recognition-respect clearly attach to groups of people who are unemployed, underemployed, dependant on public welfare checks, employed in menial, dead-end jobs, or otherwise unable to support themselves and their dependants, in a reasonable standard of living.” (Doppelt 2009, 139).

So, while Doppelt does not question that recognition respect supports recognition self-respect and not evaluative self-respect, his point is that the degree to which we enjoy (informal) recognition respect is to some extent dependent on the degree to which we enjoy evaluative respect. This implies that to secure that all citizens enjoy appropriate levels of (informal) recognition respect, everyone must enjoy some level of evaluative respect too.

Zink offers another critical corrective that more directly threatens the Honnethian position. He argues that even though recognition self-respect may be distinct from evaluative self-respect, , they are “mutually constitutive” (Zink 2011, 341). More specifically, recognition and evaluative self-respect reinforce each other in a sort of feedback process according to Zink. If true, then even if recognition respect only supports, in the first instance, recognition self-respect it still indirectly supports evaluative self-respect by supporting the former self-attitude. The same would hold for evaluative respect and recognition self-respect. It follows that the recognition respect that JF conveys might very well support citizens evaluative self-respect.

Zink is arguably on to something important, I believe. On the face of it, evaluative self-respect can support recognition self-respect. It is common sense that if we often fail in living up to our moral standards and thus lack confidence that we can do so, we are inclined to soften or abandon them. A certain self-confidence (evaluative self-respect) that we can live up to the ideal of, say, a rational, reasonable, and fully cooperating citizen is therefore important for the continuous acceptance of this ideal (recognition self-respect). It bolsters our sense that the ideal is not only worth respecting, but also feasible – that we have the capacities and virtues necessary to pursue it. It is harder to see how the impersonal kind of recognition respect that JF can guarantee (mere respect for legal rights) offers much support to evaluative forms of self-respect, however – or so I argue in the articles.

To clarify my own position, I do not presuppose that a correspondence of the kind that Honneth describes is *always* necessary for recognitional support. Nor do I agree with Honneth (if this is how we are to understand him) that, say, the liberty principle cannot convey

anything about the merit of various ways of life. I still, however, find it counterintuitive that JF can – *via the recognition it conveys* – mitigate the negative effects of evaluative status hierarchies, such as those pertaining to economic differences, on evaluative self-respect.

Before proceeding it is worth mentioning another important and widely recognized point in political theories of recognition which also bears on Rawls’s status argument and the economy objection. This is that equal status in the sense related to esteem is impossible. An equal level of esteem is “simply impossible” according to Honneth (Honneth 1995, 129), “unrealistic and undesirable” (Laitinen 2015, 70), “meaningless” (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 32) given that esteem, conceptually, is conditional on contingent traits and achievements.³⁰ Equality in the social bases of evaluative self-respect cannot include that. The idea in the politics of recognition is not, then, strictly equal support to self-esteem but something closer to a notion of adequate support. “To the extent to which every member of a society is in a position to esteem himself or herself, one can speak of a state of societal solidarity ...” (Honneth 1995, 129). As I explain in the third article, I understand the idea here to be that in a just society, everyone has a reasonably equal opportunity to attain a healthy level of self-esteem. A just society must ensure mutual esteem recognition in this sense.

Those sympathetic to the strong version of the economy objection might reply that equality of wealth would in any case effectively absolve status hierarchies attached to the distribution of economic goods. And that this is necessary for securing a maximally equal distribution of the social bases of self-esteem. For in that case, at least no one would be negatively evaluated because they are relatively poor. This response is not an argument I discuss in the second article, and it implies that the superfluosity thesis is false. Therefore, I will point out, first, that the following section about envy (which involves a lowered sense of self-esteem) gives us a reason to doubt the force of this objection. And second, that the concluding chapter discusses envy-based reasons for thinking that the superfluosity thesis is false.

³⁰ One could also argue that it is not the business of the state to evaluate citizens’ merit in the first place, at least not the kind that pertains to their personal life projects and success in pursuing them, and that doing so is inherently disrespectful (Laitinen 2015, 74–75; E. S. Anderson 1999).

5.2.5. Envy, justice, and inequality

This section does two things. First, it situates the defense of envy-avoidance in the third article in the debate(s) about the envy charge to egalitarian theories. It does this by considering whether the relationship between envy and the distribution of economic goods is morally relevant. Second, it examines some arguments and positions on what this relationship is. This latter issue bears on the practical implications of the ideal of envy-avoidance, but also the Rawlsian debate about self-respect and economic inequalities, since envy involves a lowered sense of self-esteem.

1) Let us start by considering the first issue. Rawls's official position is that envy is morally irrelevant from the perspective of social justice.³¹ He devotes a significant amount of space to show that JF does not "give voice to envy" (Rawls 1999, 471). Specifically, Rawls insists that JF is not subject to what I call "the envy charge" in the third article, which is sometimes leveled against egalitarians. Basically, the charge is that egalitarian ideals are somehow founded on or attributable to envy, and that this renders them incorrect or problematic.

D'Arms and Kerr describe it thus:

"Roughly, the idea is that conceptions of justice that take equality to be bad, as such, (and equality to be good) have their source not in some principled conception of the nature of fairness but in feelings of aggrievement over various advantages enjoyed by rivals." (D'Arms and Kerr 2008, 50).

But what could this mean, more specifically? For Rawls, the charge that a conception of justice is founded on envy often appears to be that it is *motivated* by envious sentiments. In other words, that it is motivated not by a sense of justice but by a vicious and amoral desire to reduce the expectations of the best off even when it will make the prospects of the worst off even worse. Rawls, naturally, associates this motivation with principles of justice that require limitations on inequalities that are bound to make everyone worse off (Rawls 1999, 471–74).

Moreover, in the moral justification of JF within OP, the parties are not envious – this is the only explicit addition Rawls makes to the instrumental account of rationality when describing

³¹ I say "official position" because Rawls's view on envy can and has been interpreted several ways. See article 3, pp.177-178. Ultimately, I agree with Frye that Rawls's account of envy is simply not clear (Frye 2016, 507).

the parties' reasoning. In addition, the parties also assume that the citizens they represent are not envious (Rawls 1999, 124–25).³² In the check for stability, however, they consider whether the well-ordered society corresponding to JF gives rise to such levels of destabilizing propensities such as envy that the choice must be reconsidered for reasons of stability (Rawls 1999, 465). This, in effect, means that the levels of envy that we can reliably expect in a well-ordered society is morally irrelevant, but that it could pose a concern in terms of stability.

As Walsh has noted, Rawls's account of the envy charge is not very precise (Walsh 1992, 4–5). To get a clearer understanding of what this charge and corresponding defenses of the place of envy might be about, it is useful to make a distinction between two different versions of the charge and the corresponding defenses:

1. One version is that the principle(s) in question is currently motivated by envious sentiments and not a sense of justice. This is arguably the most common way of understanding the charge (e.g., D'Arms and Kerr 2008; Norman 2002; Frye 2016; Green 2013).
2. A second version is that the principle(s) in question are at least partly justified (in the moral sense) by the fact that they would tend to generate fewer or less intensive morally relevant occurrences of envious feelings than the relevant alternative(s) (e.g., Tomlin 2008; Walsh 1992, 5)

These distinctions are not exhaustive, and combinations are possible, but I believe they suffice to situate my arguments. The first reading is a claim about the psychological motivation of the proponents for the theory in question. As Richard Norman notes, it arguably has most force when directed against theories that hold equality per se to be worth promoting *even if* doing so will make everyone worse off. Norman calls this view “egalitarianism”. He suggests that it is worth examining this charge since the merit of egalitarianism is far from settled. “The search for a convincing psychological account of the desire to eliminate inequalities may therefore add greater plausibility to one side or another.” (Norman 2002, 44). Specifically, it is worth investigating whether egalitarianism (in the sense we are discussing here) could be motivated by moral attitudes – a sense of justice – instead of envy. Indeed, it is

³² Rawls immediately qualifies this, however. See note 32.

worth reiterating that Rawls himself thinks egalitarianism (in Norman's sense) is motivated by envy since there seems to be no moral reason for it.

Jeffrey Green has defended a place for "reasonable envy" in a broadly Rawlsian framework in accordance with the first reading. He argues that we should sometimes limit the prospects of the better off even when it will worsen the prospects of the worse off. When we are willing to do so for the right reasons, this willingness "... of implementers of justice sometimes to impose costs on the advantaged without compensating economic benefit for the rest of society ..." (Green 2013, 134 emphasis in original) can be described as "reasonable envy" (Green 2013, 136; for discussion see Frye 2016, 509–16).

Tomlin has argued that a consistent Rawlsian is committed to "envy-avoidance" in accordance with the second reading. He contends that the parties, in the moral justification of principles, are motivated by a desire to minimize envious sentiments. Not because the envious desire itself can be reasonable (as Green holds) but because envy is a painful feeling and involves a loss of self-esteem that we would rather be without. Tomlin notes that Rawls's account is unclear on this score amongst other reasons since envy relates to self-esteem which is morally relevant (see section 2.2.6.) (Tomlin 2008, 108). As Tomlin observes, however, this need not logically involve levelling otherwise just inequalities, or limiting the prospects of the better off even when it will make the prospects of the worst off even worse. It does not necessarily affect the choice of principles in OP. Yet, "Even though the principles ... may not change drastically, they are now *partly based* upon envy, in that it was a consideration in the decision." (Tomlin 2008, 112 emphasis in original).

The third article of the dissertation supplements and broadens Tomlin's argument for envy-avoidance in this second sense. It provides a more general defense of envy-avoidance that encompasses not just Rawls but everyone that is committed to some version of the idea that the distribution of social goods ought to secure the social conditions for self-esteem. As explained in chapter two (section 2.2.6.), this provides a partial defense of Rawls's commitment to protect the social conditions for self-esteem, because it shows that envy-avoidance is a legitimate moral concern.

2) I turn now to the relationship between envy and equality. Specifically, the relationship between economic equality and the degree to which the citizenry can be expected to have

envious feelings. Rawls believes that economic inequalities, by default, provokes envy. On his view, *large* inequalities in particular can threaten the self-esteem of the worst off. “A person’s lesser position as measured by the index of objective primary goods may be so great as to wound his self-respect ...” (Rawls 1999, 468). And a diminished sense of self-worth is a main cause of envy. However, Rawls argues that JF does not give rise to problematic levels of envy, despite allowing inequalities, largely because it still supports the self-respect of the worst off (Rawls 1999, 469–70). Conversely, the critics sometimes argue that Rawls fails to show why the worst off would not be envious. Now, this supposed connection between economic inequality and envy seems strange – and in need of a stronger justification than Rawls offers – considering the literature on envy. There is significant empirical and philosophical evidence to the effect that there would be more, not less, envy the more economically egalitarian a society is. Let us take a brief look at some of it.

Nozick argues that reducing economic inequalities might very well exacerbate envious feelings among the citizens by undermining the social conditions for self-esteem. Based on an analysis of self-esteem and its grounds, he contends that there are three conditions for self-esteem. i) Doing something reasonably well compared to others, ii) considering the thing in question to be worthwhile, iii) enjoying recognition for doing reasonably well in it. In view of these conditions, Nozick infers that to secure maximally equal and adequate opportunities to attain self-esteem, social life needs to be as diverse as possible. Specifically, there should be as many different standards of recognition and self-esteem as possible. For this would ensure that as many people as possible has a chance to do reasonably well – *relatively speaking* – in something that both the subject in question *and* at least some others find worthwhile. To put it simply, Nozick’s idea here is roughly that “everybody is good at something” is more likely to be true the larger the set of “some things”. As we will see in the next section, this is close to how Rawls and others argue for the importance of freedom of association to self-esteem. Nozick, however, also suggests that reducing economic inequalities would be counterproductive with regard to securing the kind of diversity that is conducive to self-esteem. For this would mean less social diversity and therefore less diversity in standards of recognition. (Nozick 1974, 232–46).

A second kind of argument is based on the fact that we tend to envy those that are relatively equal to us in some important sense. As D’Arms and Kerr note, this is a fairly common observation in the philosophical tradition (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 42–45). It is sometimes

called the “proximity” or “equality” factor of envy. As I write in the third article (pp. 177), this factor

“... 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. (Salice and Sánchez, 2019: 236–237).”

D’Arms and Kerr provide a similar explanation of the equality factor in terms of what they call the “competitive function account” of envy. The function of envy, they argue, is to motivate the agent to improve her comparative position within some hierarchy “in which the agent has some standing and aspirations ...” (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 44). The clause “in which the agent has some standing and aspirations” explains why professional runners may envy runners but not, say, academics etc. They are equal to other runners and unequal academics in a way relevant to envy. Specifically: “One envies only those who are closely related in a manner that permits competition – one envies one’s rivals.” (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 43). In addition, we only envy those that are relatively close to our own position in the relevant competitive context. For

“If someone ... far above you succeeds in a dramatic way, his movement within the hierarchy provides no threat to your relative standing. It is those who are in the same general vicinity as you that threaten your overall position.” (D’Arms and Kerr 2008, 44).

On the basis of a similar (but somewhat broader) understanding of the equality factor, Aaron Ben-Ze’ev argues that reducing economic inequalities might very well exacerbate envious feelings among the citizens – at least in our western societies. Because we envy those that are relatively equal to us, and emotionally and physically close, “... we can expect that reduced socioeconomic gaps will increase envy. Major means for reducing envy are those making social comparison less significant.” (Ben-Ze’ev 1992, 581). Ben-Ze’ev illustrates this with an analysis of the Israeli kibbutz, which, he says, is “... one of the most egalitarian contemporary societies ...” (Ben-Ze’ev 1992, 576). He also notes that this claim about economic equality and envy is not just a philosophical hypothesis: there is also empirical evidence that suggests such a correlation:

“... there is some empirical evidence suggesting that the inclination toward equalization of fortunes is strongest when the subject and the object are more or less on equal footing, and

that envy does not diminish with reduced inequality but often even increases.” (Ben-Ze’ev 1992, 576).

So, there are reasons for thinking that the Rawlsian worry over whether the inequalities JF allows (or reliably leads to) would generate envy is misplaced (D’Arms 2017, sec. 3.3). Moving towards a more economically egalitarian society can exacerbate problematic status hierarchies, or even create new ones. This also gives us a reason to doubt the force of the economy objection to the extent that it concerns self-esteem (evaluative self-respect). That said, we should also note Bankovsky’s account of how economic inequalities – albeit in conjunction with lack of fair equality of opportunity – can cause and *warrant* envy. It can lead to morally relevant occurrences of envy because it can give the better off advantages vis-à-vis the worst off in competitive contexts. (Bankovsky 2018).

How should we evaluate these arguments? There are at least two complicating factors. One is that the precise definition of envy varies (see section 4.6.). Another is that not all occurrences of envy are morally relevant. To wit, no one suggests that envy tout court should be minimized in virtue of our moral commitments towards would-be enviers. Rawls, Tomlin, Bankovsky and I all qualify the relevant occurrences of envy differently, and it is not clear that minimizing envy would require the same on all views. As the previous paragraph indicated, Bankovsky thinks inequality is an important ground for *warranted* and hence *morally relevant* envy. Another example is that Tomlin defends the contention that envy and inequality go together against Ben-Ze’ev’s argument by adding further qualifications to Rawls’s account (Tomlin 2008, 115–16).³³ Nonetheless, it still seems fair to say that Rawlsians must do more to establish a link between inequality and envy. The arguments that Nozick and Ben-Ze’ev offer are important since they give additional reasons to doubt the force of the economy objection to Rawls’s account of self-respect, and because they show how complicated and contested the relationship between self-respect and the distribution of social goods is.

³³ Rawls concentrates on envy of social primary goods and more specifically “general envy”. General envy is directed towards kinds of goods and not particular objects. Rawls believes it is this type of envy towards the better off that the least advantaged are most like to experience, and which, consequently, poses a potential problem to the stability of JF. (Rawls 1999, 466).

Because the relationship between equality and envy is so contested and complicated, I do not think it is possible to say something strong about the implications of my argument for envy-avoidance regarding the distribution of economic goods without significant argumentation. In the article, I note that standard policies of esteem such as securing freedom of association and combating stigma and social invisibility arguably go a long way in preventing morally relevant occurrences of envious sentiments. Envy-avoidance may require more, however. In cases where it does require a more egalitarian distribution than, say what the difference principle prescribes, then I am prepared to accept that implication. More precisely, I would say that in such cases considerations of envy give us a moral pro tanto reason to favor such a distribution. It is worth noting, however, that if envy-avoidance does not pull us in the direction of some repugnant form of equality but rather a standard politic of esteem, then that is another reason to endorse that ideal. It would cohere better with our intuitions.

5.2.6. Associations and self-respect

One of Rawls's main strategies for securing self-respect is to secure an effective freedom of association. "It normally suffices that for each person there is some association (one or more) to which he belongs and within which the activities that are rational for him are publicly affirmed by others." (Rawls 1999, 387). While freedom of association is a basic liberty, I wish to examine this claim and the discussion surrounding it here because it also connects to the relationship between economic inequalities and self-respect. For the fact that JF secures freedom of association is one of Rawls's main reasons for thinking that the inequalities it permits are compatible with an equal distribution of the social bases of self-respect.

Associations include a variety of groups ranging from formal work environments to more informal sport associations, religious communities and so on. Effective freedom of association that secures a rich variety of viable associations is considered important to self-respect for three overall reasons.

First, it secures everyone the opportunity to attain recognition for what they do in "everyday life" (Rawls 1999, 387). The idea is that different associations have different standards of recognition tailored to the particular interests and talents of their members. As I understand it, the idea here aligns with Nozick's argument for social diversity considered in the previous section. The second reason has to do with the Aristotelian principle. Briefly put, the principle is that "... other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities

...” (Rawls 1999, 374). Rawls thinks that when our plan of life is suited to our nature – our “realized capacities” – we will experience it as more fulfilling which in turn disposes us to value it more. This is conducive to our self-respect, since one aspect is precisely a person’s “secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out” (Rawls 1999, 386). Furthermore, people have different talents and therefore enjoy doing different things. Therefore, a rich variety of associations tailored to the interests and aims of their members is important to self-respect. In sum, as Zink puts it, a rich variety of associations secures that it is possible to satisfy the Aristotelian principle while also attaining recognition (Zink 2011, 333).

Third, associations tend to form “non-comparing groups” (Rawls 1999, 470). This means that people tend to not compare themselves to others in different associations, e.g., associations where the earnings are much higher. This should work to render general status hierarchies, such as those pertaining to economic position, less important. Moreover, this is presented in conjunction with the idea that when citizens venture outside their associations they meet each other as equals, and the better off do not make an “... ostentatious display of their higher estate calculated to demean the condition of those who have less.” (Rawls 1999, 470). This duty of civility and the plurality of associations should also “reduce the visibility, or at least the painful visibility”, of economic differences (Rawls 1999, 470).

It is worth noting a couple of critical remarks to the idea that associations can mitigate the negative effects of general status hierarchies. Honneth’s position is that associations are inadequate sources of self-esteem (Honneth 2011, 406). Zaino (Zaino 1998, 744) offers another kind of criticism. She maintains that the reliance on associations to prevent the worst off from comparing themselves to the better off is, in effect, too much like relying on segregation. It is illiberal and morally akin to manipulation and deceit, which are supposed to be absent in the public justification of a well-ordered society (Zaino 1998, 747).

Rawls’s defenders point out that the idea of non-comparing groups, meeting each other as equals and refraining from ostentatious displays of wealth can be read more charitably. Scanlon contends that the reliance on associations is an objectionable way of concealing the problem only if the differences that are concealed are themselves unjust (Scanlon 2018, 36). Frye similarly remarks that the point of associations is not really to hide anything but to

lessen the psychological and social significance of global status hierarchies (Frye 2016, 508–9).

This dissertation does not question that associations provide important support to self-respect, nor do I argue that relying on associations to mitigate the effects of economic status hierarchies is somehow illiberal. The second article, however, points out another problem with using this as an argument for freedom of associations in a Rawlsian context. Namely that no one who accepts the set-up of the original position and accepts that the principle of freedom of association provides more support to the Aristotelian principle than contrary arrangements can, in a meaningful way, be more convinced about the importance of associations by additional appeals to self-respect. In short, I criticize the justificatory force that this argument has *within* OP.

5.2.7. Summary

Before proceeding to the relationship between self-respect and basic liberties, it might be useful with a summary of this section. Rawls gives several reasons for thinking that the economic inequalities that JF permits do not undermine the self-respect of the worst off. The critics criticize the force of these arguments by pointing to how significant relative economic standing is to our sense of self-worth. They also argue that because of this significance, equality in the social bases of self-respect requires equality of wealth. My position concerning Rawls's status argument is that it is implausible to the extent that it pertains to evaluative self-respect. On this issue, I mostly agree with the largely Honnethian literature. Regarding the matter of envy, my position is that Rawls and others that care about the social conditions for self-esteem should care about envy too. However, the relationship between envy and economic inequalities is far from clear. This makes it hard to tell what the ideal of envy-avoidance requires with respect to the distribution of economic goods. It also gives a reason for doubting the force of the economy objection. It is unclear whether there is a problem here for Rawls, and, for the same reason, if the way that JF distributes economic goods constitutes an advantage or disadvantage vis-à-vis alternative conceptions in terms of self-respect. The argument from freedom of association might be sound, but I argue that it is superfluous within the context of OP.

5.3. Self-respect and basic liberties

A main theme in the dissertation is the relationship between basic liberties and self-respect, and the relevance of this relationship from the perspective of justice. We have already considered whether basic liberties, including freedom of association, are sufficient to secure equal support to self-respect under conditions of economic inequalities. We did not examine in depth whether equal basic liberties are necessary or important in the first place, however. Could, say, equality of wealth be equally good in terms of self-respect? That is the topic here.

This section gives a critical overview of some of the literature concerning the relationship between self-respect and basic liberties. It is common to argue that self-respect, or at least recognition self-respect, normally depends on having equal basic liberties. Both Rawls, Honneth, and others insist that the constitution must secure every citizen an equal share of certain basic liberties such as freedom of expression, the right to own private property, freedom of association etc. And one of the central reasons that they marshal in favor of this claim is that it is important to citizens' self-respect.

I criticize such arguments for being problematic in one way or another: they are superfluous (in a Rawlsian context), circular, concern a form of self-respect that is not a condition for any relevant interests, or are otherwise problematic. Some of my criticism that concerns arguments centered on an evaluative notion of self-respect was taken up in the previous section and shall not be reiterated here. The primary focus will be on arguments centered on recognition self-respect. In the following sections, I start by giving a brief account of some of the most influential arguments for this connection between self-respect and basic liberties, largely concentrating on those of Honneth and Rawls. After that I briefly consider what, following Jason Brennan, I shall call "semiotic arguments" and how they can be used in self-respect arguments for basic liberties. Finally, I account for some general critical perspectives on some of these arguments, situating this dissertation among them.

Before that, however, I should make some preliminary remarks about how basic liberties and the liberty principle that mandates an equal distribution of them is understood in this dissertation. I assume a standard list such as we find in Rawls, e.g., freedom of association, free speech, the right to vote etc. (Rawls 1993, 291). I do not have a specific view on which items that belong on such a list or how they ought to be specified. That is, how precisely the liberty principle differs from the relevant alternatives. The arguments I make should hold

regardless of how precisely we draw the distinctions here (though I operate with some examples of what I take to be contrary principles). What is important to me is that the liberty principle and the relevant alternatives are all reasonable interpretations (by which I mean worth taking seriously) of the formal principle of moral equality, and that they are justified as such.

5.3.1. Rawls and respect for personhood

We have already seen that Rawls sometimes appears to hold that a conception of justice can provide recognitional support of everyone's equal worth by equalizing either wealth or basic liberties (section 5.2.3.). However, he can also be understood to give three arguments for the claim that the liberty principle is *essential* to secure the social bases of self-respect. One of these is the argument from freedom of associations that I considered in section 5.2.6., and which shall not be reiterated here. Another argument is that JF affirms or worth:

“For by arranging inequalities for reciprocal advantage and by abstaining from the exploitation of the contingencies of nature and social circumstance within a framework of equal liberties, persons express their respect for one another in the very constitution of their society. In this way they insure their self-respect as it is rational for them to do.” (Rawls 1999, 155).

Remarks such as this one can and has been interpreted as an argument that JF, including the liberty principle, expresses respect for the citizenry better than other conceptions of justice, and therefore provides the best support to self-respect. Importantly, the remark is plausibly taken to concern *recognition* respect and self-respect. This in contrast to the evaluative form of self-respect that consists in being confident in the value of our pursuits and our ability to pursue them. The same goes for Rawls's account of the duty of mutual respect that the citizens have.³⁴

³⁴ “This is the duty to show a person the respect which is due to him as a moral being, that is, as a being with a sense of justice and a conception of the good. [...] Mutual respect is shown in several ways: in our willingness to see the situation of others from their point of view, from the perspective of their conception of their good; and in our being prepared to give reasons for our actions whenever the interests of others are materially affected.” (Rawls 1999, 297).

So, it is fair to say that we can at least reconstruct a Rawlsian argument for JF based on recognition self-respect. Several authors have pursued this possibility. Meena Krishnamurthy, for example, has examined this Rawlsian idea about respect for persons, and what that means when we understand “person” according to Rawls’s conception of personhood in relation to democracy. Amongst other things, Krishnamurthy contends that, on Rawlsian premises, such respect requires that everyone has an equally effective vote:

“In short, because I possess the two moral powers to the requisite degree and a determinate conception of the good that is worth pursuing, I therefore must be given an equally effective vote. It confirms my equal status as a possessor of the two moral powers and of a determinate conception of the good that is worthy of pursuit.” (Krishnamurthy 2013, 188).

Respect for the fact that citizens are persons is in turn essential to their self-respect as persons, and this is, according to Krishnamurthy, Rawls’s most important argument for democracy and political liberties. I question this line of reasoning in the second article. The trouble, I argue, is to see how such arguments can have any role in the complete case for JF.

Another of Rawls’s arguments for the special importance of basic liberties to self-respect is that they support it by supporting the moral powers: “The first element [of self-respect] is supported by the basic liberties which guarantee the full and informed exercise of both moral powers.” (Rawls 1993, 319). The element Rawls is talking about is “our self-confidence as a fully cooperating member of society rooted in the development and exercise of the two moral powers.” (Rawls 1993, 319), i.e., rationality and reasonability. This would mostly fall under the specifically moral part of our evaluative self-respect on my definition. I also criticize this argument for being superfluous in the context of the original position.

It is worth noting that the alleged link between the social conditions for evaluative self-respect/self-esteem and economic equality, is part of the motivation for this turn among the commentators to more restricted forms of self-valuing like recognition self-respect. Recognition self-respect, it is argued, does not have such troubles: it is this kind of self-respect that is best supported by JF (e.g., Krishnamurthy 2013, 188–90; Doppelt 2009, 144).

5.3.2. Honneth – Rights and respect

Honneth offers a considerably more developed version of the idea that recognition self-respect depends on equal basic liberties. Like Rawls, Honneth believes that equal basic

liberties but also equal legal rights in general are necessary to show equal moral concern for all persons. Legal individual rights enable recognition self-respect as morally autonomous beings: "... adult subjects acquire, via the experience of legal recognition, the possibility of seeing their actions as the universally respected expression of their own autonomy." (Honneth 1995, 118).

Honneth sometimes expresses this idea in republican terms: to have equal moral concern for all persons involves respecting their status as equal co-authors to those norms that regulate our common social life. What threatens our self-respect as equal co-authors, then, is marginalization, domination, and submission according to Honneth. Legal rights are important because they protect against these injustices:

"Without getting into an exhaustive list of what diminishes self-respect, we can say that any such list would have to include subordination, marginalization, and exclusion. For these are ways in which individuals are denied the social standing of legitimate co-legislators. They are told, in effect, that they are not competent to shape decisions, and unless they have exceptionally strong inner resources for resisting this message, it will be hard for them to think of themselves as free and equal persons." (J. Anderson and Honneth 2005, 132).

Why does self-respect depend on equal legal rights and specifically the package that the liberty principle offers? One reason, which I briefly explained in chapter 2, relies on socialization and moral progress. I shall here explain two other arguments for this connection that can be interpreted as aiming to show that it relies on some invariable aspect of our human nature – that there is a universal need for this specific form of recognition respect. For even though Honneth drops this line of reasoning in his later works, it is worth briefly examining since it constitutes a potential objection to one of my core claims in this dissertation. Namely, that it is not plausible that the liberty principle offers better support to recognition self-respect simpliciter than other reasonable conceptions of justice. We find these arguments in *The Struggle for Recognition* (1995). One is "conceptual", the other is empirical.

The conceptual argument is based on Joel Feinberg's paper "The nature and value of rights" (Feinberg and Narveson 1970), where Feinberg employs a thought experiment that he calls "Nowheresville". In Nowheresville, people are generous and compassionate such that individual well-being is secured. But people lack legal rights that they can refer to in order to *demand* that their important interests are respected. Whatever assistance they get is charity,

not something that they are legally or even morally entitled to. Being at the mercy of the good will of others, in turn, makes it hard, if not impossible, to respect oneself. Having rights, in contrast, enables us to “stand up like men” (Honneth 1995, 120). In conjunction with the claim that rights express recognition respect for autonomy, Honneth infers that having socially effective rights provides an affirmation of one’s moral worth as a rational being. It “demonstrates” to the agent that “... he or she is universally recognized as a morally responsible person.” (Honneth 1995, 120).

Honneth also gives an empirical argument by referencing marginalized groups that have been denied rights. He points to the effect that disrespect (denial of rights) has had on the psychological health of marginalized minorities. Specifically, Honneth refers to the experiences related to the civil rights movements in the USA: “...in the relevant publications one regularly finds talk of how the endurance of legal under privileging necessarily leads to a crippling feeling of social shame, from which one can be liberated only through active protest and resistance.” (Honneth 1995, 121). Being legally under privileged makes it harder to see oneself as an autonomous and equal actor (Honneth 1995, 120).

The first article contends that it is hard to see why recognition self-respect would be better supported by the liberty principle than other reasonable conceptions of justice unless it is construed in a rather narrow way that I term “basic-liberties self-respect”. This narrow conception, however, is not a condition for autonomy (or welfare for that matter) in any plausible sense. I say nothing about the arguments just considered. This is because they do not appear to give strong reasons for thinking that reasonable alternatives to the liberty principle would not support recognition self-respect simpliciter equally well. Nowheresville is very far from the well-ordered society that corresponds to, say, a reasonable form of epistocracy such as the kind Jason Brennan defends (Brennan 2016). The same point applies to the examples of legal under privileging that Honneth gives (Brennan 2016, 116–17). Nor is it clear that these arguments hold for utilitarianism for that matter – supposing that utilitarianism might mandate something different than a standard list of equal basic liberties but is very unlikely to prescribe something so extreme as systematic oppression of certain groups etc.

5.3.3. Semiotic arguments

What I shall call, following Brennan, “semiotic arguments” for the liberty principle and democracy (equal political rights) in particular, merit some attention in this context. Such

arguments, as Brennan defines them, rely on the idea that democracy signals equal respect, and are independent of other arguments for democracy (Brennan 2016, 113–15). On Brennan’s account such arguments try to establish that epistocracy is *inherently* disrespectful:

“[T]hose who rely on semiotic arguments want to contend that such reasoning succeeds *regardless of the authors’ intentions*. They want to assert that democracy inherently signals respect while epistocracy inherently signals disrespect, notwithstanding what any person actually feels, believes, or intends to express, even if the purpose of implementing epistocratic regimes is to generate more substantively just results.” (Brennan 2016, 117 emphasis in original).

Strictly speaking, semiotic arguments are different from the kinds of self-respect arguments I discuss. They do not rely on specific claims about how principles of justice would affect the self-respect of the citizenry.³⁵ However, they can easily be used as premises in such arguments. One could reason that, say, epistocracy would be *experienced* as disrespectful and therefore undermine self-respect *because* it is objectively disrespectful. At least under the ideal circumstances where people are rational, informed etc. that my project concerns (see chapter 3). It is worth mentioning that Brennan does not think that epistocracy is inherently disrespectful, since he does not a) think that epistocracy is inherently unjust, nor b) that the proponents of such a view must have attitudes that are (objectively) demeaning, arrogant etc. Though this specific line of reasoning is not explicitly addressed as such in the articles, I believe it is covered by my arguments about what citizens have reasons for thinking constitutes respectful or disrespectful treatment. My view is that *if* epistocracy is otherwise just then it is hard to see why it would be objectively disrespectful in terms of recognition respect.

5.3.4. Critical perspectives

This section takes up some general critical perspectives on the justificatory role of self-respect arguments for principles of justice. Specifically, arguments centered around the idea that certain principles of justice affirm recognition self-respect whereas others do not.

³⁵ Elizabeth Anderson’s famous criticism of luck-egalitarianism largely consists of such semiotic arguments (E. S. Anderson 1999).

Massey provides an interesting criticism of the justificatory role of what he terms “objective” self-respect. Recall that on the objective concept of self-respect there are moral constraints on which forms of self-valuing that deserve the name of “self-respect” (section 4.3.). The meaning of self-respect is explained with reference to some moral notion: we must believe we are entitled to rights or some such in order to have real *self-respect*.

Massey bases his case on an objection to Feinberg’s argument from Nowheresville mentioned in section 5.3.2. (Massey 1995, 208–9). Massey notes two possible ways of understanding Feinberg’s argument. The first is that believing oneself to deserve rights is causally necessary for having self-respect, but not the same as having self-respect. The other is that the belief in having rights is a conceptually necessary condition for having self-respect. He believes that this latter possibility is what Feinberg has in mind. However:

“If, as Feinberg suggests, respecting oneself simply is believing oneself to have rights, then the importance of respecting oneself must derive from the prior importance of having rights. One cannot then use the importance of self-respect ... to explain the importance of rights.” (Massey 1995, 209).

Why not? That would be a circular argument according to Massey, one whose “tightness of the circle” is of the nonvirtuos variety (Massey 1995, 209). I draw on this idea in the first article (pp. 131):

“Say that we defend a notion of self-respect as respecting yourself as a right bearer with the moral idea that having and exercising rights are important. In that case, we cannot defend the importance of rights by arguing that they are conducive to self-respect thus understood. That would be a circular argument.”

Schemmel points to a complementary problem with the justificatory role of what he terms “standing self-respect”. To have standing self-respect is to have a sense of what you are entitled to in virtue of your status. To have standing self-respect as a citizen is to have a view of what you are entitled to as a citizen, and to be ready to fight for these entitlements. (Schemmel 2018, 4–5). For the sake of clarity, this is the concept of recognition self-respect as a citizen minus the standards of conduct (apart from standing up to your rights).

Schemmel notes that the conception of standing self-respect relevant to a liberal theory of justice must be objective. Not any view of your moral status would suffice – it must be the

correct one since an objective theory of justice cannot support just any view of what justice requires. This raises the question, however, of how standing self-respect can give rise to additional requirements of justice over and beyond what is already required for other reasons: “... the obstacle to finding such cases is that, if they are not otherwise unjust ... then individuals ought to adapt their standing self-respect accordingly.” (Schemmel 2018, 10).

Schemmel calls this the “... *Alignment Thesis: if social and political arrangements are arranged in a just manner, then proper standing self-respect should follow.*” (Schemmel 2018, 9 emphasis in original). He qualifies it, however, by remarking that it applies to normal adults, not children or the mentally ill (Schemmel 2018, 9). Schemmel is arguably on to something important regarding arguments to the effect that principles of justice (such as the liberty principle) affirm the part of recognition self-respect that concerns the sense of being a moral equal. I think that at least parts of my claim about which principles that affirm our sense of being moral equals on Rawlsian premises in the second article can be read as a special case of the alignment thesis. On this point I argue that whatever the parties in the original position choose is what a consistent Rawlsian must think affirms recognition self-respect.

Brennan also criticizes the force of self-respect based arguments for principles of justice in his defense of epistocracy. He addresses the charge that epistocracy would be experienced as disrespectful by those that are denied or only have restricted voting rights. Part of his defense is that even if this is true, it does not count against epistocracy. Specifically, Brennan does not think that this objection has any force provided i) that epistocracy is not intended to convey any disrespect but is rather a genuine attempt at regulating political decisions in the most just way possible in accordance with the norm of moral equality. And ii) that epistocracy really is morally preferable to democracy (considerations of self-respect aside). Under such conditions, Brennan’s position is that “If people feel insulted, it is just too bad, and they need to grow up.” (Brennan 2016, 123).

As I have indicated while describing these critical perspectives, some of my own complaints about self-respect arguments draw on or are similar to them. The added value of these complaints – aside from their value in the context of the articles – is that while you might argue that Massey, Schemmel and Brennan provide us with strong reasons to be skeptical of arguments about affirmation, the merit of such arguments is still far from settled. Therefore, I

believe, more needs to be said. It is also worth mentioning that the dissertation provides a partial defense against these critical perspectives. The basic intuition has some merit, I argue. Specifically, I show that we can give a similar but more modest argument for the liberty principle based on a self-attitude that I call “a sense of competence”.

5.3.5. Summary

Before proceeding to the discussion of the dissertation as a whole, it might be useful with a brief summary of this section about basic liberties and self-respect. Rawls, Honneth and others provide several arguments to the effect that self-respect depends on basic liberties such that we have a reason to favor the liberty principle. I criticize such arguments for being invalid or otherwise problematic. We also noted some general critical perspectives on some of these arguments, specifically those centered on the claim that the liberty principle affirms recognition self-respect. To summarize, it seems that this line of reasoning is available to anyone that defends her theory of justice as a conception of what equal moral concern requires. Moreover, a reasonable conception of justice founded on the principle of equal moral concern need not include a principle of equal basic liberties as this principle is commonly understood. Specifically, it might allow for an unequal distribution, or an equal but less comprehensive list of basic liberties than the one we find in Rawls etc. Therefore, this line of argument does not appear to support the importance of standard basic liberties – or so I and others argue. Yet, I do not go as far as some critics do. The first article makes a case for thinking that the basic intuition has some merit, and that it can be developed in a more plausible way.

6. Summary of articles, discussion, and limitations

This chapter starts by giving a summary of the articles of the dissertation (section 6.1.). The first examines the self-respect argument for basic liberties, which is that self-respect is an important good and best supported by the liberty principle such that we have a reason to favor this arrangement. It argues that we can establish a version of this argument, but not by following the two standard approaches loosely associated with Rawls and Honneth. The second article investigates the role considerations of self-respect have in justifying the choice of basic principles within Rawls's framework of an original position. It argues that the appeal to self-respect is superfluous in the sense that it fully relies on the assumption that JF is the best choice also if we ignore considerations of self-respect as such. The third article argues that, at the very least, those committed to the idea that the distribution of social goods ought to protect the social conditions for self-esteem also have good reasons to care about the levels of envy that different distributive principles reliably generate. The chapter then discusses the unity of the articles, particularly how my critical arguments fit with the constructive ones (section 6.2.). The final section considers some of the overall limitations of the dissertation and further avenues for research.

6.1. Summary of articles

6.1.1. Self-respect and the Importance of Basic Liberties

This article discusses the self-respect argument for basic liberties, which is that 1) self-respect is highly important to autonomy and/or welfare and 2) is best supported by a system of equal basic liberties (the liberty principle), such that 3) we have a reason to think that equal basic liberties are important. I concentrate on versions of it that contend that self-respect is best supported by basic liberties for reasons related to the recognition that such liberties convey. To examine this idea, the paper follows a common practice of making a distinction between two types or concepts of self-respect: evaluative self-respect and personhood self-respect. John Rawls and Axel Honneth are used as representatives of these two types. Rawls's account is understood as an evaluative conception of self-respect, and Honneth's as a conception of personhood self-respect. On the former notion, self-respect is understood as an evaluation based on character, traits, and conduct. On the personhood account, it is understood as respect

for the fact that one is a person. This involves having moral expectations grounded in a sense of being a morally equal person.

I argue that we can provide a convincing version of the self-respect argument, but not by following the two standard approaches loosely associated with Rawls and Honneth. While the evaluative type of self-respect is arguably a valuable self-attitude, it is hard to see why it would be best supported by the liberty principle in virtue of the recognition that this principle conveys. The kind of recognition that the liberty principle conveys does not do much to affirm evaluative self-respect overall, though it does appear to support some aspects of this self-attitude. The personhood account of self-respect, in contrast, suffers from an opposite problem. I argue that it is hard to see why it would be better supported by the liberty principle than other reasonable principles unless it is construed in a rather narrow way that I term “basic-liberties self-respect”. This narrow conception, however, is not a condition for autonomy (or welfare for that matter) in any plausible sense.

The problems I identify with the standard approaches serve as a motivation for a somewhat different and more modest version of the self-respect argument. This is built upon a similar but narrower self-attitude than self-respect that I call “a sense of competence”. This self-attitude is identified by drawing on the two concepts of self-respect together with the literature on relational autonomy. To have a sense of competence is to trust your own capacities for valuation and reflection, and your ability to act in accordance with them. This, in turn, is a condition for exercising autonomy. A sense of competence is included in certain forms of personhood self-respect, but still a conceptually distinct self-attitude because trusting your capacity for autonomy does not entail any specific moral beliefs and views on the standards that are appropriate for persons, the treatment that you are entitled to as a person, or even the respect worthy features of persons. A sense of competence also differs from evaluative self-respect because it does not essentially involve a positive self-evaluation. It is argued that a sense of competence is best supported by a system of equal basic liberties, in conjunction with a public justification centered on autonomy, because this is the arrangement that best signifies recognition of our capacity to make sound decisions.

6.1.2. The Irrelevance of Self-respect in the Original Position

This article discusses John Rawls’s self-respect argument(s) for Justice as Fairness, specifically the role it has in grounding the choice of basic principles of justice within his

framework of an original position. His argument is that self-respect is an important good and best supported by Justice as Fairness, and that this gives us a strong reason to favor that theory. My primary focus is not on the soundness of this argument but on whether it yields an effective reason within the framework of the original position: a reason that can, in principle, tip the scale in favor of a specific alternative all-things-considered. While widely influential, the literature is marked by stark disagreement about its success. The most common criticism of Rawls's account is that it neglects the importance of economic goods to self-respect. I contend that there is a more basic problem with his argument, namely that it is superfluous.

To defend this contention, I distinguish between three arguments from self-respect. 1) The argument from alignment, 2) the argument from egalitarianism and 3) the argument from freedom of association. This analysis covers, I believe, the most central reasons that we can identify in Rawls's and his commentators' works.

I show that these arguments are either unconvincing or superfluous in the specific sense that they fully rely on the assumption that Justice as Fairness is the best choice also if we ignore considerations of self-respect per se, and in such a way that a critic would say that it is her preferred alternative that best supports self-respect. This is clearest in the case of the argument from alignment. The argument from egalitarianism is either implausible or reduces to the argument from alignment, depending on how it is interpreted. The argument from freedom of association is also superfluous, though it does appear to have some force outside the framework of OP, as it were. Thus, it seems that within Rawls's framework considerations of self-respect do not give us a reason to change our opinion on which conception of justice we should prefer all-things-considered.

Importantly, the argument is agnostic with respect to whether the parties would choose Justice as Fairness and not some other alternative. I neither presuppose nor deny that, say, the parties already have conclusive reasons for Justice as Fairness, and that the appeal to self-respect is superfluous in *that* sense. Nor does the paper presuppose or deny that self-respect is indeed best supported by Justice as Fairness. Moreover, the article only discusses the choice of basic principles. How such principles should be specified and approximated in specific social institutions is not considered.

6.1.3. Envy, Self-esteem, and Distributive Justice

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.

After having briefly explained and defended the first premise, the paper concentrates on three objections to the second one. The first is that envy is irrational. This is because the envious desires to reduce the rival's share of the envied good even at a personal cost. Therefore, envy is irrational in the prudential sense. Therefore, it is not something rational actors are liable to experience (everything else being equal). My reply has two steps.

a) It is argued, first, that when the envied good is associated with esteem, and when the envious lacks practical opportunities to attain it for herself, the envious desire is rational with respect to attaining social esteem. b) Following the first step, I argue that it is rational to desire social esteem for reasons of self-esteem in a way that makes even rational people vulnerable to envy. This is done through engaging Morgan Knapp's claim that envy is always irrational because it is systematically unfitting. To defend against this charge, I argue that fittingness is not necessary to make envy rational all-things-considered. The basic idea is that envy can be indirectly prudent in the sense that having those attitudes that make us vulnerable to envy is generally good for us.

The second objection is one from fairness. It basically states that because people have some control over which things they care about and potentially envy, they can be asked to take responsibility for their envious feelings. Therefore, envy-avoidance is a form of illegitimate indulgence and/or give raise to situations morally akin to hostage-taking, where people can voluntarily cultivate interests that may lead to envy and subsequently claim compensation. My response is that when the envy in question is particularly burdensome, and the envious person has had no reasonable alternatives to become highly invested in specific goals and expectations of esteem, it is not unfair to take measures to minimize and compensate for it.

The final objection is that envy is a vice, and that ideals of justice should not be grounded in vices. My answer is that this worry is exaggerated when applied to my defense of envy-avoidance, given everything else that has been said in its defense.

6.2. The overall position of the dissertation

The dissertation discusses the place of self-respect and related self-attitudes in the justification of a theory of social distributive justice. The first two articles examine various types of self-respect based arguments for specific distributive principles. The third discusses the moral relevance of envy – whether it has a place in the justification of distributive principles in the first place. The overall stance of the dissertation can be summarized as two overall points, one negative and one positive:

(1) Negatively, it is argued that several standard types of self-respect based arguments for substantive distributive principles are problematic, and that considerations of self-respect are superfluous to the choice of basic principles within Rawls’s framework.

(2) Positively, it is argued that considerations of self-respect and related concepts still have an important role, and that they encompass more than what is commonly argued (at least in detail) or readily admitted. For we can give a similar and more modest version of the argument for the liberty principle based on what I call “a sense of competence”. And envy-avoidance is a legitimate ideal of distributive justice that arguably offers some practical guidance.

In sum, self-respect and related self-attitudes have an important place in the justification of a theory of distributive justice, but not in the way that Rawls, Honneth and others believe. The first two articles mainly establish the negative point. Firstly, though I concentrate on the liberty principle and the difference principles, they show, from different angles as it were, a) that it is hard to see how considerations of recognition self-respect can have a role in the justification of any substantive interpretation of the formal principle of moral equality. b) The articles also provide supplementary criticisms of the idea that the liberty principle provides the best recognitional support to evaluative self-respect, and indeed any significant positive support of this kind. In addition, the second article also objects to the notion that the difference principle provides such support or protection.

Secondly, the second article also considers the idea that JF might nonetheless provide citizens with the required means to attain self-respect, and establishes that considerations of self-respect are superfluous in the justification of basic principles within OP. While both the general self-respect argument for basic liberties and Rawls's specific account of self-respect has already been criticized extensively by others, more needs to be said given the current state in the literature. In addition, the articles identify some additional problems that have not been clearly and thoroughly exposed before.

While the first two articles are mostly critical, the third defends and broadens the frameworks of Honneth, Rawls and other supporters of a politics of esteem. The argument for envy-avoidance constitutes a defense of the idea that one important aim of a just distribution of social goods is to protect the social bases for self-esteem. For it shows that even though this aim arguably extends to envy-avoidance this is not a weakness, as some have worried (Walsh 1992; Tomlin 2008). It also broadens this idea and the related one of a politics of esteem (Laitinen 2015). For while Honneth and other proponents of political theories of recognition do not explicitly reject that envy-avoidance is a legitimate moral concern (as Rawls seems to do), they say little about it. The place of envy in a political theory of esteem is arguably undertheorized (but see Thompson and Hogget 2011; Bankovsky 2018, 2012, chap. 3,6).

There are two issues that need to be clarified to show how the negative and positive point fit together. First, how does the argument from a sense of competence fit with the superfluosity thesis of the second article? Second, how does the argument for envy-avoidance fit with the negative point, especially the superfluosity thesis? The clarification of these issues should also be informative regarding the implications of the dissertation and serve to prepare the discussion of limitations and further research avenues in section 6.3. Let us consider them in that order.

6.2.1. A sense of competence and the superfluosity thesis

We may wonder whether the argument from a sense of competence is relevant to the second article. Is the position of the dissertation that we can establish a sound and effective argument for the liberty principle based on something close to self-respect, but not within Rawls's specific framework? Or does the argument from a sense of competence falsify the superfluosity thesis?

The answer is that while the argument from a sense of competence seems to be compatible with OP, it cannot solve the problem that I identify in the second article. The argument from a sense of competence shows that the liberty principle protects autonomy more than we might otherwise have a reason to believe. It presupposes, however, that the liberty principle protects the external conditions for autonomy, i.e., conditions other than those relating to the mental states required for autonomy. This is in line with the superfluousness thesis: the argument presupposes the rest of the autonomy-based case for said principle. Therefore, it does not give an effective reason for thinking that it is the liberty principle rather than some other arrangement that is necessary for guaranteeing the development and exercise of our moral powers (which form part of our capacity for autonomy) in the first place. Yet, this is exactly the kind of issues that the choice of principles in the original position turns on.

The argument from a sense of competence is still important, however, when we must prioritize between autonomy and other values such as stability, utility, equality etc. since it tells us that deviations from the liberty principle could undermine autonomy even more than we might otherwise have a reason to believe. The fact that the liberty principle supports a sense of competence can in this specific sense play a role in an all-things-considered assessment. But such an argument would be superfluous in the original position. For the choice of basic principles in OP is about which principles that *guarantee or maximin* all our higher-order interests as citizens³⁶ rather than considering how much support different interests and values should enjoy (Rawls 1993, 74–76, 2001, 102–10). To say that a sense of competence gives an effective reason in this latter context is a stronger claim than the one I defend in the first article.

6.2.2. Envy-avoidance and the negative point

The conjunction of the negative point and the defense of envy-avoidance raises several questions: Is the ideal of envy-avoidance superfluous in the original position in so far as it pertains to self-esteem? If so, in which contexts does it offer practical guidance? Or, alternatively, can Rawlsians escape the superfluousness charge by appealing to some distinct

³⁶ These interests are the interest in developing and exercising our moral powers of rationality and reasonability respectively, and the interest we have in pursuing our conception of the good (Rawls 1993, 74).

envy-based argument that I did not cover? To approach these matters, let us start by considering the following envy-based objection to the superfluosity thesis:

The human sciences tell us that we can, at least as a general rule, expect more and/or more intensive occurrences of morally relevant envy the greater the degree of economic inequality in society. Therefore, the ideal of envy-avoidance gives us a reason to prefer a more equal distribution of economic goods such as income etc. to a less equal distribution. Rawls is committed to envy-avoidance to the extent that envy involves a harm to self-esteem.

Therefore, the parties in OP have a self-esteem based reason to prefer principles that permit (or reliably lead to) less inequality above principles that permit (or lead to) more inequality. It follows that the superfluosity thesis is false.

My response is that the empirical assumptions that this sort of envy-based argument for economic equality (or inequality for that matter) rests on are too controversial. Recall from section 5.2.5. that the relationship between inequality and envy is contested. Some argue that economic equality leads to more/more intensive feelings of envy. Others contend that it is the other way around. The matter is further complicated by slightly different definitions of envy and varying qualifications on which occurrences of envy that are morally relevant. This controversiality is problematic for a Rawlsian when it comes to invoking envy-based reasons for basic principles regulating the distribution of economic goods.

To prevent misunderstandings, I am not saying that we cannot determine which side that has the strongest argument. My position is rather that none of the corresponding empirical assumptions are well enough established in the human sciences. They are too controversial for it to be unproblematic for a Rawlsian to presuppose any specific view. Importantly, this claim about controversiality is about relatively general empirical assumptions and not assumptions about what would happen in this or that specific society under conditions of more or less economic inequality. This is an important distinction because, in Rawls's framework, basic principles of justice have a general scope. Briefly put, they apply to *all* modern well-ordered democratic societies (Rawls 2001, 1–9).

Why is it problematic for a Rawlsian to presuppose controversial empirical assumptions? On the face of it, the parties in the original position appear to know all general facts about society and human nature: "There are no limitations on general information, that is, on general laws

and theories ...” (Rawls 1999, 119). So, by default the parties would know that envy and inequality go together if the human sciences say that this is the case. However, in *PL* the parties only know uncontroversial empirical facts (e.g., Rawls 1993, 139). This follows from Rawls’s account of the burdens of judgement. The facts must be uncontroversial in the sense that they are not subject to reasonable disagreement, i.e., possible for normally rational, reasonable, and fully informed people to disagree on given the current state of evidence, difficulties with interpreting it and so on (Rawls 1993, 54–58). I do not believe any general assumptions about the relationship between economic equality and envy currently satisfy this strong criterion of which facts the parties can base their choice on.³⁷

Rawls had a more lenient view on controversial facts before *PL*. Nonetheless, a weaker version of the basic idea is still in the spirit of Rawls’s early work: a theory of social justice should not be based on controversial empirical assumptions. More precisely, when the question is whether a theory has an advantage *or* disadvantage vis-à-vis some specific alternative with respect to some issue such as envy, the argument should not be based on controversial empirical assumptions. Let “controversial” mean that there is no strong evidence for it and consensus on it in the sciences. Thus understood, this methodological principle is weaker than Rawls’s view in *PL*, but still sufficient (I believe) to rule out general assumptions about envy and economic inequality.³⁸ This weaker version also seems like a plausible principle that any theory of justice should satisfy, at least everything else being equal. If so, then invoking envy-based reasons for basic and general principles for the distribution of economic goods appear to be problematic even for non-Rawlsians.

The ideal of envy-avoidance is not without practical implications, however. Far from it. First, recall that the superfluousness thesis only applies to the choice of basic principles of distribution whereas the defense of envy-avoidance also applies to the context of legislation.

³⁷ Eyal is on to something similar in his discussion about Rawls’s view on the social bases of self-esteem: “... it is doubtful that the parties in the original position are even aware of the exact nature of common psychological inhibitions. The veil of ignorance permits the parties to know very little about the persons they represent; almost only that these persons are ‘rational’ and ‘reasonable’ ...” (Eyal 2005, 215–16 note 32). This is stronger than what I am claiming, however.

³⁸ Of course, we need not agree with Rawls that the same basic distributive principles are valid for, roughly, all well-ordered liberal democracies. This is an issue that goes beyond the scope of this dissertation.

This is important for Rawlsians since, in this latter context, we are dealing with more specific social circumstances than at the level of basic principles. The veil of ignorance is partly lifted, we are no longer dealing with all well-ordered modern liberal democracies (see section 2.2.4.). Therefore, it stands to reason that the relevant empirical assumptions are, in general, less controversial. In addition, at the level of legislation we are dealing with more specific issues such that the empirical consequences of our choices in terms of envy should be easier to assess, at least in general.

Second, as I note in the third article, the ideal of envy-avoidance arguably gives us at least an additional reason for a standard politics of esteem. In short, the state should combat stigma and social invisibility, and secure freedom of association. Though such additional reasons for freedom of association are superfluous on Rawlsian premises, this might very well be an effective reason within other frameworks.

So much for envy-avoidance and the superfluosity thesis. As a final point, we should also note the implications of the other parts of the negative point for how we might meet the ideal of envy-avoidance. The negative point entails that neither the liberty principle nor the difference principle provides significant recognitional support or protection of our evaluative self-respect. Envy involves a harm to this aspect of our self-image. Therefore, we cannot trust the recognition that these principles convey to satisfy the ideal of envy-avoidance.

6.3. Limitations and further research avenues

There are two kinds of limitations to my dissertation worth mentioning. They both relate to the negative point, in particular the part about arguments based on recognition self-respect. One kind of limitation pertains to the relationship between affirmation and support, considered in section 5.2.4. The first and second article both argue or presuppose, in different ways, that the principles of justice that affirm our recognition self-respect are those that conform to our moral convictions, specifically our sense of justice. However, recall the distinction between affirmation and support (section 5.2.4.). Affirming a self-attitude is a matter of conveying the corresponding attitude. Support, on the other hand, is an empirical matter. Logically, I could feel that I am not respected as a moral equal even though, according to my own convictions, I am treated as a moral equal.

Though it might be a general rule that those principles that affirm the cognitive content of recognition self-respect are also those that support it, this need not hold for all conceptions of justice. Whether it does is an empirical matter. Yet I have not considered whether there could be relevant exceptions in the articles. This is a limitation on my case against arguments based on recognition self-respect for substantive principles of justice. Dillon's account of basal self-respect, which we briefly touched upon in section 4.4., points to a similar problem. Recall that Dillon identifies cases where the agents "know but cannot feel their worth" (Dillon 1997, 227). It seems reasonable to say that recognition self-respect includes or relies on affective components. I have not discussed this possibility either. This is also a limitation of my criticism of self-respect based arguments.

Another kind of limitation has to do with feasibility, specifically the feasibility of moral compliance with various conceptions of justice. Suppose that epistocracy is less feasible than JF with respect to moral compliance in that we cannot expect citizens living in the well-ordered society corresponding to epistocracy to agree to that conception of justice to the same extent as they would agree to JF in the well-ordered society corresponding to JF. If this is the case, then epistocracy would not affirm citizens' recognition self-respect to the same extent either. Therefore, it might not support citizens' recognition self-respect to the same extent as JF would (assuming here the connection between affirmation and support).

This is a limitation of my dissertation for the following reason. Recall from section 3.2. that this dissertation is mostly a work within ideal theory. *Most* of the arguments I make and engage simply assume ideal circumstances, which include moral compliance. More specifically, most of the arguments I make and engage concern, following Rawls's distinction, the moral justification of end-state principles and not the check for stability. The former presupposes ideal circumstances, the latter is a check of whether these are feasible and stable. A theory of justice could perfectly well pass one of these stages but not the other. However, the overall justification of basic principles is arguably a matter *both* of their moral desirability and of their feasibility.

This point is especially salient in the context of the second article, since the choice of principles in OP clearly must satisfy both desiderata. For this means that the fact that some alternative to JF is less feasible with respect to moral compliance and consequently (we assume here) supports recognition self-respect less could be an argument from self-respect

against that alternative within the position. Specifically, it could provide an additional reason for doubting the *overall* feasibility of the alternative in question. For Rawls argues that JF secures a congruence between the right and the good in part because it secures the social bases of self-respect. This, in turn, is one of his main arguments for stability – the other being that JF provides for social mechanisms that would make citizens develop a sense of justice that would motivate them to comply with the demands of justice (Rawls 2001, 185–86, 298; Freeman 2003, 280–85).

In short, Rawlsians could perhaps escape the superfluousness charge by appealing to some sufficiently independent argument based on considerations of self-respect and the feasibility of moral compliance that I have not covered.³⁹ This would presumably be an argument founded on empirical research within the human sciences. That said, such an objection does not seem very easy to establish. Taking epistocracy as the example, the argument would hold that epistocracy could be the first choice in OP but for the fact that it does not pass the check for stability. Furthermore, the argument would hold that epistocracy would pass the check for stability, despite being less feasible in terms of moral compliance than JF, but for the fact that this lower degree of compliance makes it so that epistocracy undermines the self-respect of some groups. Importantly, the source of this difference in moral compliance cannot be contingent cultural or social factors. This is because the check for stability concerns the practical possibility of achieving the well-ordered society that corresponds to the conception in question given *general* facts about human nature and the world (see chapter 3). It does not appear easy to establish the plausibility of such a scenario. Yet, it might still be worth exploring.

To generalize, a limitation of this dissertation is that there is not much discussion of the empirical premises in the arguments I make. I wish to close by indicating a possible response. This response is of the same kind as the one I gave to the envy-based objection to the superfluousness thesis in the previous section (that objection can be seen as an illustration of this overall limitation with respect to my arguments about evaluative self-respect): the relevant empirical assumptions are too controversial. It is not obvious how strong this reply is

³⁹ According to Rawls's argument for stability, moral compliance is realistic in part *because* JF secures self-respect (Rawls 1999, paras. 80–81). I have the opposite relationship in mind, though one does not exclude the other.

in this context, however. I cannot develop or defend it here but shall leave it for future research.

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Individual papers

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Article 1. Self-respect and the Importance of Basic Liberties

Abstract: This article discusses the self-respect argument for basic liberties, which is that self-respect is an important good, best supported by basic liberties, and that this yields a reason for the traditional liberty principle. I concentrate on versions of it that contend that self-respect is best supported by basic liberties for reasons related to the recognition that such liberties convey. I first argue that the two standard approaches loosely associated with John Rawls and Axel Honneth, respectively, fail. Here self-respect is understood as an evaluation based on traits and conduct (Rawls) or as respect for the fact that one is a person (Honneth). The problem with evaluative self-respect is that basic liberties do not offer much support to it. The problem with the personhood notion is that it is hard to see why it would be better supported by the liberty principle than other reasonable principles unless it is construed in a rather narrow way that is not an important good. I then draw on the literature to identify a self-attitude that I call “a sense of competence”, which I argue avoids the problems with the two standard approaches such that we get a reason for the liberty principle.

Keywords: Self-respect, John Rawls, Axel Honneth, basic liberties.

1. Introduction.

A common idea in the literature on self-respect and recognition is that self-respect is an important good and that social arrangements therefore should be evaluated, at least in part, by how they affect people’s self-respect. As Robin S. Dillon puts it: “Self-respect is frequently appealed to as a means of justifying a wide variety of philosophical claims or positions, generally in arguments of the form: x promotes (or undermines) self-respect; therefore, x is to that extent to be morally approved (or objected to)” (Dillon 2018, 23). In particular, various accounts of self-respect are used to defend the importance of an equal distribution of basic liberal rights and liberties. I will call this “the self-respect argument”. It is that (1) self-respect is highly important to autonomy and/or welfare and (2) best supported by basic liberties, and that (3) basic liberties therefore are important. The idea is to give a reason for prioritizing the fair distribution of basic liberties above other distributive principles.

We find different versions of the self-respect argument in the literature on recognition and self-respect where it is debated how self-respect must be conceptualized for the argument to work, and whether it can succeed at all. Two of the most known, widely applied and

discussed versions of this argument are those of John Rawls and Axel Honneth. The appeal to self-respect plays an important role in both of their theories. In Rawls's theory, the importance of self-respect is used – among other considerations – to support the contention that the “liberty principle” should enjoy a lexical priority⁴⁰ above other distributive principles. The liberty principle is, roughly, that the standard basic liberal rights and liberties are to be distributed equally (Rawls 1993).⁴¹ In Honneth's early framework before *Freedom's Right* (Honneth 2015) the argument from self-respect is arguably the most central reason for defending a similar position – a legal system of equal and highly prioritized if not inviolable legal rights (Honneth 1995, chap. 5). Several authors have taken up Rawls's and Honneth's approaches and followed similar lines of reasoning. However, there is also an ongoing discussion as to whether considerations of self-respect actually lend any support to the liberty principle and its special status (Schemmel 2018; Brennan 2016, chap. 5; Massey 1995; Eyal 2005).

This paper examines the self-respect argument, specifically versions of it that contend that self-respect is best supported by basic liberties for reasons related to the recognition that such liberties convey. I argue that we can provide a convincing version of the self-respect argument, but not by following the two standard approaches loosely associated with Rawls and Honneth. I begin (section 2) by examining the approach associated with Rawls (or, rather, parts of his argument) and which is based on an evaluative conception of self-respect. Here self-respect is evaluative in the sense that it is based on an evaluation of your character, traits and conduct.⁴² According to Rawls, to have self-respect is to be convinced that your conception of the good is worth pursuing and that your character is fit to pursue it (Rawls 1971, 440). Self-respect has prudential value because it is a precondition for enjoying other goods, and for being motivated to pursue your aims. Furthermore, Rawls argues that self-

⁴⁰ By “Lexical priority”, Rawls means absolute priority under “reasonable favorable conditions, that is, under social circumstances which, provided the political will exists, permit the effective establishment and full exercise of these liberties” (Rawls 1993, 297).

⁴¹ The liberty principle is that “Each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which is compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all” (Rawls 1993, 291). These liberties are in turn specified as “...freedom of thought and liberty of conscience; the political liberties and freedom of association ... the freedoms specified by the liberty and integrity of the person; and finally, the rights and liberties covered by the rule of law” (Rawls 1993, 291).

⁴² This is what Dillon terms “evaluative self-respect” (Dillon 1992).

respect is best supported by the liberty principle and its priority because this signifies our equal status (Rawls 1971, 546). I reject this approach because even though this evaluative form of self-respect is valuable, we have no strong reasons to think that it is best supported by the liberty principle in virtue of the recognition that this principle conveys.

The other approach (section 3), associated with Honneth and recognition theory, is based on a “personhood view” (Dillon 1995, 29) of self-respect, according to which having self-respect means respecting your moral status as a person. Such self-respect is not based on an evaluation of your character or conduct, but rather the mere fact that you are a person.

Honneth argues that self-respect thus understood is a condition for autonomy, and that it is dependent on respect in the form of equal legal rights because this signifies our moral status as persons (Honneth 1995, chap. 5). I reject this approach because it is plausible that personhood self-respect is better supported by the liberty principle than reasonable alternatives only if it is interpreted in such a narrow way that it is not a condition for autonomy (or welfare for that matter) in any plausible sense.

In the last two sections, I provide a version of the self-respect argument based on a third kind of self-relation that does not quite fit either of the above views of self-respect. Drawing on the evaluative and personhood view of self-respect and the literature on relational autonomy, I isolate a form of self-regard that is necessary for exercising autonomy (section 4). I call it “a sense of competence”. To have a sense of competence is to trust your own capacities for valuation and reflection, and your ability to act in accordance with them. This differs from moral personhood self-respect because it does not entail any specific moral beliefs. It is therefore a more plausible condition for autonomy. Moreover, a sense of competence differs from evaluative self-respect because it does not entail the conviction that your aims are particularly worthwhile, or that your character is particularly fit to pursue them. In the end (section 5), I suggest that the best political social basis for this self-relation is the liberty principle because this is the social arrangement that best signifies recognition of the capacity of the citizens to make sound decisions. We thereby get a reason for assigning the liberty principle a high priority.

The motivation for this paper is that while there are already good reasons in the literature to doubt standard self-respect arguments for basic liberties, more needs to be said given that the merit of such arguments is far from settled. This paper identifies some problems that, to wit,

has not been clearly and thoroughly exposed before. In addition, the argument from a sense of competence shows that the basic intuition is not completely without merit. Indeed, it can be understood as a *part* of the standard arguments since there are many connections and overlaps between the various self-attitudes.

2. Evaluative self-respect and basic liberties – Rawls.

Rawls's account of what he interchangeably calls "self-respect" and "self-esteem" has two aspects in *A theory of Justice*. It includes, first, "... 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-esteem implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions" (Rawls 1971, 440).

In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls complements this account of self-respect by explaining its connection to his political ideal of personhood. In Rawls's ideal of personhood, what characterizes such beings, and makes them free and equal, are two fundamental moral powers: rationality and reasonability. To be rational means to have "... the capacity to form, revise and pursue a rational plan of life" (Rawls 1993, 318). To be reasonable means to "[be] ready to propose principles ... as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given ... that others will likewise do so" (Rawls 1993, 49).⁴³ Moreover, persons are also understood as being engaged in a determinate plan of life, suited to their particular character. On the basis of this political conception of persons, Rawls derives three "higher-order interests" of citizens: the interest in developing and exercising each of the two moral powers, and the interest we have in pursuing our determinate plan of life. From these interests Rawls derives an account of "primary good" which are social goods that are "generally necessary" (Rawls 1993, 307) to satisfying our higher-order interests. His principles of justice concern the distribution of these goods. The main primary goods are basic liberties, income, opportunities, social power – and the social bases of self-respect (Rawls 1993, chap. 3,5).

⁴³ It also involves recognizing the burdens of judgement, i.e., the fact that "it is not to be expected that conscientious persons with full powers of reason ... will all arrive at the same conclusion" (Rawls 1993, 58).

In relation to this ideal, Rawls describes self-respect as having two elements. The first element is “our self-confidence as a fully cooperating member of society rooted in the development and exercise of the two moral powers” (Rawls 1993, 319). The second is “our secure sense of our own value rooted in the conviction that we can carry out a worthwhile plan of life” (Rawls 1993, 319).

Rawls argues that the social basis of self-respect is “perhaps the most important primary good” because it is perhaps the most important means for pursuing a rational plan of life (Rawls 1971, 440, 68, 178–79, 1993, 318). The reason for this is that without self-respect we lack the necessary motivation to pursue our plan of life. As Rawls says, “Without [self-respect] nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them” (Rawls 1971, 440). This means that self-respect, in effect, is a precondition for the value of other things.

There is a considerable debate on what exactly Rawls means by “self-respect”. For the purposes of this article, I follow a standard interpretation according to which Rawls operates with an evaluative form of self-respect, albeit it a broad one that also includes what some would say falls under “self-esteem” (Doppelt 2009; Eyal 2005; Dillon 1995, 32). As Dillon formulates it “For Rawls self-respect ... [consists of] a) confidence in the worth of one’s ‘plan of life’ – the aims and ideals one seeks to attain ... b) the assessment of one’s character and abilities as well suited to successfully living that life” (Dillon 1995, 27–28). This strikes me as a plausible interpretation of the two aspects of self-respect in *A Theory of Justice* and its two elements in *Political Liberalism*, which is how Rawls most often describes it. Here self-respect is grounded in your character, traits and conduct in the sense that it concerns the merit of what you are doing and your ability to pursue your aims and ideals. That said, you can also reconstruct a personhood account of self-respect in Rawls.⁴⁴

According to Rawls, the parties in the original position would “... avoid at almost any cost the social conditions that undermine self-respect” (Rawls 1971, 440). Therefore, “The fact that justice as fairness gives more support to self-respect than other principles is a strong reason ... to adopt it” (Rawls 1971, 440). While the exact status of self-respect, including how it ought to be distributed, is somewhat unclear in Rawls, it is common to interpret him as

⁴⁴ E.g., (Doppelt 2009; Krishnamurthy 2013).

claiming that the social bases of self-respect must be distributed equally (Rawls 1971, 546; Eyal 2005, 197; Zaino 1998, 742; Doppelt 2009, 128). By “social bases”, he arguably means social conditions that either affirm people’s self-respect or guarantees them opportunities to achieve self-respect, together with their public justification (Rawls 1971, 544–46, 1993, 319; Doppelt 2009, 135–37; Eyal 2005, 207). The social bases of self-respect are primarily equal basic rights and liberties according to Rawls, but also – to some extent – economic goods. He therefore claims that his two principles of justice provide citizens with an optimal basis for self-respect, at least to the extent that principles of justice can do so.

It is argued that self-respect is most effectively encouraged and supported by the two principles of justice, again precisely because of the insistence on the equal basic liberties and the priority assigned to them, although self-respect is further strengthened and supported by the fair value of the political liberties and the difference principle (Rawls 1993, 318).

Rawls’ main argument for this is that what matters most to our self-respect is our status, the worth we have in the eyes of others: “...our self-respect normally depends upon the respect of others. Unless we feel that our endeavors are respected by them, it is difficult if not impossible for us to maintain the conviction that our ends are worth advancing ...” (Rawls 1971, 178). And the liberty principle – both the content and priority – is the principle that best conveys our full and equal worth – at least on some of Rawls’s formulations (Rawls 1999, 155–58, 477, 1993, 318–20). Therefore, the liberty principle serves as the main social basis of self-respect. Note, however, that the second principle of justice, which requires fair equality of opportunity, and that social and economic inequality must benefit the least advantaged members of society, also serves to affirm our status as citizens.⁴⁵ I will call claims to the effect that certain distributive principles affirm our worth rather than provide us with means of attaining self-respect “status arguments”. It should be added that in addition to signaling our worth, basic liberties also serve as means for attaining self-respect. This is because they a) enable one to participate in associations in which one’s worth is recognized. b) Because they are necessary, according to Rawls, to guarantee an adequate development and exercise of our

⁴⁵ The difference principle: “Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions. First, they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they must be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society” (Rawls 1993, 291).

moral powers which the second element of our self-respect is rooted in (Rawls 1971, para. 67, 1993, 318).

These considerations of how our evaluative self-respect is most effectively supported by society is one of Rawls's arguments for both the content and lexical ordering of his principles of justice. In the following, I will discuss this argument. My focus will be on the claim that the liberty principle affirms our status (henceforth the "status argument") in the evaluative sense.⁴⁶ However, I shall not try to interpret what exactly Rawls means by the claim that the liberty principle offers recognitional support to evaluative self-respect. Rather, I shall argue that there are some general problems with this kind of reasoning. I will not say much about the value of evaluative self-respect. It is hard to deny that it is important for humans to have evaluative self-respect in Rawls's sense, i.e., a sense that their plan of life is valuable and that their character is suited to pursuing it. We need not establish more than this to say that if the liberty principle is important to evaluative self-respect, then this gives us a *pro tanto* reason to favor it.⁴⁷

One problem with the claim that the liberty principle affirms our evaluative self-respect is that it cannot affirm the value, the merit, of our *particular* aims and ideals. To see this, it might be helpful to distinguish between two ways in which a determinate plan of life can be recognized. The first is respect for the mere fact that I have a determinate plan of life. Such respect simply consists in taking into account that we have a determinate plan of life that we wish to pursue. When I recognize your plan of life in this way, I simply take into account that it is important to you to pursue it when considering my own actions. This implies no evaluation of the plans' worthwhileness, apart from the value they have *for* the citizens that have them. In Rawls, what is to be recognized by principles of justice is that pursuing a determinate plan of life suited to our character is one of our "higher-order interests", not the objective worthwhileness of this or that plan (Rawls 1993, chap. 5). Drawing on Stephen L. Darwall, we can describe this as recognition respect for the fact that you have life plan x

⁴⁶ For a more complete discussion, see (Eyal 2005; Doppelt 2009; Zaino 1998).

⁴⁷ It may be another matter if we wish to provide a case for the *lexical* priority of the liberty principle by considerations of evaluative self-respect *alone*. See (Massey 1995, 210–13; Taylor 2014, 147–51).

(Darwall 1995). I take this kind of recognition to be part of respect for citizens' moral status as persons, not their particular activities, conduct or character (see next section).

The second way of recognizing a plan of life is by recognizing its worthwhileness. We may call this appraisal respect or esteem, again following Darwall (Darwall 1995). This is primarily the kind of recognition of your life plan that affirms your evaluative self-respect. Suppose my plan of life is to be a professional football player so that I respect my character and traits to the extent that I am convinced that this pursuit has merit and feel confident in my ability to pursue it. Now, mere recognition respect for the fact that I want to be a professional football player – that others take into account that this is important to me because they respect my right to live as I want –, does not do much to affirm my conviction that being a football-player is worthwhile. It rather affirms my sense that my own interests have weight vis-à-vis those of others, which, again, falls under the personhood view of self-respect.

With this distinction in mind, I think it is clear that the liberty principle cannot affirm the merit of our *particular* aims and ideals. Nir Eyal argues that the liberty principle, but also wealth-egalitarianism, “rationally” affirms the worthwhileness and feasibility of our determinate plans of life, no matter their content (Eyal 2005, 203-204, 207-210). I think this is mistaken. Firstly, no distributive principle affirms the merit or worthwhileness of my plan regardless of what it is. The claim that some principles do is not intelligible. For I can only think of one rational reason another person or institution can give for thinking that my aims have merit regardless of what they are. Namely the mere fact that the merit is acknowledged by others who I in turn regard as competent in judging the merit of my plan of life, and/or my ability to pursue it. How this recognition can be intelligibly expressed in a principle of distribution surely depends on the content of my plan.

Secondly, it is hard to see how the liberty principle can affirm the value of *any* of our *determinate and particular* ends, or our ability to pursue them. For when I cannot fail in being entitled to, say, the same basic liberties that everyone else has, how can these affirm that I have succeeded in forming and pursuing a worthwhile determinate plan of life? That is, how can I take it as an affirmation that my particular career, hobbies etc. have merit?

That being said, in Rawls, the liberty principle, in conjunction with its public justification, plausibly affirms the merit of *some* aims and ideals. Specifically, I think that it credibly and

intelligibly affirms the merit of developing and exercising the moral powers and pursuing *a* rational plan of life. In short, the merit of satisfying Rawls's ideal of personhood. For an important part of Rawls's public justification of the liberty principle is that satisfying the ideal of personhood is important and that the liberty principle makes it possible (Rawls 1993, chaps. 3, 5). In that sense, the principle and its public justification signal that a plan of life that is rational and which includes developing and exercising the moral powers adequately has merit.

However, there is a more basic problem with the status argument, which also applies to the specifically moral part of our evaluative self-respect. This is that the liberty principle cannot affirm that we satisfy any standards of merit to a significant extent. For this is a question of how we act, and the liberty principle does not say that liberties are to be distributed based on how people act. When I cannot fail in being entitled to the same basic liberties as everyone else, how can they affirm my sense of succeeding in developing and exercising my moral powers and being a fully cooperating citizen? To put the point another way, by respecting your rights as determined by justice as fairness, I do not express any evaluation of your character and conduct. Arguably, I simply recognize the fact that you are a person and treat you accordingly. Intuitively, this impersonal form of respect does not do much to support your evaluative self-respect. Thus, the status argument fails if taken to be about evaluative self-respect.

So, the liberty principle cannot do much to directly affirm the merit or feasibility of our plans and projects. And mere respect for the right to live as one wants, which is arguably closer to what Rawls has in mind, does not do much to support people's evaluative self-respect (at least not the impersonal respect of rights that the liberty principle prescribes). Therefore, I do not think that the liberty principle offers much recognitional support to evaluative self-respect.

3. The personhood account of self-respect and basic liberties – Honneth.

In this section, I discuss whether the moral personhood concept of self-respect can ground an argument for the importance of equal basic liberties. While, as previously mentioned, you can reconstruct an account of personhood self-respect in Rawls, I shall use Honneth as a proponent of the personhood view of self-respect. This is simply because Honneth's

personhood view is more developed and because I believe the discussion in this section highlights some general problems with using the personhood account to ground a case for the liberty principle. I focus on Honneth's early theory of recognition as it is stated in *The Struggle for Recognition* (1995) and in some of his subsequent works where the emphasis is on the psychological conditions for "autonomy" and "self-realization". The main idea is that autonomy requires a specific sense of your moral status as a person that in turn requires recognition in the form of equal legal rights. I begin by outlining Honneth's argument in more detail before turning to some problems with using any personhood concept of self-respect to defend the value of legal rights and liberties.

According to Honneth, having self-respect means to respect oneself as a person, an autonomous being, a responsible agent morally equal to all other persons and a bearer of legal rights. This involves having certain moral expectations of being treated as an equal, and to take oneself seriously as a competent judge of one's own choices and actions. In contrast to Rawls, Honneth clearly and consistently views self-respect as grounded in personhood, not character and conduct. He categorizes the self-relation that concerns the value of one's particular traits and one's abilities and achievements as "self-esteem". Self-respect, in contrast, concerns traits that are common to all persons (person-making features). Moreover, while self-esteem comes in degrees and must be earned, self-respect is a matter of being conscious of and respecting your unconditional and non-gradual moral status as a person. If you are a person, you will always have sufficient grounds for full self-respect (Honneth 1995, chap. 5). Honneth here explicitly draws upon Darwall's classical notion of "recognition respect" for persons as persons which consists in considering the fact that you are a person to be important and acting accordingly (Honneth 1995, 113; Darwall 1995). The crucial point here is that recognition self-respect concerns the moral status you have simply in virtue of being a person. It is not conditional upon whether you are a good person, morally or otherwise.

The relationship between self-respect in Honneth's sense and autonomy is seemingly straightforward. As previously mentioned, to have self-respect involves viewing oneself as a subject who is competent and worthy of making decisions. And as Honneth writes:

If one cannot think of oneself as a competent deliberator and legitimate co-author of decisions, it is hard to see how one can take oneself seriously in one's own practical reasoning about

what to do. Those with diminished self-respect – with less of a sense of their personal authority – thus are less in a position to see themselves as fully the author of their own lives (Anderson and Honneth 2005, 132).

Self-respect is in turn dependent on recognition in the form of respect, which for Honneth means recognition of our status as moral equals capable of autonomy (Anderson and Honneth 2005, 132; Honneth 1995, chap. 5). The idea here, as with Rawls, is that your positive self-attitudes are dependent on the confirmation from others. You thus need to be recognized as autonomous in order to be autonomous.

... the agentic competencies that comprise autonomy require that one be able to sustain certain attitudes toward oneself ... and ... these affectively laden self-conceptions ... are dependent, in turn, on the sustaining attitudes of others. [Self-respect, self-trust and self-esteem] can be viewed as being acquired and maintained only through being recognized by those whom one also recognizes (Anderson and Honneth 2005, 131).

In particular, Honneth argues that we need to have the standard liberal individual freedoms and rights recognized by others in order to develop and maintain self-respect (Anderson and Honneth 2005, 132–33). Notice that this is a status argument. Basic and inviolable liberties support self-respect because they convey certain attitudes, not because they are means of achieving any of its requisites (autonomy, moral status). To sum up, the claim is that to be autonomous we must respect our moral status as autonomous persons, which involves identifying with this ability. This, in turn, is dependent on living in a liberal democracy where our basic legal rights are protected.

I have now outlined Honneth's self-respect argument for basic liberties based on a moral form of self-respect. Can such an account work? I shall argue that Honneth's account of self-respect fails in providing a case for the special status of the liberty principle. The reason for this is that we cannot establish both that personhood self-respect is best supported by the liberty principle and at the same time important for any plausible and relevant kind of autonomy.

To make this case, I shall rely on a distinction between personhood self-respect simpliciter and specific forms of such self-respect. By the former I mean a sense of being a morally equal person entitled to equal moral concern based on a reasonable conception of personhood and moral equality. The "reasonable" clause means deserving of serious attention as a conception

of moral equality and justice. One example is epistocracy of the kind that Jason Brennan defends (Brennan 2016). Another could be utilitarianism, supposing that utilitarianism might mandate something different than a standard list of equal basic liberties but is very unlikely to prescribe something so extreme as systematic oppression of certain groups etc. The distinction between different forms of personhood self-respect goes between the conceptions of moral equality and personhood that they are based upon.

I do not think we have strong reasons to believe that personhood self-respect simpliciter is supported better by the liberty principle than other reasonable conceptions of moral equality. Suppose that I am a utilitarian who does not believe that the standard set of inviolable basic liberties is necessary to maximize welfare. I do have a sense of being a moral equal, but why would my self-respect be better supported by the liberty principle than by some more utilitarian arrangement? It seems plausible that which specific principles that affirm my sense of being a moral equal is, at least largely, determined by my view of justice – specifically the kind of treatment I think the fact that I am a moral equal entitles me to (Schemmel 2018, 8–10; Labukt 2009, 212–17; Brennan 2016, chap. 5). We should also note that Honneth, at least after *The Struggle for Recognition* (1995), holds a similar position when he contends that the need for recognition is historically contingent. By this he means that what we need to have personhood self-respect simpliciter is determined by the basic underlying norms of recognition (e.g., norms of respect) in the society we have been socialized into, and not by some invariable aspect of our human nature (Honneth 2002, 501–2, 508–10).

Therefore, I shall concentrate my discussion on the value of the form of personhood self-respect that is arguably better supported by the liberty principle than contrary alternatives. This form is based on a conception of personhood and moral equality that implies that the liberty principle is what justice requires. This kind is closer to what Honneth is talking about than epistocratic and utilitarian self-respect. It is the form of self-respect that Honneth would say has become prevalent in contemporary liberal democracies (Honneth 1995, 107–21; Anderson and Honneth 2005, 133). As previously mentioned, it is based (according to Honneth) on an understanding of individual autonomy as the “respect worthy core” of persons (Honneth 1995, 119). For the sake of simplicity, I will henceforth refer to this form as “basic-liberties self-respect”. Arguably, citizens growing up in a society where the liberty principle is implemented would tend to respect themselves in this sense.

Why should our focus be on this form of self-respect? In what follows, I discuss what I take to be the two most central answers in the literature. (1) Basic-liberties self-respect is more valuable in terms of autonomy than other reasonable forms of self-respect. This, I take it, would be Honneth's answer.⁴⁸ (2) Self-respect as a bearer of inviolable rights is morally correct, i.e. it has moral value (e.g. Meyers 1995).

(1) Consider first the idea that basic-liberties self-respect is important to autonomy. Why should we think that such a demanding form of self-respect is a condition for autonomy? To fully understand and discuss what exactly Honneth is claiming about autonomy and its connection to self-respect (and what can be claimed in this regard), it is necessary to take a brief look at some distinctions between different theories of personal autonomy.

Personal autonomy concerns the agent's own aims and personal values, her own view of the good life. To be autonomous, your preferences, values etc. must be your own in some deep sense. Liberals typically advocate a procedural account of autonomy. Procedural theories are content neutral in the sense that they say nothing about which values and beliefs a free agent must have or cannot have. The question is only whether they are affirmed in the appropriate way. "Procedural conceptions characterize autonomous agents—agents whose preferences and desires are genuinely their own—as those who critically reflect in the appropriate way to evaluate their preferences, motives, and desires" (Stoljar 2018, 7). Most procedural accounts require only some sort of reflective endorsement in order for a preference, value or action to be autonomous (Christman 2018, 3–4). Hence, "In a thoroughly liberal manner, this shift to formal, procedural conditions allows this model to accommodate a diversity of desires and ways of life as autonomous" (Christman and Anderson 2005, 3). Procedural accounts of autonomy contrast with substantive accounts. Substantive accounts are not content-neutral, but require that autonomous agents have specific values and/or beliefs (Stoljar 2018, 5).

It may seem as if we presuppose a substantive conception of autonomy if we claim that it depends on basic-liberties self-respect (which involves having specific moral beliefs).

⁴⁸ Honneth argues that the historical expansion and equalization of rights and liberties has led to a form of self-respect that is superior in terms of autonomy to previous self-relations (Honneth 2007, 334, 2002, 1995, 118–21). It is not clear from his writings whether he would say that basic-liberties self-respect is also superior to epistocratic or utilitarian self-respect. But that position is at least close to his explicit stance.

However, with Antti Kauppinen (Kauppinen 2011), we can read Honneth's account as a theory of (some) of the social conditions for exercising procedural autonomy rather than as a definition of freedom as such. This also strikes me as the most plausible interpretation of Honneth's argument (Honneth 2002; Anderson and Honneth 2005). Following Kauppinen then, basic-liberties self-respect is perhaps best understood as a "second-order autonomy capacity" (Kauppinen 2011, 266). What he means is that self-respect is not itself an autonomy-capacity such as the ability to reflectively endorse your desires and the like, but a precondition for exercising them. The idea here is that you must identify with your abilities to make effective use of them. Put differently, self-respect is a condition for living an autonomous life: "... roughly put, an autonomous person is one who has the capacities that are exercised in autonomous choice and action, and an autonomous life is one led by an agent who successfully exercise these capacities to a significant extent over time" (Westlund 2009, 28). If this distinction is viable, you might say that there is no conflict between liberal theories of autonomy, which are typically procedural, and Honneth's account (Kauppinen 2011, 274–75). In Kauppinen's view, the concept of second-order autonomy capacities is perfectly compatible with procedural accounts of autonomy (Kauppinen 2011, 274–75). Moreover, as far as people are interested in the possibility of living autonomous lives and not merely being autonomous, they have an interest in this form of self-respect (Kauppinen 2011, 274–75).

We have at least two ways then of understanding the position that autonomy depends on respecting oneself as bearer of inviolable basic liberties: we can understand it as a substantive theory of autonomy, or we can view it as a claim about the conditions for exercising procedural autonomy. Consider firstly the idea that the exercise of procedural autonomy depends on basic-liberties self-respect. Why would a procedural form of freedom – however we specify it – presuppose such specific moral beliefs? As far as I can see, it is perfectly possible to not have basic-liberties self-respect and still be able to exercise procedural autonomy. To take an example, think again of those utilitarians who do not believe that giving standard basic liberties some special status is the best way to promote welfare. They do not respect themselves as bearers of these inviolable liberties. But rejecting this particular moral view is clearly not an obstacle to exercising procedural autonomy. I therefore do not see why they would not be able to reflectively endorse and pursue their conception of the good.

Basic-liberties self-respect is thus not important to procedural autonomy. Therefore, let us secondly consider abandoning the focus on procedural autonomy and defend basic-liberties

self-respect as part of a substantive account of autonomy. However, this defense also seems highly implausible. Again, consider the implications. It implies that no one who does not favor the priority of the liberty principle can be autonomous, or quite as autonomous, as those who do. Even if we put the issue of state-neutrality versus perfectionism aside, this still does not strike me as a defensible view of personal autonomy. It is hardly reasonable to say that people who favor somewhat different views of justice cannot be autonomous, or quite as autonomous, as those who respect themselves in this specific way *ipso facto*. To say that deeply submissive individuals may be free is perhaps something that violates our intuitions about freedom (e.g. Oshana 1998). However, to reiterate, to say that those utilitarians who do not believe in the special status of basic liberties can be as personally autonomous as anyone else, does not. In short, I do not see why lacking basic-liberties self-respect should make you less autonomous (or worse off in terms of welfare for that matter) in any plausible and relevant sense of that word.

(2) So much for the importance of basic-liberties self-respect with regard to autonomy. It is worth considering another value that such self-respect may have. We may argue that respect for basic liberties is the correct way to interpret the idea of treating people as moral equals, and that it therefore is important for people to understand themselves as bearers of certain inviolable liberties. In the words of Robin Dillon: "...maintaining an explicit congruence between self and value is appropriate and good for beings such as ourselves" (Dillon 1995, 35). However, while this may very well be the case, it cannot establish the kind of argument that we are looking for. The problem is that most if not all modern theories of justice can be viewed as interpretations of the norm of moral equality – what it means to treat people as moral equals (Dworkin 1987, 7–8; Kymlicka 2002, 1–5). That treating people equally requires that we give the liberty principle a special status is precisely what the argument from self-respect is supposed to support. As Stephen Massey points out, if we defend a form of self-respect by arguing that it is morally correct, then we cannot point to this form of self-respect to defend the moral notion in terms of which it is correct (Massey 1995, 207–10). Say that we defend a notion of self-respect as respecting yourself as a right bearer with the moral idea that having and exercising rights are important. In that case, we cannot defend the importance of rights by arguing that they are conducive to self-respect thus understood. That would be a circular argument.

4. A sense of competence.

So far, I have tried to show that there are some problems with defending the special status of basic liberties via the two standard approaches to self-respect. Notice that the problems and strengths of these approaches mirror each other. While the evaluative form of self-respect is clearly valuable, the connection between it and the liberty principle is too weak. Basic-liberties self-respect, on the other hand, is clearly supported by the liberty principle, but it is far too comprehensive. The idea that we are somehow less autonomous or worse off if we do not think that the liberty principle is exactly what justice requires is not plausible. What we need then is, at the very least, a self-relation that is neither too tied up with our character and conduct, nor our moral status and sense of justice. In this section, I will try to clarify what I take to be such a self-relation. What I suggest is that both of these concepts involve a self-relation that is necessary for exercising procedural autonomy, and which is possible to distinguish from their problematic elements. In the next section, I use this self-relation to make a case for the special status of the liberty principle, by arguing that this principle provides an optimal basis for it.

Recall Honneth's basic idea (as interpreted by Kauppinen) that the effective and regular exercise of autonomy depend on some self-relation, and that this self-relation requires some form of recognition. Though I have criticized the specific way that Honneth develops this point, I still find it to be an intuitive idea that is worth building upon. It is a main point not only in recognition theory, but also in several relational theories of autonomy.⁴⁹ Rather than suggesting a new relational theory of autonomy, or of self-respect, I want to focus on one essential component, if not the most basic, in the self-relation that is required to exercise autonomy as it is understood in standard procedural conceptions.

To elaborate, it is typical to operate with both authenticity and competency requirements in conceptions of personal autonomy. "To govern oneself, one must be in a position to act competently and from desires (values, conditions and so on) that are in some sense one's own" (Christman and Anderson 2005, 3). These two types of requirements correspond to two types of autonomy-capacities: capacities for valuation and capacities for reasoning or

⁴⁹ Relational theories of autonomy hold the view that your relationship with others is crucial to whether you are autonomous. See (Stoljar 2018, 10–14).

rationality. “Authenticity conditions are typically built on the capacity to reflect on and endorse (or identify with) one’s desires, values, and so on” (Christman and Anderson 2005, 3). A few examples of competency requirements are self-control, self-understanding, the capacity for care, empathy, lack of mental illness, the ability to follow norms of reasoning, imagination, determination and the like (Christman and Anderson 2005, 3). As previously mentioned, most procedural accounts of autonomy specify it as the ability to reflectively endorse preferences, values and choices in some sense.

My aim is not to defend a specific view of personal autonomy. My point is rather that in order to exercise our capacity for valuation and reflection regularly and effectively, we need to trust our own competence to make sound judgements and act on them. Again, this is a common idea in the literature on self-respect and relational autonomy.⁵⁰ I will call this self-relation “a sense of competence”. As I have said, a variant of a sense of competence is part of or implied in most standard concepts of self-respect. However, it is important to point out that a sense of competence also differs from these self-relations in ways that make it more suited to ground the self-respect argument. In the rest of this section, I present my arguments for why this is the case.

A sense of competence is included in Honneth’s notion of basic-liberties self-respect. We are morally equal in virtue of our common capacity for autonomy. It follows that respecting yourself in Honneth’s sense implies a certain level of confidence in your autonomy. Indeed, as previously mentioned, he says a self-respecting person views herself as a “competent deliberator and legitimate co-author of decisions” (Anderson and Honneth 2005, 132). I think this accounts for much of the intuitive plausibility of Honneth’s theory of how self-respect is important to autonomy. However, this is a one-way implication. In moral philosophy humans are often ascribed equal moral worth on the basis of a shared capacity for rational thought and action, and this is commonly thought to warrant respect in the form of legally protected basic rights and liberties, but from a psychological and conceptual point of view these are distinct notions. I do not see why you would need to hold specific ethical and/or political views in

⁵⁰ It is, to wit, given the most clear and thorough elaboration in Trudy Govier’s concept of “self-trust” (Govier 1993). She defines it more broadly, however, and consequently conceptualizes its relation to other self-relations somewhat differently than I do. See also (Benson 1994; Westlund 2009; Mackenzie 2008).

order to be confident in your ability to make sound judgements. A sense of competence is therefore conceptually distinct from personhood self-respect: it does not essentially involve respecting yourself in accordance with some view on personhood. In contrast to basic-liberties self-respect, it is also compatible with many different views on justice. This makes it more plausible, by default, that it is a condition for autonomy.

A sense of competence is also included in Rawls's evaluative view of self-respect – the conviction that your plan of life is worthwhile, and that your character is fit to pursue it. Most importantly, you need a sense of competence to the extent that the standards by which you evaluate the merit of your character and actions require that you exercise your capacities for autonomy. For example, depending on how precisely we understand Rawls's account of the moral powers, perhaps his formulation of self-respect as rooted in the development and exercise of these powers requires the degree of a sense of competence that you need to be autonomous in the procedural sense. If so, his argument, or parts of it, might not be that different from my own.

Having evaluative self-respect requires more, however, than having a sense of competence. Firstly, that you trust your own *capacity* for autonomy does not mean that you are secure in your *disposition* to act autonomously. More precisely, it does not entail that you satisfy any standard of autonomous behavior such as we find in, say, Rawls's ideal of personhood. Secondly, having a sense of competence does not entail that you hold an ideal of autonomy in the first place. It does not mean that you count exercising your capacities for autonomy regularly and effectively as a moral or personal standard. Indeed, it does not imply anything about your evaluative standards. Thirdly, a disposition to act procedurally autonomously does not – in any case – exhaust any plausible conception of a good or decent character. It says nothing about whether you are, say, compassionate, honest, reasonable etc. In short, that you have a good character, at least good enough to be respected, means more than that you are *able* to act autonomously or satisfy other important standards. Therefore, far more is required to have evaluative self-respect than a sense of competence. Consequently, I think a sense of competence avoids the problem I noted in section 1 about how it is hard to see how the liberty principle can do much to affirm that people's character and conduct have merit.

5. A sense of competence and basic liberties.

So far, I have discussed the importance of a sense of competence for autonomy and tried to clarify the meaning of this concept. In what follows, I will try to establish that this account yields a reason for thinking that the liberty principle ought to enjoy some special status. I also spell out what this adds to the more general autonomy-based defense of basic liberties.

Why should we think that the liberty principle provides a particularly good support for a sense of competence when this self-relation is compatible with a multitude of views on justice? The core of my argument is that a political system based on the liberty principle provides an important social basis for a sense of competence by virtue of the attitudes it expresses. Recall the idea that your own self-attitudes normally depend on affirmation from others. Others must treat you in accordance with your self-attitudes. This is a basic premise in recognition theory and much of the literature on self-respect. Now, if this premise is true, then to develop and maintain a sense of competence, others must recognize you as autonomous.

Does the liberty principle express recognition of autonomy then? Now, it is common sense that a political system wherein the liberty principle is implemented expresses recognition of autonomy in a more clear and credible way than contrary arrangements. Consequently, it may as a matter of empirical fact, support a sense of competence better than alternative ways of organizing society. Of course, we may say the same about personhood self-respect and the liberty principle. It is common sense that the liberty principle affirms our moral status. Arguably, most people think of themselves as morally equal in broadly Kantian terms, as autonomous beings entitled to rights that protect their autonomy. In other words, most people have basic-liberties self-respect. If so, the liberty principle would affirm most people's personhood self-respect (with the exception of some utilitarians and the like). The problem here is that we rely on possibly unreasoned, uninformed and manipulated views about what it takes to properly recognize the fact that someone is autonomous, is a person, what it means to be a person etc. This is incompatible with the liberal commitment to offer principles that could be the object of informed and reasoned consent.

So, mere empirical support is not sufficient. What we need to say in addition is that the citizenry can accept the liberty principle as an expression of recognition of autonomy on an informed and reasoned basis. I believe this would be correct because I take it that the principle does the best job of securing the other conditions for autonomy, the "external" ones

we might say (Kauppinen 2011). It enables us to pursue our goals and prevents others from unduly interfering in our lives. In conjunction with a public justification that centers on autonomy, I would say the liberty principle thereby provides the best expression of recognition of autonomy.

The public justification is important. As Gerald Doppelt points out, what rights signify depends on their symbolic meaning (Doppelt 2009, 135–38). If rights are to give people a reason to be convinced of their autonomy, the culture needs to be such that rights are taken to express genuine respect (or trust) for autonomy. Conversely, if the public justification of the liberty principle is centered on autonomy, then deviations from this principle convey distrust of autonomy (or at least entail the absence of a sign of trust). And at least some social groups might for historical or social reasons be vulnerable to public distrust of their autonomy – such as the kind conveyed by restricted voting rights.

However, this raises the question of what exactly the account of a sense of competence and its political basis adds to the more general autonomy-based defense of the liberty principle. How does it give us an additional reason for its high status? If we presuppose that the liberty principle must enjoy a high status to protect our autonomy also if we ignore a sense of competence (because it protects the external conditions for autonomy), then what relevance does it have that a sense of competence is important to autonomy and best supported by the liberty principle? Note that this problem is similar to how the idea that basic-liberties self-respect has moral value ends up with a circular defense of the liberty principle (section 3). If, say, we argue that the liberty principle rather than some other principle is required to protect autonomy on the basis of a sense of competence, we end up with a circular argument.

My answer is essentially that the argument from a sense of competence shows that basic liberties are *more important* to autonomy than we might otherwise have reason to believe. Though I assume that the liberty principle is already required to protect our autonomy, the point of the argument from a sense of competence is that deviations from this principle threaten autonomy in a specific way. They not only hinder autonomy by making it practically harder for people to pursue their own projects. They also undermine autonomy by threatening people's self-relation. This preserves a basic intuition in recognition theory. In Honneth's words: "... on the recognitional approach, guaranteeing rights does not ensure autonomy only directly (in the negative sense of blocking interference) but also supports autonomy *via* the

support for self-respect” (Anderson and Honneth 2005, 133 emphasis in original). We thus have an additional reason to insist on the importance of basic liberties if we are concerned with autonomy. This may be relevant in situations where we must prioritize between the liberty principle and responding to other values such as utility, equality, or stability.

In short, I have tried to give a reason for thinking that basic liberties are more important to autonomy than we might otherwise have reason to believe. How much more important? This depends on exactly how vulnerable humans are to misrecognition.⁵¹ I have assumed throughout this paper that our self-attitudes normally depend on the attitudes of others. I do not have the space to discuss the extent to which this claim is true and in what sense. If, say, we are not particularly vulnerable, the account of a sense of competence does not give a reason for thinking that the liberty principle should enjoy a significantly higher status than we might otherwise have reason to believe. In that case, my argument may have more theoretical than practical interest. Nevertheless, given the premise that our self-attitudes rely – at least to some extent – on affirmation from others, the account of a sense of competence yields an additional reason for thinking that basic liberties should enjoy a special status.

⁵¹ See (Bird 2008) for a discussion of this.

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Article 2. The Irrelevance of Self-Respect in the Original Position

Abstract: This article discusses John Rawls's self-respect argument(s) for Justice as Fairness, which is that self-respect is an important good and best supported by Justice as Fairness, and that this gives us a strong reason in favor of that theory. While widely influential, the literature is marked by stark disagreement about its success. The most common criticism of Rawls's account is that it neglects the importance of economic goods to self-respect. I contend that there is a more basic problem with his argument, namely that it is superfluous in a specific sense. To defend this contention, I distinguish between three arguments from self-respect in accordance with the different ways in which Rawls grounds the claim that Justice as Fairness best supports it. All of them are superfluous in the sense that they fully rely on the assumption that Justice as Fairness is the best choice also if we ignore considerations of self-respect, and in such a way that a critic would say that it is her preferred alternative that best supports self-respect. Thus, within Rawls's framework considerations of self-respect do not give us a reason to change our opinion on which conception of justice we should prefer all things considered.

Keywords: John Rawls, Self-respect, The original position.

1. Introduction

This article addresses Rawls's argument from self-respect for his theory of justice, Justice as Fairness. Specifically, it investigates the role considerations of self-respect have in justifying the choice of principle in the original position. According to Rawls, self-respect is a highly valuable good and the fact that it is "most effectively encouraged by Justice as Fairness" (Rawls 1993, 318) gives the parties in the position a "strong reason" (Rawls 1999, 386) to choose that theory. In other words, it plays a significant role in grounding the choice of principles in Rawls's view.

Rawls's account of self-respect has been widely influential. It has generated a significant debate about both the nature of self-respect and its place in a theory of justice, and has inspired the use of self-respect in theorizing about a wide range of normative issues (Dillon 1995). Most agree with Rawls that self-respect is an important good and normally dependent on a supportive social environment. The discussion regarding his account is primarily concerned with whether self-respect, at least in Rawls's sense, is in fact most effectively

encouraged by Justice as Fairness – or anything resembling a liberal theory. To generalize, the most common line of critique is that the kind of self-respect that Rawls identifies as a primary good, at least in *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1971) (*ATJ*), is not best supported by Justice as Fairness, but rather by an egalitarian distribution of wealth. Thus, whereas other considerations may support the choice of Justice as Fairness, the commitment to self-respect surprisingly leads to “an illiberal form of extreme socialism” (Eyal 2005, 210) and indicates a deep flaw in the ethical foundation of Rawls’s theory (Eyal 2005, 210; Zaino 1998). There is also some debate about whether this problem can be solved by working with another account of self-respect, such as the one Rawls gives in *Political Liberalism* (Rawls 1993) (*PL*) (Doppelt 2009; Eyal 2005; Stark 2012; Moriarty 2009).

I shall argue that there is a more basic problem with Rawls’s appeal to self-respect. The main challenge is not to establish that self-respect is both highly valuable and best supported by Justice as Fairness. Rather, it is to see how these two facts play any meaningful role within the complete case for Justice as Fairness. The problem with the argument from self-respect is not that it is unsound, but that it is superfluous.

I shall show that the appeal to self-respect is superfluous in the specific sense that to establish that self-respect is best supported by Justice as Fairness, we must assume that Justice as Fairness is also the best theory with regard to considerations that do not have to do directly with self-respect. The claim that Justice as Fairness distributes the primary good of the social bases of self-respect in a way that is preferable to the alternative is not just partly but *fully* reliant on the claim that this theory also distributes the other primary goods in a preferable way. That is, a better/worse support to self-respect cannot be a distinct advantage/disadvantage of a principle of justice. Someone who thinks, say, that the parties would choose utilitarianism on grounds not directly related to self-respect would also think – and for that reason – that utilitarianism also provides the best support to self-respect. This means that the argument from self-respect does not have a meaningful role in grounding the choice of principles in the original position.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, I give a brief explanation of Rawls’s ideal of personhood and how he uses the original position to argue that Justice as Fairness is the best choice on the basis of that ideal. I then lay out Rawls’s argument from self-respect, which is part of the argument from the original position. Here I distinguish between three versions of

the appeal to self-respect by drawing on the different reasons we find in Rawls for the claim that Justice as Fairness best supports self-respect. I call them the argument from alignment, the argument from egalitarianism and the argument from freedom of association, respectively. I discuss them in turn in the last three sections before the conclusion. I start by showing how the argument from alignment is fully reliant on the case for Justice as Fairness apart from considerations of self-respect as such in a rather straightforward way. I then contend that the argument from egalitarianism reduces to a part of the previous argument. Lastly, I show that the appeal to freedom of association suffers from a similar problem as the argument from alignment, although it appears to have force outside of the original position.

2. Preliminaries – Personhood, the original position, and Justice as Fairness

In this section, I give a brief explanation of Rawls’s political ideal of personhood and his use of the original position to show how Justice as Fairness coheres with this ideal. This is important to understand the role considerations of self-respect has in grounding the choice of Justice as Fairness. I believe that to discuss this role properly, particularly with regard to the argument from egalitarianism, we must appreciate that the appeal to self-respect is made in the original position.

In Rawls’s political conception of personhood, persons are free and equal in virtue of having two moral powers: rationality and reasonability.⁵² The power of rationality is “... the capacity to form, revise and pursue a rational plan of life” (Rawls 1993, 318). To be reasonable involves being ready to “... propose principles ... as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given ... that others will likewise do so” (Rawls 1993, 49).⁵³ In addition, persons also have a revisable conception of the good – a plan of life – that they try to achieve (Rawls 1993, 19–20). Qua persons thus understood, we have three “higher-order interests”: the interest in developing and exercising our moral powers of rationality and reasonability

⁵² I focus on Rawls’s later and political conception of personhood in *PL* for the sake of brevity, but I believe my case also extends to *ATJ*.

⁵³ It further includes recognizing the burdens of judgement, which imply that often “... it is not to be expected that conscientious persons with full powers of reason ... will all arrive at the same conclusion” (Rawls 1993, 58).

respectively, and the interest we have in pursuing our conception of the good (Rawls 1993, 74).

The original position is a thought experiment that Rawls uses to represent the ideal of personhood and other background theories for the purposes of principle selection (Rawls 1993, 103–4). Briefly put, the aim is to clarify which principles of justice that are most in line with our higher-order interests as persons (Rawls 1993, 304–10). In the experiment, citizens are represented by purely rational agents that seek to promote the good of those they represent in the most effective way possible. These agents are to choose principles of justice on our behalf under a veil of ignorance. The veil of ignorance entails that the parties do not know any particular facts about the persons they represent, or the society in question – apart from the fact that the circumstances of justice apply. This ensures that the outcome is not influenced by morally arbitrary facts. The parties know, however, that persons are rational, reasonable and have a determinate plan of life. They are thus aware of the three aforementioned higher-order interests of the people they represent: the interest in developing and exercising the two moral powers, and the interest we have in pursuing our determinate plan of life. On this basis, they are able to specify an account of primary goods, which are goods that are “generally necessary” (Rawls 1993, 307) to satisfy our higher-order interests. The main primary goods are basic liberties, income, opportunities, social power – and the social bases of self-respect (Rawls 1993, 308–9). The choice in the original position concerns which distribution of these primary goods we should prefer. (Rawls 1993, 304–10).

Rawls argues that the parties in the original position would prefer the two principles of Justice as Fairness above other principles such as utilitarianism and intuitionism. These two principles are (1) The liberty principle: “Each person has an equal right to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties which is compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for all” (Rawls 1993, 291).⁵⁴ (2) The difference principle: “Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions. First, they must be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they must be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society” (Rawls 1993, 291). Under “reasonably favorable

⁵⁴ These liberties are in turn specified as “...freedom of thought and liberty of conscience; the political liberties and freedom of association ... the freedoms specified by the liberty and integrity of the person; and finally, the rights and liberties covered by the rule of law” (Rawls 1993, 291).

circumstances” (Rawls 1993, 297), the liberty principle has lexical priority – i.e. absolute priority – over the difference principle, and the first part of the difference principle has lexical priority over the latter (Rawls 1993, 294–97).

3. The argument from self-respect

According to Rawls, the parties have several reasons for choosing Justice as Fairness instead of other alternatives. One reason is that it supports self-respect more than the alternatives, a claim he grounds in several different ways. The overall structure of the full appeal to self-respect is as follows. (P1) The parties prefer the conception of justice that is most in line with our higher-order interests. (P2) The social bases of self-respect is “perhaps the most important primary good” (Rawls 1999, 386), i.e. perhaps the good that is most important to the pursuit of our higher-order interests. (P3) “Self-respect is most effectively encouraged by justice as fairness” (Rawls 1993, 318). (C) The parties have a “strong reason” (Rawls 1999, 386) to choose Justice as Fairness, i.e., at the very least a strong pro tanto reason. In this section, I briefly explain how Rawls fill out and ground the premises concerning self-respect.

3.1. Self-respect and its value according to Rawls

I start with what Rawls means by “self-respect”, which he uses interchangeably with “self-esteem”. For now, I will just call it “self-respect” for the sake of simplicity. I consider possible ways to interpret and differentiate his account later, but at the moment I believe his own words suffice. In *ATJ*, Rawls mostly describes self-respect as having two aspects:

“...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).

According to this account, self-respect is about the worthwhileness of our determinate plan of life, and our abilities to pursue it. For example, if my only goal in life were to be a professional football player, then I would have self-respect to the extent that I was convinced about the worthwhileness of this plan of life and my abilities to pursue it. In *PL*, Rawls gives a narrower and political conception of self-respect where it is rooted in our self-confidence as persons understood in accordance with his political conception of personhood: “Self-respect

is rooted in our self-confidence as a fully cooperating member of society capable of pursuing a worthwhile conception of the good over a complete life” (Rawls 1993, 318). This consists of two elements. One is “our self-confidence as a fully cooperating member of society rooted in the development and exercise of the two moral powers” (Rawls 1993, 319). The other is “our secure sense of our own value rooted in the conviction that we can carry out a worthwhile plan of life” (Rawls 1993, 319).

Rawls states that the social basis of self-respect is “perhaps the most important primary good” (Rawls 1999, 386), i.e. perhaps the most important good with regard to our higher-order interests. Most often, he explains the value of self-respect in terms of our interest in pursuing our determinate plan of life, not only in *ATJ* but also in *PL*. “The importance of self-respect is that it provides a ... firm conviction that our determinate conception of the good is worth carrying out” (Rawls 1993, 318). If we are unable to view our plan of life as worthwhile, or do not believe that our character is suited to pursuing it, then it is hard to muster the motivation to pursue it. “Without [self-respect] nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them” (Rawls 1999, 386).

3.2. Why Justice as Fairness secures the social bases of self-respect

Why does Justice as Fairness give more support to self-respect than other principles? In Rawls, self-respect is supported by the basic structure of society in several ways. We might say that there are two types of social bases of self-respect. Firstly, the means of attaining self-respect – like the means of attaining a plan of life that we consider worthwhile. Secondly, the recognitional bases that affirm our sense of self-worth by signaling that others recognize us. (Cohen 1989, 737; Doppelt 2009, 135–37; Eyal 2005, 207; Rawls 1999, 477–80)

“The social bases of self-respect: these bases are those aspects of basic institutions normally essential if citizens are to have a lively sense of their own worth as persons and to be able to develop and exercise their moral powers and to advance their aims and ends with self-confidence” (Rawls 1993, 308–9).

So, Justice as Fairness gives more support to self-respect than other principles because only this theory fully secures its social bases. Rawls’s overall claim, then, is that only his conception of justice adequately affirms self-respect and provides us with the means essential

to attaining it. He gives several reasons for this overall claim. Some are aimed at establishing the importance of specific elements of Justice as Fairness while others are aimed at showing that the whole theory is necessary to secure the social bases of self-respect. To simplify my discussion of these reasons, I shall categorize them into three arguments for why Justice as Fairness – either the whole theory or some specific part of it – is necessary to secure the social bases of self-respect.

The argument(s) from alignment. Strictly speaking, this is not one argument but three interconnected reasons. I shall call the set of them “the argument from alignment” because, as I will argue in the next section, they essentially amount to the claim that the social bases of self-respect must align with that which is otherwise just.⁵⁵ The first reason is that the principles of Justice as Fairness give us the means of attaining self-respect because they enable an adequate development and exercise of our moral powers of rationality and reasonability. The second is that the principle gives us the means of pursuing a plan of life that we consider worthwhile. And the third is that Justice as Fairness distributes the primary goods in a rational and reasonable way and in that sense signals that others recognize our value as persons.

The argument from egalitarianism. Rawls also claims that Justice as Fairness affirms our *equal* value, “status”, due to its egalitarian elements (Rawls 1999, paras. 80–81). Specifically, because of the fact that the liberty principle secures an equal distribution of basic liberties, and that – together with the difference principle – it limits economic inequalities.⁵⁶ This argument aims to establish the importance of equality to self-respect, and thus the superiority of Justice as Fairness vis-à-vis less egalitarian conceptions with regard to self-respect.

The argument from freedom of association. This argument aims at establishing the importance of freedom of association to self-respect, and consequently Justice as Fairness’s

⁵⁵ I here draw on Christian Schemmel’s “Alignment-thesis” about what he terms “proper standing self-respect” (Schemmel 2018, 9).

⁵⁶ The liberty principle constrains economic differences because it requires the “fair value” of the political liberties: “that everyone has a fair opportunity to hold public office and to influence the outcome of political decisions” (Rawls 1993, 327).

superiority with regard to self-respect vis-à-vis alternatives that place lower weight on freedom of association (Rawls 1999, para. 67). It targets perfectionism in particular.

To sum up, we can distinguish between three arguments for the claim that Justice as Fairness provides the best support to self-respect, or at least a better support than some other alternatives. I discuss them in turn in the following sections.

4. The argument from alignment

In this section, I discuss the first version of Rawls's appeal to self-respect, the argument from alignment. This case consists of three overall reasons for the claim that Justice as Fairness secures the social bases of self-respect. These are the reasons that most clearly are fully reliant on the case apart from self-respect as such. Here, I argue, we reason that the principles that best secures the social bases of self-respect must be the principles that involve the best distribution of the other primary goods, the primary goods seen as direct means of realizing the ideal of personhood. Justice as Fairness gives more support to self-respect than other principles simply because it is preferable on other grounds. I discuss these reasons in turn to show that they are arguments from alignment in this sense before I explain the problem with this kind of reasoning.

The first reason is that the principles of Justice as Fairness give us the means of attaining self-respect because they enable an adequate development and exercise of our moral powers of rationality and reasonability. The liberty principle and its priority is especially important in this regard, according to Rawls, as it is necessary to guarantee an adequate development of these powers (Rawls 1993, 318). This supports our self-respect because, as previously mentioned, one element of self-respect is rooted in our self-confidence as citizens, and being a citizen involves developing and exercising our moral powers. "...self-respect presupposes the development and exercise of both moral powers" (Rawls 1993, 318).

This reason clearly presupposes another rationale for choosing Justice as Fairness that does not have to do with self-respect as such. Namely, that the liberty principle is necessary for

enabling the moral powers in the first place.⁵⁷ Rawls reasons that all of the basic liberties have a “central range of application”, by which he means a range essential to our moral powers, and that the liberty principle secures these ranges (Rawls 1993, 294–99). This is an important, arguably decisive, reason (if true) for the liberty principle and its priority because of the weight of our moral powers in matters of basic justice (Rawls 1993, chap. 8).

The second reason is that Justice as Fairness gives us the means of forming, revising and pursuing a determinate plan of life that is suited to our nature. This is important, according to Rawls, for the aforementioned two aspects of self-respect – in short, the conviction that our determinate plan of life is valuable and feasible. He explains this importance with reference to the “Aristotelian principle”: “other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities ...” (Rawls 1999, 374). Rawls thinks that when our plan of life is suited to our nature – our “realized capacities” – we will experience it as more fulfilling which in turn disposes us to value it more.

However, that Justice as Fairness supports the two aspects of self-respect because it provides us with the means of satisfying the Aristotelian principle clearly implies that we have a more general reason for choosing that theory. Namely, that Justice as Fairness secures our higher-order interest in pursuing our rational plan of life in a reasonable way. For due to the Aristotelian principle, which Rawls assumes that all rational plans of life normally satisfy (Rawls 1999, para. 65), the securement of this interest requires precisely that we have the means of forming, revising and pursuing a plan of life suited to our nature. Moreover, recall that self-respect is important precisely to our interest in pursuing our plan of life. Thus, if the means of attaining the two aspects of self-respect is distributed in a way that accords with their importance, then so are the means of pursuing our plan of life. Granted, the importance of associations to self-respect complicates the matter. I return to this in section 6.

The third reason concerns the recognitional basis for self-respect. It is that Justice as Fairness affirms our self-respect because the two principles distribute the primary goods in a rational and reasonable way, as already indicated by the first two reasons and because this is how they are justified. They allow us to develop and exercise our moral powers and to pursue our determinate plan of life. In addition, because they are reasonable, they also satisfy our interest

⁵⁷ This much is entailed in Nir Eyal’s argument (Eyal 2005, 197–99).

in being reasonable citizens. This signals that others recognize our value as persons. “... by arranging inequalities for reciprocal advantage and by abstaining from the exploitation of the contingencies of nature and social circumstance within a framework of equal liberties, persons express their respect for one another in the very constitution of their society” (Rawls 1999, 155). One way to interpret this is that Justice as Fairness adequately affirms our self-respect simply because it is preferable on grounds not directly related to self-respect. This, in turn, is important to self-respect because “...our self-respect normally depends upon the respect of others” (Rawls 1999, 154).

To generalize, the reasons amount to that if a conception of justice distributes the other primary goods in a preferable way, then it – for that reason – also provides better support to self-respect. However, if this is how we argue, then it is mistaken to speak of the appeal to self-respect as something that can tip the scale in favor of Justice as Fairness, or any other conception of basic justice, all things considered. Rawls is sometimes interpreted as appealing to considerations of self-respect as a sort of tie-breaker in the choice of principles; Justice as Fairness may not be superior on other grounds, but it is superior with regard to self-respect and therefore the best choice all things considered (Shue 1975; Eyal 2005). Yet this cannot be the case in the argument from alignment. Here a better or worse support to self-respect cannot be a distinct advantage or disadvantage of a conception of justice. If two conceptions of justice are equally good with regard to the other primary goods, then they are equally good with regard to how well they secure the social bases of self-respect.

I wish to emphasize that it is not problematic to assume that Justice as Fairness is otherwise preferable when we consider whether it also supports self-respect, and *partly* basing our assessment on this assumption. This is natural considering the holistic character of Rawls’s theory.⁵⁸ Nor is it problematic that the ranking of different alternatives with regard to self-respect on the one hand and other considerations on the other hand, is the same. That is, alignment as such is not a problem. However, this is something other than the appeal to self-

⁵⁸ Rawls follows the method of reflective equilibrium wherein the different elements of a theory are justified on the basis of their mutual support: “...a conception of justice cannot be deduced from self-evident premises or conditions on principles; instead, its justification is a matter of the mutual support of many considerations, of everything fitting together into one coherent view” (Rawls 1999, 19).

respect being *fully*, not just partly, *dependent* on the case apart from considerations of self-respect as such.

Why is this a problem? It is a problem because I take it that to have a meaningful role in grounding the choice of principles, the appeal to self-respect must somehow have an at least partly independent weight in the balance of reasons. Otherwise, it would have no force. The argument may be sound and it does not exactly suffer from a circularity, but we would still not say that it has a meaningful role in grounding the choice of principles. More precisely, it is superfluous in the specific sense that it does not provide a reason to change our opinion, or be more or less secure in our opinion, on which conception of justice that we should choose all things considered.

To put the point in pragmatic terms, the problem is that the appeal to self-respect will not convince anyone who is not convinced that Justice as Fairness distributes the other primary goods in a way that is preferable to the alternative. On the contrary, we would argue that what we believe is the best alternative considering the other primary goods, also provides the best support to self-respect. For example, say that we believe – for whatever reason – that the parties would choose an egalitarian distribution of wealth based on considerations not pertaining directly to self-respect. In that case, we would also believe that an egalitarian distribution of wealth adequately secures the social bases of self-respect.⁵⁹

I hope it is clear that for the appeal to self-respect to have a role in grounding the choice of principles it must be because either the argument from egalitarianism or the one from freedom of association holds and have independent weight. I take them up in turn in the two following sections.

5. The argument from egalitarianism

As previously mentioned, one of the reasons that Rawls and others give for thinking that self-respect is best supported by Justice as Fairness is that his two principles ensure a certain equality, and that equality in the distribution of some important good is essential to securing the social bases of self-respect. The liberty principle secures an equal distribution of basic liberties, and – together with the difference principle – it limits economic differences. This is

⁵⁹ This example is loosely inspired by (Eyal 2005).

supposed to affirm self-respect in the sense that it signals our *equal* value. This, in turn, is meant to give us a reason for preferring Justice as Fairness above less egalitarian alternatives.

To discuss whether this argument avoids the problem with the previous one, it is necessary to begin by giving a brief reconstruction of Rawls's reasoning around self-respect, equality and Justice as Fairness. This reconstruction should accord with how his take on this issue is usually understood.⁶⁰ Rawls argues that we have a "need for status" (Rawls 1999, 477), that others recognize our value. As previously mentioned, this is because "...our self-respect normally depends upon the respect of others" (Rawls 1999, 154), "how we think others value us" (Rawls 1999, 477). It follows that equality in some important status is important for the social bases of self-respect to be distributed equally (Taylor 2014, 149). Rawls also believes that to signal and secure our status equality, principles of justice must secure an equal distribution of some important good that marks an important status (Rawls 1999, paras. 81–82).

Now, both wealth and basic liberties are goods that can, in principle, fulfill this role as status-markers according to Rawls. In other words, both the liberty principle and a principle of equal distribution of wealth can express our equal status (Rawls 1999, 477–78). However, because Rawls considers wealth-egalitarianism to be irrational (Rawls 1971, 546), one of the aims of his theory is to ensure that people base their self-respect on basic liberties rather than wealth. "The best solution is to support the primary good of self-respect as far as possible by the assignment of the basic liberties that can indeed be made equal, defining the same status for all" (Rawls 1999, 478).

As I understand it, the idea is that economic inequality would undermine the self-respect of the worst off, "given human beings as they are" (Rawls 1999, 468), unless it is legitimized in a way that affirms their worth and thus provides them with a source of self-worth other than wealth. Put differently, to avoid that the worst off take their lower position to signify that they have less worth than the better off, i.e., that they base their sense of self-worth on their relative amount of wealth, inequality must be justified in a way that affirms their equal worth. Moreover, a requirement for such a justification is that some other important good is distributed equally. Rawls thus argues that the equal distribution of basic liberties is important

⁶⁰ See (Stark 2012; Zink 2011; Zaino 1998) for more thorough analyses.

in light of the difference principle that allows economic inequalities, because it ensures us an equal status independent of such differences. The difference principle is also central, however, because it “narrow[s] the range of inequalities” (Rawls 1999, 478). This is important because “To some extent men’s sense of their own worth may hinge on their institutional position and their income share” (Rawls 1999, 478).

As a final point, I should mention that Rawls invokes this argument in his case for the stability (as opposed to moral acceptability) of Justice as Fairness. Very briefly, he argues that Justice as Fairness is stable in the sense that the basic structure corresponding to it does not give rise to such high levels of excusable social envy⁶¹ that it becomes unworkable – despite allowing for economic inequalities – because it still affirms the worth of the worst off (Rawls 1999, 464–80).

For my argument, this distinction between stability and moral acceptability does not matter.⁶² The claim I discuss is in any case that Justice as fairness affirm our self-respect due to its egalitarian elements. It is worth mentioning, however, that if my thesis is correct then it is strange to present the egalitarian argument as an argument for stability. For, as I will show, this amounts to saying that Justice as Fairness is stable because it is just. If Justice as Fairness affirms our status equality despite allowing economic inequality, then it is simply because it is just. This is plainly not a satisfactory response to the question of stability since the matter of stability is partly independent from the question of moral acceptability.

I believe that the argument from egalitarianism suffers from the same problem as the one from alignment. The crucial step in the above line of reasoning is the claim that to signal and secure our status equality, principles of justice must secure an equal distribution of some important good that marks our status. It seems plausible that equality in some important status is important to secure the social bases of self-respect. But why, exactly, would securing such

⁶¹ Rawls defines 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” (Rawls 1999, 466). It is excusable when “[It] is a reaction to the loss of self-respect in circumstances where it would be unreasonable to expect someone to feel differently ...” (Rawls 1999, 468).

⁶² James R. Zink argues that even if the account of self-respect is insufficient to establish the moral acceptability of Rawls’s theory, it still has an important function in the argument for stability (Zink 2011). See also (Thomas E. 2014, 206–8). Zink responds to different problems than those I identify, however.

a status equality require the equal distribution of some important good? Why is it necessary to equalize basic liberties to prevent the worst off from taking their lower economic position to signal that they have less worth than the better off? I cannot see that Rawls or anyone else explains this, at least not explicitly.

I shall argue that the only plausible explanation available to the parties in the original position is that the equal distribution of basic liberties, and the narrowing of economic differences, is rational, when considering the primary goods as direct means for pursuing our higher-order interests as opposed to social bases of self-respect. That is, the importance of equality to self-respect fully relies on equality being important for reasons not directly related to self-respect. In that case, however, the claim that equality is important to self-respect suffers from the same problem as the argument from alignment. In fact, it reduces to the third ground in that one; Justice as Fairness affirm our self-respect because the two principles distribute the primary goods in a rational and reasonable way. To defend this claim, I will distinguish between two types of self-respect corresponding to the two types of status that Rawls may plausibly have in mind.

5.1. Recognition self-respect and equality

Drawing on Stephen L. Darwall's analysis of respect and self-respect (Darwall 1995), I shall call the first kind "recognition self-respect". To have recognition self-respect is to pay proper consideration to the fact that you are a person when you deliberate about your own actions.

This involves having certain moral standards of conduct that constrain your behavior:

"...behavior may be degrading in expressing a conception of oneself as something less than a person, a being with a certain moral status or dignity" (Darwall 1995, 193). Importantly, these standards include standing up to your rights as a person.

Assuming Rawls's political conception of personhood, behaving in a degrading way would be to act contrary to the ideal of personhood; willfully choosing not to be a fully cooperating citizen engaged in a reasonable and rational determinate plan of life and developing and exercising the moral powers to the degree that is necessary to do this. Having recognition self-respect as a person in this sense involves caring about our higher-order interests as such a person, and the rights that protect these: "In a democratic culture we expect ... citizens to

care about their basic liberties ... in order to develop and exercise their moral powers and to pursue their conceptions of the good. We think they show a lack of self-respect and weakness of character in not doing so” (Rawls 1993, 76–77). Indeed, having recognition respect as a person strikes me as equivalent – on Rawlsian assumptions – to accepting and acting from the ideal of personhood with its adherent standards, such as reasonableness and taking responsibility for one’s aims. To have recognition self-respect as a person in Rawls’s sense just is to be morally motivated to pursue your higher-order interests as a person. This is the same as being a person, or at least the same as accepting the ideal of personhood as reasonable, i.e., as morally appropriate in the context of basic justice (Rawls 1993, 29–35).

Now, how can we understand the claim that equality is important for status equality with regard to recognition respect? Here the “status” in question is that of our moral status as morally equal persons. The idea would be that equality in the distribution of some important good is necessary to affirm our status as morally equal citizens, and hence our recognition self-respect. It signals that we have the same basic moral status, i.e., that our interests have equal weight. The claim then is that if wealth is not equalized, some other important good must be equalized to signal that everyone, including the worst off, have the same moral status. In other words, the liberty principle is needed to provide the worst off with adequate recognition respect for their personhood, such that they can be reasonably expected to be secure in their sense of having an equal moral status despite having a lower economic position.

However, as far as I can see, the claim that our equal moral status can only be expressed by the equal distribution of some important good is a claim about what it takes to have due consideration for the fact that people are morally equal persons. And this is far from a self-evident conceptual truth, but rather a substantive moral-theoretical claim (Kymlicka 2002, 3–5; Rawls 1999, para. 77). A consistent Rawlsian must say that if equality affirms our equal moral status, it is because it is rational for the parties in the original position to prefer it – assuming that the position correctly models our moral convictions (Rawls 1993, chap. 3). In short, if a conception affirms our recognition self-respect it is *because* the parties would prefer it.

Thus, considerations of recognition self-respect cannot be a reason for the parties to prefer one conception to another. A utilitarian, say, that objects to the equal distribution of basic

liberties, or their priority, would simply argue that having due consideration for the fact that persons are morally equal requires us to distribute them in some other way, which would therefore also affirm our self-respect more than distributing them equally. In short, if equality is important to affirm recognition self-respect, then it is so because equality is already important for reasons that do not directly have to do with self-respect.⁶³

One objection to my analysis might be that the principles that affirm my recognition self-respect are those I believe are proper given the fact that I am a person, and that these are not necessarily the ones that objectively, from the perspective of the original position, gives all relevant interests equal weight. That people accept the ideal of personhood does not mean that they accept Justice as Fairness as the best theory of justice, even though the latter undergirds the former. Indeed, it may seem strange to ground a seemingly empirical claim about which principles that affirms people's self-respect with a normative account about which principle that should affirm it.⁶⁴

I believe that we can settle this issue by taking a brief look at Rawls's overall methodology in *PL*. Very briefly, Rawls derives his political conception of personhood from an analysis of the public political culture of liberal democracies. It is a partly empirical description of "how citizens think of themselves in a democratic society when questions of political justice arise" (Rawls 1993, 33). In other words, that people accept the ideal of personhood (have recognition self-respect as citizens) is presented as a description of the public political culture. However, Rawls does not rely on our empirical normative expectations as persons to determine the kind of treatment the fact that we are persons entitles us to, i.e., in determining principles of justice. It is clear that the parties cannot look to actual expectations of recognition respect – actual views of justice. The veil of ignorance shields this kind of particular information from them. The principles of justice are instead constructed from an objective point of view in the original position. For the purpose of the original position is precisely to get an objective perspective on which conception of justice that best secures our higher-order interests, i.e., the kind of treatment that the fact that people are citizens makes

⁶³ See (Schemmel 2018, 8–10) for a somewhat similar point.

⁶⁴ On a related note, there is some discussion about whether Rawls's conception of self-respect is normative (about how we should value ourselves) or empirical (how we in fact value ourselves). E.g. (Doppelt 2009; Massey 1995; Krishnamurthy 2013).

them entitled to. We might say that the purpose of the original position is to show which principles citizens would endorse, would take to signal proper recognition respect, if they thought of themselves as persons and of society as a fair system of cooperation, and reasoned clearly. (Rawls 1993, chap. 3).

Moreover, a main motivation behind the original position is that even though people accept the underlying ideas of personhood etc. there is little agreement on the content of justice. The argument from the original position is an attempt to solve this situation by providing an account of what we should expect, what our view of justice should be, given that we accept certain fundamental ideas embedded in the public political culture of liberal democracies (Rawls 1993, 89–90, 1985). The hope is that citizens come to accept Justice as Fairness because they accept these basic political principles and values that undergird it, and because the inference from these to justice as fairness is plausible. If and when they do accept Justice as Fairness, it will provide the best support to their actual recognition self-respect. In this sense, Rawls's claim that Justice as Fairness affirms our value as persons is not just a normative claim, but also empirical. In short, the objection fails because we cannot look to actual expectations of respect, but Rawls's account is still empirical in the sense that it is based on the public political culture.

5.2. Evaluative self-respect and equality

I shall call the other kind of self-respect for “evaluative self-respect”, drawing on Robin S. Dillon (Dillon 1992).⁶⁵ To have evaluative self-respect as a person in Rawls's sense means, firstly, to be confident that you are living up to the ideal of personhood, i.e. your standards of recognition self-respect. This is how Rawls describes self-respect in *PL* (see p. 5). Secondly, persons can also have evaluative self-respect for how they are doing in their particular social roles and the merit of these roles. For example, if my plan of life is to be a professional football player, then I will evaluate my character on the basis of how well I live up to this plan of life and on how worthwhile I think it is. This form of self-appraisal fits more with how Rawls describes self-respect in *ATJ*; here self-respect is the conviction that your plan of life is

⁶⁵ This includes both what Darwall calls “appraisal self-respect” and part of what he calls “self-esteem” (Darwall 1995)

valuable and that your character is suited to pursuing it. I shall focus on this latter form of self-appraisal since this is common in the literature about Rawls⁶⁶, and because I believe a discussion of the conception in *PL* would be mostly similar.

Now, how can we understand the claim that equality is important for status equality with regard to evaluative respect? Here the “status” (“worth”) in question is the worthwhileness of our particular social roles, and our merit in them. The idea, then, is that equality in the distribution of some important good is necessary to secure our status as equally meritorious in our particular social roles, and hence our evaluative self-respect. And, consequently, that if wealth is not equalized then basic liberties must be equalized to prevent the worst off from taking their lower economic position to signal that they have less merit.

The problem with this interpretation of status is that the equal distribution of basic liberties is in no way to signal that people have equal merit. The contention that Justice as Fairness ought to affirm the worst off – or anyone’s – sense of having meritorious plans of life is incompatible with Rawls’s views of what a conception of justice should and should not imply about people’s plans of life. Justice as Fairness does not express – or deny – that all plans of life are equally worthwhile, equally meritorious. “[Justice as Fairness] does not try to estimate the extent to which individuals succeed in advancing their way of life or to judge the intrinsic worth (or the perfectionist value) of their ends” (Rawls 1993, 188). Justice as Fairness involves no ranking of plans of life – not even an equal ranking (Rawls 1982, 172). In short, while the egalitarian elements of Justice as Fairness may affirm our moral equality, they do not affirm our equal merit.⁶⁷ Thus, I do not see how the equal distribution of basic liberties would prevent the worst off from taking their lower economic position to signal that they have less merit, or that their plans of life are less valuable than those of the better off.

However, there is still the fact that Justice as Fairness narrows the range of economic inequality. Can we say that Rawls’s theory thereby makes a potential connection between economic position and evaluative respect less problematic? That is, perhaps the worst off will

⁶⁶ E.g. (Doppelt 2009; Eyal 2005; Stark 2012).

⁶⁷ See also (Stark 2012, 244–45).

tend to think or feel that their plans of life are less valuable than those of the better off, but to a lesser degree than they would if the economic differences were greater.

I do not think the constraints that Justice as Fairness place on economic inequalities does much to protect people's evaluative self-respect, however. For it is not my economic position, neither absolute nor relative to others, as such that affirms my self-respect, my status. Say I win the lottery. This would not automatically strengthen my conviction in the value of my plan of life. What affirms my status, worth, is rather the recognition of others – “how we think others value us” (Rawls 1999, 477). And as previously indicated, the constraints that Justice as Fairness place on inequalities does in no way express that others value my plan of life, or that they do not consider it of little value. Rather, it signals that others recognize my moral status as a citizen – the mere fact that I am a person. Consequently, I doubt that the fact that Justice as Fairness narrows the range of economic inequalities would mitigate an eventual connection between economic position and evaluative respect.

An example might make this more convincing. Assume that I work in a lowly valued job, and that I – for that reason – only earns the minimum wage. Imagine furthermore that one day my fellow citizens decided to raise the minimum wage in view of moral considerations about what I (and others in the worst off social group) would consent to if we were fairly represented in the original position. Now, I do not think that this raising of my wage would make me more convinced that my plan of life has value, or that others recognize its value. It only tells me that others recognize my moral status as a citizen. They raise my wage not because they suddenly value my work more, but because they come to realize what respecting my moral status requires. I would still belong to the worst off social group due to how my line of work is valued. To see how my status understood as merit might be improved by or through an improvement in my economic position, we would have to imagine a different scenario. For example, that my salary was raised after a long struggle of convincing other citizens that my line of work provides a valuable contribution to society and that I therefore deserved it on the basis of my merit (as opposed to my moral status).⁶⁸ Justice as Fairness,

⁶⁸ This example is loosely inspired by Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, which provides useful insight into how a redistributive policy that improves one's economic position may signal different kinds of recognition depending on how it is justified (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 135–60).

however, is silent on questions about which lines of work and activities that should enjoy evaluative respect and on what specific basis.

6. The argument from freedom of association

I turn now to the argument from freedom of association, which targets perfectionism in particular. In Rawls, perfectionism involves privileging associations and ways of life that contribute to realize human perfection defined independently of and incongruent with what humans want or enjoy (Rawls 1999, 285–99).⁶⁹ This contrasts with Justice as Fairness’s “principle of free associations” (Rawls 1999, 289). According to the principle of free associations, the state may only support associations with resources in exchange for producing public goods that contribute to the freedom of all to choose how they want to live, and never because they contribute to human perfection (Rawls 1999, 289,291).

Rawls’s self-respect argument for preferring the principle of free associations above perfectionism goes as follows. This principle allows a greater variety of viable associations suitable to people’s particular talents than perfectionism does. A rich variety of viable associations suitable to people’s talents is an important part of the social bases of self-respect. Therefore, Justice as Fairness secures one important aspect of the social bases of self-respect better than perfectionism.

Rawls gives us two reasons for thinking that a rich variety of viable associations suitable to people’s particular talents is an important part of the social bases of self-respect. The first reason is that this is necessary to secure everyone the opportunity to satisfy the Aristotelian principle, which in turn is a prerequisite for self-respect. As previously mentioned, the Aristotelian principle states that “Other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities ...” (Rawls 1999, 374). Rawls thinks that when our plan of life is suited to our nature we will experience it as more fulfilling which in turn disposes us to value it more. And since one part of self-respect consists in valuing our plan of life, having a plan of life that

⁶⁹ Steven Wall gives a Rawlsian case for perfectionism in a different sense. Namely, the state taking a more active role in promoting a rich plurality of associations in order to support the Aristotelian principle (an account of what humans enjoy and want) than the principle of free association permits (Wall 2014).

satisfies the Aristotelian principle is important to having self-respect. Consequently, the association(s) within which we pursue our plan of life must be fitting in light of our talents and nature to be optimally conducive to our self-respect. This necessitates a wide range of associations since people have different talents (Rawls 1999, 386–87).

However, it seems to me that the concept of self-respect does not play any significant role in this first reason. Rawls assumes that rational plans of life normally satisfy the Aristotelian principle, because otherwise we would not view them as valuable and be motivated to pursue them. He believes that “... in the design of social institutions a large place has to be made for [the Aristotelian principle], otherwise human beings will find their culture and form of life dull and empty” (Rawls 1999, 377). The Aristotelian principle is in that sense a condition for rationality. And when Rawls clarifies the meaning, importance and possible explanations of the Aristotelian principle (Rawls 1999, para. 65), he does not refer to self-respect. That would be a superfluous complication since the part of self-respect in question just is the conviction that our plan of life is worth doing. To say that our plan of life must be suited to our nature for us to have self-respect due to the Aristotelian principle adds nothing of substance. Thus, if we accept the Aristotelian principle, then we already agree that a plan of life must be fitting in light of our nature to be rational.

Therefore, the appeal to self-respect does little work in the first reason. Furthermore, even if it did, it is impossible to prefer perfectionism if we accept the Aristotelian principle as a condition for rationality and believe that the principle of free associations entails a larger space for it. This is important because the Aristotelian principle is a basic premise in the original position. To reiterate, the position is modelled after this principle in the sense that the parties assume the citizenry to have different, but rational, conceptions of the good. Rawls does not try to show that the Aristotelian principle is true, but rather assumes it as part of the background for the argument from the original position (Rawls 1999, para. 65). It is a basic premise in the deliberation of the parties, not something they discuss. Consequently, no one who is on board with the set-up of the original position can have serious doubts about whether we should prefer the principle of free associations above perfectionism – provided that he or she agree that the former entails a larger place for the Aristotelian principle. These

interlocutors are already *fully* convinced and cannot be *more* convinced in any meaningful way by additional appeals to self-respect.⁷⁰

That being said, it is worth looking at Rawls's second reason for thinking that a rich variety of viable associations suitable to people's particular talents is an important part of the social bases of self-respect. He reasons that associations are important because it is within them that we receive recognition for "what we do in everyday life" (Rawls 1999, 387), i.e. the value of our determinate plan of life. Recall from the previous section that the basic principles of justice themselves entail no such recognition, and so we rely on associations for this part of our self-respect – the secure conviction that our plan of life is worth carrying out. Moreover, being part of an association is also important to our confidence in our abilities, because it provides a supportive context that helps us deal with challenges (Rawls 1999, 387).

This yields the following reason for preferring the principle of free associations above perfectionism. Privileging certain associations on the basis of some standard of excellence would not only make other associations comparatively less viable, and their members worse off in terms of the opportunity to pursue their plans of life. It would also make the members of non-privileged associations worse off in terms of recognition. This is partly because the associations within which they receive recognition would be less viable. But also because privileging certain associations signals that these activities are more valuable. The lower worth of their plans of life would be affirmed in the basic structure of society.

"The parties in the original position do not adopt the principle of perfection, for rejecting this criterion prepares the way to recognize the good of all activities that fulfill the Aristotelian principle (and are compatible with the principles of justice). This democracy in judging each other's aims is the foundation of self-respect in a well-ordered society" (Rawls 1999, 388).

The appeal to self-respect thus identifies an extra harm of such perfectionist policies. This extra harm gives us a reason to reject perfectionism as a political principle even if we are not

⁷⁰ Consider that Rawls devotes relatively little space to show why the parties would not prefer perfectionism in his paragraph about this alternative (Rawls 1999, para. 50), and without referring to self-respect. Moreover, when he later explains the importance of associations to self-respect, he gives the impression that the case for perfectionism is already settled with reference to the discussion of perfectionism.

on board with the set-up of the original position. In that sense, it provides external support to Justice as Fairness.

7. The scope of the argument

By way of conclusion, I will say something about the scope of my argument. I believe that it covers most of Rawls's own account of self-respect and the most common and reasonable takes on it in the literature. However, I have limited myself to discussing only the choice of basic principles of justice in the original position. I have not shown that considerations of self-respect cannot have a role in grounding specific ways of implementing and applying such principles. Moreover, there is a kind of self-respect that I have not covered and which may be relevant in Rawls's framework: basal self-respect. While recognition and evaluative self-respect are rather cognitive forms of self-attitudes, basal self-respect pertains more to our emotions and the unconscious. Some argue that basal self-respect qualifies as a primary good – it is important for pursuing our higher-order interests and it may be normally dependent on certain aspects of the basic structure (e.g. Dillon 1997). For reasons of space, I have not taken up this kind of self-relation. However, my argument gives us an additional reason for examining this notion of self-respect and its political implications. In any case, I have shown that it is hard to see how considerations of the more standard conceptions of self-respect can have a role in grounding the choice of principles within the original position.

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Article 3. Envy, Self-esteem, and Distributive Justice

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 concentrate on three objections to the second premise: that envy is irrational, that it is unfair to prevent and compensate for it, and that ideals of justice should not be based on vices. 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 fact that envy is a vice is not a strong objection to envy-avoidance given everything else I say in its defense.

Keywords: Envy, Self-esteem, Distributive Justice, John Rawls.

1. 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 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 envier 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: para. 81; Walsh, 1992).

There has been several attempts to provide a corrective to this dominant position (e.g., Tomlin 2008; Bankovsky 2012, 2018; Frye 2016). Each of these are indebted to Rawls's account of envy and particularly his remarks about "excusable envy" (Rawls 1999, para. 80), though they differ widely in how they interpret and develop this idea. Very briefly, Rawls's 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 (Frye 2016) provides a partial critique of this position where he agrees that envy has no place in the moral justification of *ideal* principles, i.e., 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 certain unjust (i.e., non-ideal) circumstances in bringing about a more just state of affairs. It can trigger moral reflection and provide an extra motivation to fight against unjust inequality. Miriam Bankovsky also applies Rawls's notion of excusable envy to make an argument about envy under non-ideal circumstances (Bankovsky 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.⁷¹ 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 consider all degrees of excusable envy as morally

⁷¹ 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 (Dworkin 1981).

relevant.⁷² 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 critical premise is the second. Though it might seem like a short step from a concern for self-esteem to a concern about envy, this is not so obvious. It is not obvious because there are distinctive challenges to envy-avoidance that do not apply to other parts of the commitment to protect self-esteem, at least not in the same way, challenges pertaining to the fact that it is a vice and, allegedly, irrational. The main contribution of this paper is to tackle some of these in a way that supplements and partially corrects the current literature on the relationship between envy, self-esteem, and distributive justice. The overall aim is to give a deeper understanding of the envy-charge to egalitarian theories, and the relevance of envious sentiments to distributive justice.

I shall concentrate on three objections to the second premise. The first is that envy is imprudent; satisfying it would not make the envious better off, at least not regarding the important long-term interests that are the concern of social justice. Therefore, envy is an irrational response to facts about one's place in a distributive arrangement that rational actors are not liable to experience, and which we in any case should ignore as far as considerations of stability allows. Call this "the imprudence objection". My reply (section 4 and 5) has two

⁷² The main reason is that envy is a negative feeling that we would wish to avoid in Rawls's original position, but Tomlin also notes that Rawls's rejection of the moral relevance of envy sits uneasily with the latter's commitment to secure the social bases of self-esteem (Tomlin 2008, 108).

steps. First (section 4.1), I draw on the literature to introduce two prudence requirements on the instances of envy that the idea of envy-avoidance covers. These requirements elucidate how envy can have a social basis in a specific lack of opportunities to attain social esteem. Thus, though envy appears to be systematically imprudent concerning material goods, it can nevertheless be rational with respect to attaining social esteem.

In a second step (section 5), I argue that it is rational to desire social esteem for reasons of self-esteem in a way that makes even rational people vulnerable to envy. This is done through engaging Morgan Knapp's claim that envy is always irrational because it is systematically unfitting (2014). Here I supplement Bankovsky's argument (sketched in section 5.1) that envy is sometimes fitting (2018) with an additional one that aims to show that fittingness is not necessary to make envy rational all-things-considered. The basic idea (section 5.2.) is that envy can be *indirectly* prudent in the sense that having those attitudes that makes us vulnerable to envy is generally good for us.

The second objection is one from fairness (section 6). Because people have some control over which things they care about and potentially envy, they can be asked to take responsibility for their envious feelings. Therefore, it could be argued that envy-avoidance is a form of illegitimate indulgence and/or give raise to situations morally akin to hostage-taking, where people can voluntarily cultivate interests that may lead to envy and subsequently claim compensation (Keller 2002). Call this "the fairness objection".

My answer to the fairness objection is that while it is true that normal adults have some control over which things they care about and potentially envy, there are sometimes no reasonable alternatives to become highly invested in specific goals and expectations of esteem. This, I suggest, makes it unfair to ask them to take full responsibility for having cultivated the interests that have turned to envy in the face of disappointment, whether voluntarily or not. Moreover, I shall contend that when we can also expect envy to be particularly burdensome, doing something about it does not appear to be a form of indulgence.

A third worry (section 7) is that envy is a vice, and it might seem counterintuitive that we can ground ideals of justice on vices. Call this "the vice objection". I alleviate this worry by

distinguishing between the notion of envy-avoidance and some simple-minded preference-satisfaction theory.

The paper is organized as follows. First, in section 2, I briefly explain what envy and other key terms will mean in this text. Then, in section 3, I expand on the first premise; how envy-avoidance relates to self-esteem and the moral-political concern for its social bases. Following that, I tackle the objections in the aforementioned order in section 4-7. Section 8 concludes with some remarks about the implications of my argument.

2. Envy, self-esteem, and resentment

The first order of business is the definition of “envy”. On this point, I largely follow Knapp (2014). He provides a definition that mostly 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 presents the world in the following way. A) The envied has some good that the envier lacks, or more of it. B) This difference is bad for the envier. It is not the good itself that is important, or most important, to the envier, but the fact that the rival has more of it. This explains a disposition involved in envy, namely the envier’s willingness to impose a loss on the envied even at some cost to herself, as long the relative difference becomes smaller (Rawls 1999, 464; Knapp 2014, 114).

C) The difference reflects poorly on the envier’s worth. The envious feels that she has less worth because of the difference. 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 (Rawls 1999, 469) of envy or also one of its constitutive components (Protasi 2016; Salice and Sánchez 2019; Knapp 2014).

D) The envious believes the difference is undeserved in one way or another. However, I shall operate with a distinction between envy and resentment.⁷³ 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 (Rawls 1999, para. 73). If you steal from me, I will feel resentment towards 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 in some way, 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 think that the difference in question is undeserved, for example because it is a result of bad luck on my part. This does not commit me to thinking that it is unjust. In essence, the way envy presents the world does not imply a moral evaluation of it.

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 hold that the 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 towards the social goods and social positions that are the concern of distributive justice. They must concern 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.

3. 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

⁷³ Knapp does not draw this distinction. Bankovsky draws it differently than I do.

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. In addition to the constraint that the envy must be directed towards social goods and positions, I only defend prevention and compensation for envy that a) satisfies certain rationality requirements (section 4.1.). And b) is reasonably unavoidable and particularly burdensome (section 6).

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.⁷⁴ The argument in this paper is also open regarding which specific social goods that 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, chap. 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

⁷⁴ This falls short of – but does not exclude – Rawls’s strong view that we should “... at almost any cost avoid the social circumstances that undermine self-esteem” (Rawls 1999, 386) or the early Honneth’s hyperbolic suggestion that a fully just society is one free from the pains of a wounded self-image (Honneth 1995, chap. 9).

to esteem in this sense rather than respect. Alessandro Salice and Alba Montes Sánchez, for example, states 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” (Salice and Sánchez 2019, 236).⁷⁵

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]⁷⁶ 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” (Rawls 1999, 386). Similarly, Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth remarks 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” (Anderson and Honneth 2005, 137). These quotes both point to a problem of motivation in one way or another.⁷⁷ Lacking self-esteem, we struggle to see the value of our pursuits, or we doubt our ability to attain them.

Envy also involves a 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.⁷⁸ 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 often 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.

⁷⁵ See also (Knapp 2014, 121–22).

⁷⁶ The word in the text is “self-respect”, but Rawls uses this interchangeably with “self-esteem”.

⁷⁷ Honneth frames the value of self-esteem ultimately in terms of autonomy.

⁷⁸ For examples, see (Salice and Sánchez 2019; Protasi 2016; Knapp 2014; Bankovsky 2018).

Thus, if we concede that demoralization and a lack of self-efficacy are harms 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 the 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 suggestions⁷⁹, 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, 135–60; 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”, e.g. 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 (Laitinen 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 (Rawls 1999, 470).

⁷⁹ Here I largely follow Arto Laitinen’s analysis (Laitinen 2015).

The implications of envy-avoidance for a political theory of esteem are briefly remarked upon in the final section. However, the primary aim of this paper is to defend the overall ideal of envy-avoidance, not any specific policies or distributive principles.

4. The imprudence objection

The aim in 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 broadly Rawlsian debate (Tomlin 2008; Frye 2016; Norman 2002), 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” (Rawls 1999, 466). Indeed, on 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 cost – though other desires may outweigh it (Norman 2002, 43–44).

Therefore, it could be argued that a rational person is not envious, everything else being equal, 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.

Section 4.1 shows how this objection is exaggerated by explaining two prudence-requirements on the instances of envy that the commitment to avoid envy cover. The basic idea is that when envy satisfies these requirements, it has a rational basis: a lack of opportunities to achieve social esteem compared to a socially salient rival group. Section 5

discusses and explains why this specific lack is an important harm that rational (and by default moral for that matter) actors are liable to experience.

4.1. 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 a main cause (Rawls 1999, para. 81) or constitutive (Protasi 2016; Salice and Sánchez 2019) of malicious envy. Salice and Sánchez explains that the envier assess herself as “disempowered”, as “a loser”, based on how she compares to the rival (Salice and Sánchez 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.⁸⁰

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 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, 536–37) 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 obviously 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. I shall follow the more or less standard Rawlsian account of malicious envy in that even if envy has a prudential basis in the sense I have explained, it is still systematically irrational regarding material goods. The envious is willing to harm the envied even at a (material) cost to herself. Yet, if the two prudence requirements were satisfied, the envious person would still have a reason for her envy. The difference does detract from her advantages in terms of opportunities to achieve social esteem. This makes it sensible 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.

⁸⁰ 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. (Salice and Sánchez 2019, 236–37).

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 envy). My account is heavily inspired by his. To further clarify and defend it, it is worth briefly comparing it with Rawls's (or at least one interpretation of his view). 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).

One the face of it, Rawls's idea here is that under some circumstances we cannot reasonably help but feel envious, given human nature. In such cases envy is excusable and satisfying the envious desire to reduce the rival's advantages even at a material cost to the envious would make her better off. But better off how? a) One possibility is that we would stop feeling envious which is bad for us (e.g., Bankovsky 2018, 13–14). b) Another possibility, indicated by the middle sentence, is that when we cannot reasonably help but feel envy, we have a prudential reason for feeling envy in the first place. Perhaps this reason is similar to the one I have sketched. Of course, these possibilities are not mutually exclusive. Another question is when we cannot reasonably help but feel envy and/or have a reason to feel it. As previously mentioned, Rawls seems to accept the prudence requirements as causes of excusable envy (Rawls 1999, 468–69). He also writes that “A rational individual is not subject to envy, at least when differences between himself and others are not thought to be the result of injustice and do not exceed certain limits” (Rawls 1999, 464). Rawls's notion of excusable envy has been interpreted in several ways (e.g., Frye 2016; Tomlin 2008), and I do not intend these remarks as an argument about what he means. They allow me to clarify my own view, however.

My view differs on both counts. What I am arguing is that the two prudence requirements do not merely describe causes of envy, or excuse it, but directly constitute a normative reason for feeling envious in the first place (an argument that is completed in the next section). There is no requirement that the inequalities must be large or perceived to be unjust either. Moreover, Rawls's requirement that it must be reasonably impossible to overcome the envious feelings for their satisfaction to make the envious better off psychologically or otherwise is too strong

178

(if 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). Suppose 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.

5. Why should the envious care about undeserved social esteem?

So far, I have argued that envy can have a prudential basis in the sense that satisfying the envious desire could make the envier better off in terms of opportunities to attain social esteem. Social esteem, in turn, is important to self-esteem. In this section, I shall defend this account of envy's rationality against Knapp's argument that envy is systematically unfitting, which he takes to imply that envy is systematically irrational.

I start by explaining Knapp's argument and its relevance in this context. Then (section 5.1.) I summarize Bankovsky's answer to Knapp that aims to show how envy can be fitting. 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 (in section 5.2.) 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.

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 (Knapp 2014, 121–24). 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, I have no reason to think less of myself. 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 status is false, as it were, because it does not reflect their true merit. The envious have no reason to think less of themselves. Therefore, we might add, 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.

5.1. Can envy be fitting?

Bankovsky (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. For 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 develops into a form of envy that drives him to vandalize the superior cricket facilities that belong to his privileged rivals, even though he himself is sometimes allowed using them.

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. This argument seeks to establish 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 a difference can be both undeserved and reflect poorly on the envier's worth 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 second condition is the same as my first prudence requirement, though I

defend it as a criterion of prudence and not of fittingness.⁸¹ And (3), the good must be realistically attainable under conditions securing a fair competition given our natural talents.

5.2. Envy can be rational all things considered

The aim in 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 – not least because her fittingness requirements do not cover all cases of envy that satisfy my prudence requirements.

As a first step, I must make a preliminary point about rationality and fittingness. Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson (D'Arms and Jacobson 2000) among others convincingly show that there is not just one consideration, such as fittingness, that bear 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 (Rawls 1999, para. 67; Honneth 1995, 121–30).

⁸¹ I do this for the sake of simplicity. The two prudence requirements are closer to fittingness requirements as fittingness is understood by Knapp, and D'Arms and Jacobson (2000). When they are satisfied, the first and second feature of the way envy presents the world are fitting. However, the following defense of the rationality of taking the difference to be *both* undeserved and to reflect poorly on one's worth (the conjunction of the third and fourth feature of envy) appeals to what is prudential rationality as they define it.

Therefore, it makes sense to care about social esteem and forming 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.⁸² 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.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴ In other words, it gives him a reason for feeling envy in the first place. However, since Rajeev is unable to reduce the rivals' advantages in a way that effectively betters his prospects for recognition, he vandalizes their facilities just to alleviate his feelings.

That Rajeev experiences an *initial* loss of self-esteem and 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

⁸² 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.

⁸³ 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 (Bankovsky 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.

⁸⁴ The example is not perfect for my purposes since the difference does detract from Rajeev's material advantages too, i.e., his opportunities to do cricket and generally succeed in life.

about fairness and his best interests. Bankovsky adds that Rajeev knows that injustices will prevent him from pursuing other goals too. She takes this as a justification for his envious destruction of his rivals' training facilities, because it prevents him from moving on and because his vandalism provides an alleviation of his envious feelings (Bankovsky 2018, 12–13). I agree with her that such a *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 a 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, by 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 matters to them. What I have argued is that this ideal of self-esteem is not desirable or in any case not reasonable to impose on the citizenry.

6. 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 in this section is to defend envy-avoidance against the fairness objection. To this end, I shall introduce two further requirements pertaining to reasonable unavoidability (section 6.1.) and burdensomeness (section 6.2.). My intent with these requirements is to meet the fairness

objection by showing that it is not convincing when applied to preventing and compensating for such unavoidable and burdensome envy.

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 demanding satisfaction or compensation for their rancor. Drawing on a paper by Simon Keller (Keller 2002) we can divide this overall charge into two specific complaints.⁸⁵ (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).

6.1. Moral hostage-taking and reasonable unavoidability

The first requirement is that the envy in question must be reasonably unavoidable. An example is 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 taking the risk of serious disappointment. This requirement meets the moral hostage-taking objection because 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 (Valentyne 2002, 531–43).

When are the alternatives to become strongly invested in a specific pursuit associated with esteem unreasonable? Continuing with (and slightly modifying) Bankovsky’s Rajeev

⁸⁵ Keller uncovers them in an analysis of the “expensive tastes” objection against welfare egalitarianism.

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 were the most meaningful goal for Rajeev in the sense that it is by far the activity that most fully engages his talents and/or or by far the thing he believes has most perfectionistic value among his realistic options (Bankovsky 2018; Laitinen 2015, 73; Rawls 1999, chap. 65,67). 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.

6.2. Indulgence and burdensomeness

The second fairness requirement concerns the burdensomeness of the reasonably unavoidable occurrences of envious feelings that we should compensate for. 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 it 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 (Laitinen 2015, 70–71; Honneth 1995, 129–30).

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; Brink 2011). In contrast, the ideal of zero societal stigmatization is more realistic and clearly worth striving for (Jakobsen 2015; Laitinen 2015, 66–68; Honneth 1995, 121–30). 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. 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 (Bankovsky 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 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 (Bankovsky 2018, 16–17).

7. The vice objection

A critic could accept what I have said so far but still insist that envy is a vice and that ideals of justice cannot be found on vices – not even partly. This seems to be the position of George V. Walsh (Walsh 1992). Tomlin (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.

It is unclear why the fact that envy is a vice is a strong objection to the kind of envy-avoidance that I have defended. After all, 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 levelling otherwise just inequalities. There is also the possibility of organizing society in such a way that said inequalities do not generate morally relevant forms of envy. Thus, 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 actions it motivates. Considering this and everything else I have said in defense of envy-avoidance, it is unclear why there would be a deontological prohibition against it. Indeed, the fact that envy is a vice seems rather to count in favor of envy-avoidance. Surely, we wish to protect others and ourselves against morally corrupting circumstances.

8. 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 (Honneth 1995, chap. 5; Anderson and Honneth 2005, 135–37; Zurn 2015, 42–43; Fraser and Honneth 2003, 110–60). 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 section 3 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 go 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 that only Bankovsky advocates. Furthermore, in theory preventing morally relevant envy can require more than reasonable protection against shame and demoralization does. If so, this paper provides grounds for a more comprehensive politics of esteem.

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