Jealousy: a response to infidelity?

On the nature and appropriateness conditions of jealousy

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This paper critically assesses the widespread claim that jealousy is a response to infidelity. According to this claim, herewith called the entitlement theory (ET), jealousy is only an appropriate response to a relationship between a loved one and a rival if, by entertaining this relationship, the loved one does not treat the jealous person the way she is entitled to be treated. I reconstruct different versions of ET, each of them providing a different answer to the question why we should assume that jealousy is a response to infidelity. I show that even the most plausible versions enjoy less argumentative support than it seems at first sight. The positive aim of this paper is to present a more inclusive account of jealousy as an alternative to ET. According to this account, jealousy serves to disturb the rival relationship and to (re-)gain the attention and affection of the loved person. Jealousy so understood is not only an appropriate response to infidelity but has wider appropriateness conditions. However, it plays a role in the negotiation of norms concerning exclusivity in personal relationships. The inclusive account does justice to the continuity and commonalities between adult and infant protest against rival relationships.

Key words: jealousy; infidelity; emotions; normative content of emotions

1. Introduction

Jealousy, it is often claimed, is a response to alleged infidelity, or threat thereof. According to this view, which is hereafter called the Entitlement Theory (ET), jealousy is not simply about a relationship between someone you like and a third person: rather, if you are jealous, you also assess the situation as one in which you are being treated unjustly. (Jealousy is not always romantic or sexual jealousy, and nor is infidelity always sexual infidelity, according to ET.) According to ET, knowing that a person is jealous is sufficient for us to conclude that she evaluates the situation as a violation of her entitlements. We find ET in everyday reasoning (as when we argue over whether an episode of jealousy was an exaggerated reaction), but also in the philosophical literature on jealousy where it is often treated as a fairly commonsensical observation which does not require any strong argumentative support. This is a mistake.
The negative aim of this paper is to show that the entitlement theory rests on substantive and controversial premises. I will reconstruct different versions of the Entitlement Theory, each of them providing a different answer to the question why we should assume that jealousy is a response to infidelity. These versions have different degrees of plausibility; and I will show that even the most plausible ones enjoy less argumentative support than it seems at first sight. The positive aim of this paper is to present a more inclusive account of jealousy as an alternative to ET. According to this account, jealousy serves to disturb the rival relationship and to (re-)gain the attention and affection of a beloved person. The inclusive account does justice to the continuity and commonalities between adult and infant protest against rival relationships.

I will first clarify what I and my opponents take jealousy to be (Section 2). In Section 3, I introduce the Entitlement Theory and locate it within current themes in the philosophy of emotions. Section 4 presents two versions of the Entitlement Theory, a causal and a definitional one. Each of the two comes in different variants. In Section 5 I argue that the causal version of ET is probably not true, given what we know of infant behavior and cognitive development. Then I develop a more inclusive conception of jealousy according to which it entails a tendency to protest against the rival relationship, and compare it to the definitional version of the Entitlement Theory (Section 6). In Section 7, I argue that a tendency to protest against the rival relationship has wider appropriateness conditions than jealousy according to the definitional Entitlement Theory. I also offer an alternative explanation for some insights that motivate the Entitlement Theory. In Section 8 I show how jealousy may be part of the negotiation of norms within relationships. The conclusion discusses the relevance of this case study to the philosophical study of emotions.

2. Introducing jealousy

This section offers a characterization of jealousy which introduces some terminology, and clarifies the subject matter of this paper in a way that should also be acceptable to proponents of ET.

Jealousy is an aversive response to an alleged rival relationship. To characterize the constellation that can give rise to jealousy, let me introduce three parties. First, there is the jealous person, called ‘Jean’. Second, there is the person Jean cares about: the beloved person, ‘Bobby’. Finally, there is the rival, ‘Robin’. A potentially jealousy-evoking situation is given if (according to Jean) Bobby gives some attention or affection to Robin instead of Jean. The jealous person is bothered by this very relationship from which she is excluded (Farrell 1980). If someone is bothered simply by the fact that someone he likes is not attending to him, he is not jealous. On the other hand, it is not necessary that the rival relationship actually exists – it might be a product of one’s imagination. Rival’ and ‘beloved person’ are used as technical terms. The rival is defined as the person who, in the eye of the jealous person, is favored by the beloved person instead of the jealous person – regardless of whether there is any additional rivalry between the jealous person and the rival. The beloved person is any person whose attention or affection the jealous person cares about. There are different kinds
of attention or affection Jean might care about: parental care and affection, sexual activities or deep conversations, to name a few.

Of course not every reaction to a rival relationship qualifies as jealousy. Rather trivially, happiness over the rival relationship does not qualify. Jealousy comes with a specific phenomenology; it is more specific than mere unpleasantness. It also has a different interpersonal significance than, for instance, sadness. While few scholars would object to these remarks, the precise characterization of the evaluative stance entailed in jealousy is the subject of this paper. One proposal to characterize it more precisely is given by the Entitlement Theory.

1. The Entitlement Theory and philosophical theories of emotion

The Entitlement Theory of jealousy appears across different camps in the philosophy of emotions. As a starting point, consider a passage by Aaron Ben-Ze’ev:

At the very foundation of romantic jealousy lies the concept of entitlement: we fear the loss of something or someone that we feel entitled to have. Jealousy reflects our fear that someone else will unjustly take possession of something that belongs to us. Hence, romantic jealousy implies some kind of entitlement over another person: our assumed right to exert control. Asserting sexual exclusivity, for example, is in fact asserting the right to control the spouse’s sex life. (Ben-Ze’ev 2010, 44, my emphasis)

Jesse Prinz proposes an Entitlement Theory for romantic jealousy:

When romantic jealousy occurs, there is first a judgement to the effect that one’s lover has been unfaithful and then an embodied appraisal. (Prinz 2004, 98-99)

Kristján Kristjánsson (2002, 2016a) describes jealousy (not only in the romantic realm) as a “desert-based emotion” and Robert Solomon (2007, 105) describes jealousy in terms of a legitimate claim.

In its generic version, the Entitlement Theory is a claim concerning the conditions under which jealousy is appropriate, while appropriateness is understood as something very much akin to correctness. Let us distinguish emotional episodes from emotion types. Jealousy is an emotion type. An emotional episode is directed at a particular object – in case of a jealous episode, a particular rival relationship or interaction. During an emotional episode, a person views the object of her emotion in a certain evaluative light which is characteristic of the emotion type the episode belongs to. This structure yields an appropriateness condition for emotions. An emotional episode E directed at a particular object O is appropriate if and only if it represents O as \( \Phi \) and O is \( \Phi \). This appropriateness condition describes whether the emotion is ‘getting it right’. It must be distinguished from considerations about the virtuousness or the prudence of the emotion (D’Arms & Jacobson 2000). This paper takes ET to be a theory about the appropriateness of jealousy (in the sense of getting it right). According to ET, under which conditions is jealousy appropriate? I have already said that jealousy is about a beloved person turning to a rival. According to ET, jealousy is about a beloved person unjustly turning to a rival. This is just another formulation of the claim that jealousy is an appropriate response to infidelity but is not appropriate if
there is not even a threat of infidelity. Infidelity entails that the victim of infidelity is wronged (I take wronging to be synonymous with not treating someone the way she is entitled to be treated).

We can sum up the generic version of ET as follows:

\[(ET) \quad \text{Jealousy is only an appropriate response to a rival relationship if, by the beloved person's turning to the rival, the jealous person is not treated the way she is entitled to be treated.}\]

Although it is not entailed by this definition, almost all proponents of ET propose that specific cognitive attitudes (beliefs or judgments) with normative content are necessary for jealousy: from the fact that a person is jealous we can conclude that she possesses a cognitive attitude with said normative content. This is also true for those who propose so-called non-cognitivist theories of emotions, such as Jesse Prinz. According to Prinz (2004), romantic jealousy, like any emotion, is a perception of one's own bodily changes (this is what he calls an embodied appraisal). However, Prinz says that in order to distinguish romantic jealousy from other emotions, we have to refer to the judgments that play a causal role in the etiology of jealousy. Romantic jealousy is reliably caused by judgments which assert facts that indicate the partner's infidelity (Prinz 2004, 101). That is why it is an appropriate response to infidelity.

In which sense do non-cognitivists hold cognitive attitudes to be necessary for jealousy? A look at existing philosophical theories of emotions is helpful to clarify this question. Prinz is sometimes called a non-cognitivist, but more precisely he proposes an etiological cognitivist account of jealousy, while he is not a judgmentalist. According to judgmentalists such as Martha Nussbaum (2004) and Robert Solomon (2004, 2007), emotions are a special form of judgment. Accounts of emotions opposed to judgmentalism include perceptual accounts, according to which we perceive evaluative properties through emotions (e.g. Prinz 2004; Tappolet 2011, Döring 2003, de Sousa 1990), Goldie's (2000) description of the intentionality of emotions as due to "feelings towards", and Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni's (2012) account of emotions as embodied attitudes. Non-judgmentalism is compatible with etiological cognitivism. According to etiological cognitivism, judgments (or appraisals very much akin to judgments) play a necessary role in the etiology of an emotional episode but emotions are not reduced to a judgment (or an appraisal). According to etiological cognitivist versions of ET, jealousy-evoking judgments imply the proposition 'a beloved person entertains a relationship with a rival and by this does not, or will not, treat me the way I am entitled to be treated'. Examples are: 'Bobby was unfaithful', or 'Mom likes my sister better than me (and she's not supposed to)'. In the following discussion, I use the expression 'entitlement-judgments' for these judgments.

Beliefs can serve as premises for judgments: Jean can judge that Bobby has treated her wrongly by going out with Robin based on prior beliefs about their relationship. Both judgments and beliefs represent what some part of the world is like, but while beliefs are dispositional states, judgments are not. In order to believe that p, a person does not have to entertain the thought that p. Judging that p is a mental activity where the subject assents to p. The judgment that in a given situation I was
wronged, in turn, is an activity that (under normal conditions) results in a belief with the same content.

Because almost all proponents of ET propose judgmentalist or etiologically cognitive accounts of ET, I will mostly deal with these cognitivist versions of ET. Since neither of them is implied by ET, I will also discuss non-cognitivist versions of ET where the jealous person evaluates that she is not being treated the way she is entitled to be treated but without judging so.

2. Two versions of the Entitlement Theory

Why should we assume that ET holds? We may distinguish between two versions of ET, each providing a different answer to this question. According to the causal version of ET, the evaluation that we are not being treated the way we are entitled to be treated explains why we feel bad about the rival relationship. The causal version is best understood as an etiological cognitive theory: an entitlement-judgment (or some appraisal similar to a judgment) is a necessary step in the etiology of a jealous episode.

\[(ET_C)\] A person’s judgment (or other evaluation) that the beloved person is entertaining a relationship with a rival and by this does not, or will not, treat her the way she is entitled to be treated, is a necessary causal factor in evoking a negative emotional reaction to the (alleged) rival relationship.

ET\(_C\) can explain why people react with negative emotions to a rival relationship at all. After all, this is puzzling: Why should we care about the interactions of others independently of the amount of affection we ourselves receive? According to ET\(_C\), jealous people care about such interactions because they think or fear that they are (or will be) wronged. ET\(_C\) entails that jealousy is in a certain respect a rational reaction: if Jean thinks that she is being (or will be) wronged, she has a reason to be bothered by the rival relationship.

We should not mistake ET\(_C\) for another version of ET, namely a *definitional* version where jealousy is defined partially by reference to entitlements. According to this version, it is possible to have a negative emotion in response to a rival relationship without forming any entitlement-judgments (or otherwise evaluating the situation as a violation of entitlements). However, this reaction would not be jealousy, but a different emotion. The definitional version states a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for the application of the concept of jealousy.

\[(ET_D)\] For a negative emotional reaction to a rival relationship to count as jealousy, it is necessary that this reaction is only appropriate if, by the beloved person’s turning to the rival, the jealous person is not treated the way she is entitled to be treated.

Unlike ET\(_C\), ET\(_D\) does not provide an answer to the question why we care about rival relationships at all – a main reason to ascribe entitlement-judgments to the jealous person for ET\(_C\) is not applicable to ET\(_D\). It is possible to reconstruct judgmentalist, etiologically cognitivist and non-cognitivist versions of ET\(_D\). In the next section, I will
discuss arguments against \(E_T^C\) that do not challenge \(E_T^D\). Then I will discuss arguments for and against \(E_T^D\).

3. **Arguments against the causal version of the Entitlement Theory**

One obvious argument against the judgmentalist version of \(E_T^C\) in particular stems from the observation that people sometimes get jealous although they do not claim a right to special treatment. But this argument is not conclusive, because the entitlement theorist can argue that there is a tension between this person’s emotion and her explicit claims. Such a tension is after all not unusual. I will therefore leave this line of argument aside and consider some empirical evidence that speaks clearly against \(E_T^C\) (but not \(E_T^D\)). This evidence stems from studies in developmental psychology which show that infants younger than twelve months of age already react negatively to rival relationships.

Let me introduce these studies: Sybil Hart and colleagues (Hart & Carrington 2002; Hart et al. 2004) placed mothers and their six-month-old infants facing each other in a laboratory. The mothers were asked to ignore their child and engage with a doll that looked like a real infant. In the control condition, mothers got absorbed in a book or looked at her child with a still, neutral facial expression. This so-called still-face paradigm is known to be unpleasant for infants (Trevarthan 1979). From the fact that their reactions to these conditions differed, we can conclude that infants were probably able to discriminate between a mere withdrawal of attention and a withdrawal of attention in favor of a rival. The results of the second study suggest that there is at least one characteristic behavioral/expressive pattern that six-month-olds show in a jealousy-evoking situation, namely an increased gaze towards the mother’s eyes and a sad facial expression. In the experimental paradigm of several studies by Maria Legerstee and colleagues (Legerstee et al. 2010), the experimenter took up the role of the rival. In the dialogue condition, the mother engaged in a lively chat with the experimenter while the three- or six-month-old infant was ignored by both adults. A control condition, the monologue condition, included the mother quietly listening to the experimenter while the infant was again ignored. Children were not upset in the monologue condition. In the dialogue condition, however, the experimenters observed intense gaze and loud protest. Children often tried to establish eye contact with their mothers. The authors concluded that “infants do not mind being excluded by the mother as long as she does not show interest in the interloper” (Legerstee et al. 2010, 182). This is remarkable: even in infants, jealousy is not primarily about the amount of attention the beloved person is giving to the infant; it is primarily about the beloved person attending to a rival. Complementary results were found by Draghi-Lorenz (2010), who interviewed British parents about their children’s behavior. Most parents regularly report “jealousy” and “wanting to join in” from seven or eight months onwards.

These studies provide evidence that infants are bothered by *rival relationships* and not just the withdrawal of attention. But are Legerstee, Hart and their colleagues interpreting their data correctly? Michael Lewis (2010) thinks that they are not. Let me briefly defend Legerstee’s and Hart’s interpretation against that of Lewis. Lewis’s
argument is based on his model of cognitive-emotional development. It locates the onset of jealousy at about two years, after a robust conception of the self has developed. Lewis claims that “by jealousy we mean that the infant is capable of thinking ‘that I want something that I do not have’” (2010, 33-34). He does not provide a clear argument why jealousy would require this meta-representative thought (which requires a concept of oneself) and not just the mental state of wanting something that one does not have (which does not require a concept of oneself). According to Kristján Kristjánsson’s (2016b) reading of Lewis, a capacity to make social comparisons is necessary for understanding that a caregiver is paying attention to someone else and not to oneself. This capacity requires a concept of the self, including the capacity to have propositional attitudes about oneself. While I agree that a capacity to differentiate between the self and others is necessary for understanding that one’s caregiver is suddenly paying attention to someone else, I believe that in order to have this capacity, it is sufficient to have an embodied sensory-motor, pre-conceptual sense of the self and a pre-conceptual awareness of other people as living creatures who act intentionally. Both of these features of experience emerge during the first year of life. The point has been made convincingly for emotions like pride that are even more clearly self-referential than jealousy (Zinck 2008). Furthermore, Lewis’s own interpretation of the data provided by the above studies is inadequate. He regards the infants’ behavior as a protest against a withdrawal of attention. This interpretation cannot explain the central finding that infants react differently when they experience a mere withdrawal of attention as compared to withdrawal of attention in favor of a rival.

So let us grant that infants are indeed bothered by rival relationships. Then a cognitivist variant of ETc is empirically inadequate if infants cannot form any entitlement-judgments (or appraisals). They cannot form any entitlement-judgments if they do not possess the relevant normative concepts. A judgment like ‘Mom is not chatting with me but with that person, and that’s bad!’ is not an entitlement-judgment. Here the infant conceives of the mother’s behavior as something that bears on its wellbeing in a negative way. Such a judgment does not imply that one’s mother is not treating one the way one is entitled to be treated.

Does it help to replace the judgment by a less sophisticated form of evaluation? In line with perceptual accounts of emotions, for instance, we could argue that being wronged is a perceivable evaluative property. An infant perceives that it is wronged but does not judge that it is wronged. This proposal is one way to interpret Goldie’s account of jealousy. This strategy does not help to save ETc. Entitlement-evaluations (whether they are judgments or not) carry normative content: in order to evaluate something as a violation of one’s entitlements, a person must understand what it means to owe someone that one do something or refrain from doing something. She must possess the relevant normative concepts. According to the current consensus in developmental psychology, it is highly unlikely that infants of three to eight months, when early jealousy is observed, already possess these concepts. There is widespread agreement that social cognitive skills are just beginning to develop during months three to eight. Those who argue that an understanding of social norms emerges early
in development locate the onset of this understanding at the age of two to three years, when children begin to protest if somebody violates conventional social norms (Rakoczy & Schmidt 2013). Arguing for an early onset of moral capacities in young children, Thompson (2012) reviews evidence that an understanding of differential obligations of the inhabitants of social roles (e.g. family members and strangers) emerges at pre-school age, roughly around three years. Rakoczy and Schmidt (2013) argue that “the capacity to take the normative stance presupposes robust capacities for shared intentionality” (19). These capacities are built upon the capacity for joint attention. Full-fledged joint attention occurs when both parties notice that they are both attending to the same thing. While the exact onset of joint attention is debated, a robust capacity for full-fledged joint attention seems not to be present before nine months (Tomasello 2002). Of course, this consensus in developmental psychology rests on assumptions about how we can infer concept possession from behavior, and these are in principle contestable and might be falsified in the future. Hence, we can conclude that, if central theoretical assumptions of developmental psychology, as it stands today, are by and large correct, some infants are bothered by a rival relationship before they possess the relevant normative concepts to form entitlement-judgments.

An entitlement theorist could reply that we should broaden our understanding of the content which is entailed by entitlement-judgments (or other entitlement-evaluations). According to this reply, the normative content of entitlement-judgments is at times more primitive than I have characterized it. A proponent of this strategy would emphasize that infants cannot distinguish between behavior that bears negatively on their well-being and behavior that wrongs them. Neither can they think that they have no right to interfere in a rival relationship. In a way, the proponent of ET points out, they feel entitled to everything they want. And they react to a violation of the expectation that their mother attend to them – in a basic sense they detect a norm violation (Hufendiek 2016). I concede that we can adequately characterize an infant’s mind like this. However, this attempt to save ET misses its main point. ET refers to entitlement-judgments in providing an explanation of why we mind about rival relationships, namely that we think of the interaction as something that wrongs us. Saying that infants feel entitled to demand their mother’s attention at any time does not explain why they do not mind their mother listening to a third person yet complain about her active engagement with a third person. ET is also supposed to explain why jealousy is not only an appropriate response to infidelity or threat thereof. Whether Bobby has been (or will be) unfaithful is not decisive for arguments about whether Jean’s jealousy is getting it right. So if we water down the normative content of entitlement-judgments, we must give up some central claims of ET – too central to call it an Entitlement Theory anymore. Thus, developmental evidence speaks against ET.

4. The definitional version of the Entitlement Theory: what difference do entitlement-judgments make?

So far I have argued that infants experience a negative emotion in response to a rival relationship without forming any entitlement-judgments (or other evaluations). A
proponent of the definitional version of ET could grant me all of this but propose that an infant’s emotional response is not jealousy; and neither is an adult’s response when she does not form any entitlement-judgments (or evaluations). This would be the definitional version of ET, ET_D. In this section, I discuss whether we should draw the line between jealousy and other emotions as ET_D proposes. In order to answer this question, we must clarify which criteria should guide us in drawing the line between jealousy and other emotions. These criteria are contingent upon the (theoretical) work the concept is supposed to do. Hence, what conception of jealousy is adequate can differ from theory to theory. That is why ET_D is not easily refuted. In this section, I will first argue that it is fruitful for central philosophical purposes to distinguish jealousy from other emotions by its interpersonal function. Based on this approach, I develop a more inclusive conception of jealousy and compare it to an etiological cognitivist functional version of ET_D. In the next section, I argue against the claim that the more inclusive conception entails a non-cognitivist version of ET_D.

Many proponents of ET_D try to clarify the evaluative content of jealousy in order to assess its moral significance for a good life. This requires asking questions about the conditions for jealousy’s emergence, its development and effects (for detailed accounts see Kristjánsson [2002] and Fredericks [2012]).⁶ We can develop this implicit reference to the interpersonal role of jealousy into a more systematic account and use the interpersonal function of jealousy to describe what unites instances of jealousy and what sets them apart from other emotions. According to such a functionalist approach to emotion classification, jealousy serves its function in virtue of a cluster of characteristic properties (although no single characteristic property is necessary for jealousy). As with emotions in general, these properties include cognitive features (such as suspicion), phenomenal features (a twinge), expressive/behavioral properties and physiological characteristics, such as arousal (for emotions as clusters of characteristic properties, see Welpinghus [2015]). A commitment to a functionalist approach to distinguish jealousy from other emotions does not yet answer the questions that a functional account of jealousy answers; namely which function it has, in virtue of which cluster of characteristic properties it has its function, and thus what the boundaries of the application of the concept are. A functionalist approach to jealousy is compatible both with a functionalist version of ET_D and with a more inclusive account. A functionalist entitlement theorist must show that emotional episodes that are responses to being wronged (or to the threat thereof) serve a particular function because they share a set of characteristic properties which other reactions to rival relationships do not share. I will first present my inclusive alternative and then compare it to a functionalist account of cognitivist ET_D.

The inclusive account emphasizes the commonalities and continuity between infant and adult jealousy. This can be seen when we look at the characteristic behavioral and expressive features of jealousy: infants in the jealousy-evoking conditions of Hart’s and Legerstee’s studies show a behavioral pattern that is suitable to regain the caretaker’s attention. They protest against being left out and seek to (re-)establish contact with the beloved person – call this ‘approach’. Young children seek eye contact (Hart et al. 2004; Legerstee et al. 2010), older children physically approach
caretakers (Draghi-Lorenz 2010). The function of jealousy is to disturb the rival relationship and thereby to (re-)install some degree of exclusivity in the relationship with the beloved person. Approach and protest are highly effective in toddlers and infants (Draghi-Lorenz 2010). The combination of approach and protest is also typical of adults’ jealousy, and it can be quite effective as well. Think of a situation which resembles the condition in Legerstee’s laboratory: a husband observes his wife chatting in a lively manner with a guest the whole evening; both are ignoring him. He will probably approach them and try to join in the conversation, or make his wife interrupt the conversation. Perhaps, and especially if this intervention is not immediately successful, he will become angry or irritated and protest.

Of course, jealous behavior is more flexible than a reflex. People may refrain from expressing it altogether. Yet in these cases, they still experience a felt urge to protest and intervene: this is a behavioral tendency (cf. Frijda [1987] on action tendencies as a motivating part of emotions). Behavioral tendencies belong to the characteristic elements of emotions and they are closely tied to other phenomenal and cognitive features (Welpinghus 2015). Since there are striking similarities between infant and adult jealousy, and since the pattern is familiar from children and adolescents as well, these are good reasons to treat all of these cases as one emotion, jealousy.

Against my account, it might be objected that sometimes jealousy is not effective, and might even result in a further withdrawal of the beloved person (cf. Goldie 2000; Fredericks 2012). First, let me note that an emotion which usually serves a certain function may sometimes fail to serve it. The fact that jealousy does not always contribute to the aim of re-gaining the beloved person’s attention/affection does not speak against the functional account. Rachel Fredericks, however, seems to contest the claim that jealousy ever serves this very function. She argues that jealousy plays quite the opposite role: it undermines relationships. But Fredericks considers idealized caring relationships and idealized agents, while my functional account takes a naturalistic perspective on actual relationships, and therefore her argument does not seriously challenge my account. For Fredericks, a caring relationship entails “that one desire the person’s interests [...] be well served for that person’s own sake, and [...] that one be motivated to think, feel, and act for the sake of that person by furthering or supporting her interests” (2012, 86-87). She argues that a jealous person does not meet these conditions. A jealous person prefers that the rival relationship ends, often contrary to the interest of the person she cares about. I agree with Fredericks on this characteristic of jealousy, but when I ascribe jealousy a role in stabilizing personal relationships, I do not talk of idealized caring relationships. Actual relationships can be in many respects caring, and yet parties in these relationships do not always desire what is in their friend’s interest. It is an empirical question whether jealousy has the function of stabilizing these relationships. A positive answer is compatible with Fredericks’s conceptual argument that jealousy undermines idealized caring relationships.

However, besides the commonalities between infants and adults there are also significant differences. These seem to speak in favor of a cognitivist version of ETD
which employs the functionalist approach sketched above. A proponent of this version of ETD insists that entitlement-judgments make a difference in the interpersonal function of an emotion, grounded in behavior and behavioral tendencies. Adult jealousy, unlike infant protest, involves anger and accusations towards the beloved person. Think of the husband who is jealous because his wife is talking only to the guest: he may become angry and feel the urge to accuse his wife of caring only for the rival for the whole night. Typical jealous behavior and experience might best be explained with reference to entitlement-judgments – if the husband does not think he is entitled to her attention, why would he be angry with his wife?

Two predictions of ETD are worth noting: first, since infants cannot yet form any entitlement-judgments, cognitivist ETD predicts that there is a difference in function and behavioral tendencies between adult jealousy and the precursor of jealousy we observe in infants. We would expect that the fact that adults, unlike infants, accuse a loved one of caring for the guest the whole evening is not just an artifact of different linguistic competences but also reflects different assessments of the situations: only adults feel that they are treated wrongly. Second, cognitivist ETD predicts that an adult person, who is feeling left out, has to think that she is entitled to the attention/affection in question. Otherwise the pattern of characteristic behavioral tendencies, thoughts and feelings is different from that of a jealous person (it does not include the same sort of protest). This prediction is quite speculative; ETD lacks evidence for a correlation between different patterns of behavioral tendencies and entitlement-judgments. Providing this evidence is a challenge for cognitivist ETD.

If we want to reject this cognitivist version of ETD and claim that entitlement-judgments do not make a significant difference for the characteristics and the function of jealousy, the challenge lies elsewhere: we have to explain the differences between adult and infant jealousy. In particular, we have to explain the sort of behavior that points to the presence of entitlement-judgments, such as the disposition to anger and accusations. Here I have to recur to a hypothesis. It is a fairly plausible one, but nevertheless awaits empirical support: we express our protest through anger and accusations because we have learned that anger and accusations are particularly effective ways to protest. After a while, they look to us like a natural expression of our feelings. That is why they regularly occur in the absence of any entitlement-judgments (even though they are not justified in this case). If we exhibit an action tendency towards uttering accusations, we quite often utter them without having evaluated whether they are justified. (This is compatible with the claim that adults sometimes do reflectively choose to utter accusations as a strategy to push through their interests.)

If this hypothesis was true, it would explain the difference between adults and infants without recurring to any entitlement-judgments.

To conclude this section, then, we may allow that a cognitivist entitlement-theorist would have a strong case if she could show that entitlement-judgments make a difference as regards the characteristics and the function of jealousy. But, so far, the evidence for this claim is inconclusive. Even if the entitlement theorist succeeded in supporting her claim, the inclusive account would still be viable and point to commonalities between infant protest, adult protest without entitlement-judgments
and adult protest with entitlement-judgments. Then it would depend on the context which of these concepts of jealousy was apt.

5. **Against ET₀ as a claim about appropriateness conditions**

An entitlement theorist could grant me that jealous protest and approach are often not significantly altered by entitlement-judgments, but still insist that jealousy is only appropriate if the jealous person is not being treated the way she is entitled to be treated. This leads to a non-cognitivist version of ET₀. Maybe the reason why jealousy is only appropriate if the jealous person is not being treated the way she is entitled to be treated lies in the characteristic expressive, behavioral and cognitive features that, as a cluster, are only appropriate if they are reactions to norm violations. This version applies the idea that evaluative properties feature in the correctness conditions of emotions because each emotion, as an *embodied attitude*, entails an evaluative stance. Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni’s (2012) attitudinal theory of emotions is a way to spell out this idea, but my reconstruction is not premised on the way Deonna and Teroni flesh out their account. Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson’s (2000, 2003) fitting attitude account is another strategy to flesh out the basic idea. A judgmentalist might want to claim that each emotion, as an embodied attitude, is a judgment (something neither D’Arms and Jacobson nor Deonna and Teroni agree with).⁹

Think of the husband Jean who accuses his wife Bobby of only caring for the rival the whole evening (or feels the urge to do so). Why are Jean’s feelings inappropriate? The reason is not that Jean is being unfair to Bobby when he confronts her with anger and accusations. The reason is that Jean’s whole embodied attitude only gets it right if he deserves to be treated better. This is why jealousy is also inappropriate if a person does not act out of these tendencies, and refrains from uttering accusations or showing his anger. According to the attitudinal version of ET₀, the same holds for the protest of infants: like anger, protest only gets it right when the other is treating one wrongly or is about to do so. From a first-person perspective these felt action tendencies can be described as “moral grievance and not mere resignation” (Kristjánsson 2016a, 749). Hence, the entitlement theorist could argue, jealousy is only appropriate when one has been (or is about to be) wronged.¹⁰ While adults are able to understand this appropriateness condition, infants are not.

This attitudinal version of ET gets many things right but not everything. By spelling out what it gets right we can see where the intuitive plausibility of ET comes from. Righteous anger and accusations towards the beloved person belong to the repertoire of typical jealous behavior. These episodes are indeed only appropriate if the jealous person has been wronged. Many episodes of jealousy involve such feelings, so the appropriateness conditions ET₀ identifies indeed apply to many episodes of jealousy. This also explains why we often justify our jealousy by pointing out that a loved one owes us some form of exclusivity.

But – and here lies the mistake of the attitudinal version of ET – the fact that righteous anger and accusations are only appropriate as responses to a violation of entitlements does not show that *jealousy* in general is only appropriate under such conditions. To the contrary, mere protest and approach have wider appropriateness
conditions. Protest is only appropriate as a response to being wronged in so far as it includes the righteous stance we usually associate with anger. But protest does not always include this righteous stance. Sometimes it is just an expression of a very basic form of anger. Basic anger occurs when fighting restraints, for instance, and this emotion is not only appropriate if these restraints are illegitimate. Basic anger is not only appropriate as a response to being wronged (Neu [2002], 169, appeals to the same judgment on anger’s appropriateness).

According to the inclusive alternative to ET$_D$, the jealous person evaluates an alleged rival relationship as something negative, the beloved person’s attention as something positive and her turning to the rival as worth protesting. This alternative accounts for the fact that jealousy is usually accompanied by moral grievance and not just resignation. The felt tendency to protest about how I am being treated is a sort of moral grievance from the first-personal point of view: I feel the tendency to appeal to the beloved person to change her focus of attention and affection; I do not just feel sad about it. Hence the argument that jealousy involves moral grievance and not just resignation is not a decisive argument for ET$_D$.

Admittedly, this argument against the attitudinal version of ET$_D$ rests on the intuitive, pre-theoretical judgment that the appropriateness conditions of jealous protest and basic anger are wider than ET allows. While one could object that the argument for these appropriateness conditions is therefore not conclusive, this objection also applies to ET$_D$’s argument for narrow appropriateness conditions for jealousy (and indeed to any attempt to spell out appropriateness conditions for an emotion). The argument for wider and for narrower appropriateness conditions for basic anger and protest are equally vulnerable to this principled objection. The argument for wider appropriateness conditions gains further plausibility when we take a more detailed look at the interpersonal function of jealousy: jealous protest seems to be appropriate — and not just strategically apt, but also as providing an adequate evaluation of the situation — in the process of establishing norms about exclusivity.

6. Jealousy and negotiations

The entitlement theorist is right that jealousy and norms within relationships regarding preferential treatment are intimately linked. According to the more inclusive account of jealousy, jealousy is not only a reaction to a violation of already established norms, but is prior to such norms: jealous approach and protest can serve as moves in negotiations with a beloved person concerning how we ought to treat each other. This suggestion is inspired by a particular psychological perspective on emotions, namely a transactional perspective, according to which emotions are non-verbal moves in interpersonal negotiations (Parkinson, Fischer and Manstead 2005; Griffiths and Scarantino 2009). They are usually self-interested, but are not chosen purposefully to push through one’s interests. The way an emotional episode evolves depends on the (emotional) feedback a person gets from others. I develop the suggestion for mother-infant interactions, but it should be emphasized that the same story could be told for interactions between friends or romantic partners.
We may characterize social norms between small groups of individuals in terms of mutual expectations: roughly, if I expect you to do something and you expect me to expect from you that you do this, we have established a norm between us. Perhaps some mutual expectations already exist between the mothers and infants who have been observed in psychology labs. Children have formed an expectation that their mother will not ignore them in favor of a rival. However, ‘expectation’ is an ambiguous notion. Sometimes it is used in a merely predictive sense. Jean could have a merely predictive expectation that her friends Bobby and Robin will not sleep with each other because they never felt attracted to each other. For a social norm to be in place, the expectation must be both predictive and normative (Rakoczy & Schmidt 2013). If Jean and Bobby form a monogamous couple, Jean expects Bobby to refrain from sleeping with Robin in a sense that is both predictive and normative.

While predictive expectations might be necessary in infant jealousy, normative expectations are not. Consider the relationship between mothers and children: in repeated interactions, the child experiences that its mother interacts with it even if other people are present. On this basis, it forms a predictive expectation that its mother will not exclude it from interactions with others. Now the child may notice that something is different and not to its liking when its mother turns to the rival and ignores it. It may protest against it. This protest is a “don’t!”-signal to the mother. If the mother returns her attention to the child in response to its protest, the child learns that its protest is effective. The “don’t!” is a reason for the mother not to ignore her child. The fact that she properly reacts on this signal shows the child that the mother will not ignore it. At some point, because of these answers, the child notices that its protest is a reason for the mother not to ignore it. After repeated interaction, it forms a normative expectation that its mother will not ignore it in case it communicates its protest. Now imagine that this normative expectation is violated. The reaction is protest again, but this time the protest does not just constitute a “don’t!” Rather, it is protest against the violation of normative expectations: “you signaled to me that you won’t, but now you did!” If verbally expressed, this protest might include accusations. But it can also be expressed non-verbally. If this reaction is accepted by the mother, for example by providing an excuse, she accepts that the child can normatively expect her privileged attention. The norm between them is established, although it is not fixed once and for all. It may be stabilized or weakened though further interactions.

7. Conclusions

The Entitlement Theory of jealousy is surprisingly hard to defend, given how widely it appears to be taken for granted. Here I have developed a more inclusive account, according to which jealousy is not only appropriate as a response to infidelity. This account emphasizes the continuity between episodes of jealousy that involve accusations and mere jealous protest. It has a consequence for the way we should judge a jealous person: from the mere fact that she is jealous, we cannot infer that she holds any entitlement-judgments. This calls for a more accepting attitude towards the jealous person. I take this to be an attractive consequence.
While entitlement-judgments cannot be the only reason why we act negatively to a rival relationship at all (ET_C), the arguments for the more inclusive account do not provide a decisive verdict on the definitional Entitlement Theory. A proponent of ET has several options in defending ET: she could (1) find conclusive evidence that entitlement-judgments make a significant difference in the way we act and feel or (2) attack my argument that jealous protest can be appropriate even when no entitlements have been violated. (3) Finally, she could reject the functionalist approach to emotion individuation altogether. But given that there are several commonalities and maybe a few differences between jealous protest in the presence and in the absence of entitlement-judgments, the proponent of ET_D must provide some strong reasons for ET.

The distinction between a causal version and a definitional version of the Entitlement Theory has a systematic upshot: according to ET_C, entitlement-judgments (or appraisals) are the reason why we mind the rival relationship at all. According to ET_D, it is only appropriate to call a person ‘jealous’ if she somehow evaluates the situation as a violation of her entitlements. This distinction is also applicable to other emotions. A statement of the form ‘emotion E requires the subject to evaluate its object O as P’ is underspecified: does it express that our evaluation of O as P is the reason why we react positively or negatively to O at all? This is usually assumed when the evaluation is ascribed to those who experience E, on the grounds that it renders a negative or positive attitude towards O into a rational attitude. Or does the claim express what distinguishes E from similar emotions? The question matters — as I have shown, some arguments for ET_C are not arguments for ET_D, and vice versa. Hence, the distinctions can and should illuminate more debates on the representational structure of specific emotions.

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References


1 While most entitlement theorists think of jealousy as a three-party-relation, Luke Purshouse (2004) and Rachel Fredericks (2012) argue that jealousy does not always involve a beloved person. J might be jealous at R because R possesses a fancy stamp collection. I side with Farrell’s account and consider this reaction to be a case of envy. Jealousy is different from envy precisely because the jealous person is concerned about their relationship with the beloved person. This terminological choice has some theoretical advantages which I present in Sections 6 to 8.

2 Some scholars, such as Ben-Ze’ev (2010) and Solomon (2007), describe jealousy as a fear of losing something (it is not clear whether we fear the loss of the spouse or the exclusive nature of the relationship). Kristjánsson (2002, 2016a) argues that fear that a rival will take the partner away is not jealousy. I agree with Kristjánsson on this point. Since I want ET$_G$ to be as general as possible, it includes cases where the subject reacts to a rival relationship and fears that because of this relationship, she will be wronged in the future.

3 Arguable exceptions are Peter Goldie (2000), who is not explicit about the question whether jealousy requires any beliefs or judgments, and D’Arms and Jacobson (2003) in their brief remark on jealousy.

4 The distinction is an adaptation of Andrea Scarantino’s (2010) distinction between constitutive and etiological cognitivism. I use ‘judgmentalism’ for the theories Scarantino calls ‘constitutive cognitivism’ because some etiologically cognivist accounts count the judgment among the constitutive elements of emotions (e.g. Barlassina & Newen 2014).

5 Goldie’s treatment of jealousy could also be interpreted as an etiological cognitivist account. Goldie writes that jealousy arises when expectations of exclusivity are violated. He leaves open whether a violation of expectations always includes a judgment (which would amount to etiological cognitivism) or not.

6 As Kristjánsson (2016b) has recently pointed out, philosophers and psychologists want the concept of jealousy to do different theoretical work. While psychologists are concerned with broad-track dimensions of personality, philosophers are concerned with the specific evaluative content and hence appropriateness conditions as well as with moral evaluations of jealousy. I agree with Kristjánsson that we should be careful when using psychologists’ conclusions about infant jealousy for these two philosophical projects. I also agree with him that psychological findings are nonetheless relevant for the philosophical projects because questions regarding the evaluative content as well as a moral assessment of jealousy rely on empirical assumptions. For reasons presented in the following sections, I
disagree with Kristjánsson’s claim that the concept of jealousy suited for an ethical assessment of jealousy should exclude infants’ reactions to rival relationships. My inclusive account leads to an assessment of the conditions under which jealousy is appropriate and is relevant for an assessment of the character of the jealous person. It provides knowledge that is relevant for emotion management as well. Nor do I think that Legerstee, Hart and colleagues are solely interested in broad-track personality traits: they distinguish between protest against mere withdrawal of attention and protest against withdrawal of attention in favor of a rival.

Relatedly, the entitlement-theorist could point out that the jealous person is very much occupied with what she deserves: this is a point emphasized by Kristjánsson (2002), drawing on sibling and workplace rivalry. I am not sure whether concern with desert always amounts to entitlement-judgments. I concede that jealousy is often accompanied by entitlement-judgments in these cases, but I doubt that they are necessary even here: a child who sincerely believes that she is entitled to less parental love than her siblings might experience jealousy of the most painful form.

I thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify the status of this argument.

The accounts by Deonna and Teroni and D’Arms and Jacobson differ considerably when it comes to the relation between emotions and values; the former pair of authors proposes an objectivist account of values, the latter pair a neo-sentimentalist one. This difference is not relevant to the issue at hand.

I present the attitudinal version of ET as a definitional version. An attitudinal variant of ET would include this attitudinal variant of ET and in addition the claim that a person is jealous whenever she reacts aversely to an (alleged) rival relationship.