ENVY

A Theory of Social Behaviour

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Envy as Seen by the Social Sciences

THE MUTUAL AND SPONTANEOUS supervision exercised by human beings over each other—in other words, social control—owes its effectiveness to the envy latent in all of us. If we were quite incapable of envy and, more important, if we were also convinced that our behaviour would not be envied by anyone, that mutual, tentative exploration of the threshold of social tolerance—a constant social process upon which the predictability of social life depends—would never occur.

Without envy there could be no social group of any size. The other-directed process comprised in this concept consists of emotional, probably also endocrine processes which influence our perceptions as well as our rationalized cognitive acts. Envy is as much a constituent of social existence as it is generally concealed, repressed and proscribed. Similar denials and repressions in respect of an even far more basic kind of motivational system, the sexual, have been investigated and described in detail since the beginning of the twentieth century.

It is not uncommon for a behavioural factor essential to our existence to be passed over in silence for a long time. The threat of envy, arising between human beings at almost any time through any deviation from the standard or norm, not only has this itself necessary function; it also constantly sets the limit of variability in the patterns of social behaviour and social organizations.

The awareness, conscious or subconscious, of the often only latent or potential envy of others, has the same kind of effect as a gravitational field: our socially relevant, or at least socially visible, behaviour is kept within certain limits and is unable to deviate too far from the centre of consensus. In so far as virtually all members of a group or society are endowed with this inhibition, each keeps the other in check and is prevented from displaying arbitrary innovations in his own behaviour.

This view of the problem would seem to me more enlightening than the usual one, according to which we are at all times so intent on gaining the approval and acceptance of others that we conform. It would be more realistic not to regard this as the primary motive. Often enough we conform whether or not the sympathy of the rest is, or should be, of especial importance to us: we fear what they might do—or not do—if we were to arouse their envy of our courage to deviate from the norm.

Individual and group

The fact that modern social psychology always substitutes the motive of ‘acceptance’ or ‘wanting to be popular’ for the obviously more apt motive of the avoidance of envy, is in itself a symptom of a process of repression.

Sociologists, especially American sociologists, have investigated in many variations the repeatedly observable fact of conformity. The members of a group, whether as sub-group or as individuals, exact from every other member, and especially from the newcomer, certain kinds of conformity. ‘They’ want ‘adaptation’ and ‘adjustment.’ They punish non-conformity. These studies, however, never ask whence this tendency comes, and why conformity of behaviour is demanded of the individual even in fields having little or nothing to do with the real functions of the group. What is particularly striking and unexplained here are those cases in which a hold is gained over some members by others—usually those who make themselves out to be spokesmen or in some way specially qualified representatives of the group—where no one personally feels that the recommended norm is either pleasant, practical or rewarding. Indeed, the more unpleasant in practice, the more irrational and awkward the norm to which members have to adhere, for whatever reason (perhaps because the controlling body simply wants it that way), the more fiercely do they watch each other for any laxity or failure.

Could it be that in culture and society, man sees himself, often perhaps unconsciously, as so much of an individual that any kind of group membership is inherently repugnant to him? He feels himself robbed of an asset—his very individuality. He has to be a member of a group so as to earn his living, to acquire a certain education etc., but he feels himself somehow diminished by belonging to a group, even if he...
prefers that particular group to other possible ones. He can then most easily compensate for his partial loss of individuality occasioned by membership of the group, or mitigate the pain of that loss, by taking an active part in depriving other members of their individuality.

It is malicious glee in the torment of the newcomer who has yet to adapt himself to the group, *Schadenfreude* in the sanctions applied to a non-conforming member, that automatically makes of every one of its members a watch-dog and a whipper-in. The kind of group is immaterial: it could be a parliamentary political party, a school class, a boarding school, a platoon of recruits, a group of office workers, a group of industrial workers, an age group in a primitive society, prisoners, or simply a sibling group within a family.

Despite some influential social theories, it may be that man experiences his membership of a group not as fulfilment but as diminution. Thus membership of the group would be for man a compromise with his true being, not the culmination of his existence but its curtailment. This is a necessary experience for nearly everyone if he is to acquire certain values such as economic security, the acceptance of his children into society, etc. But even in the most 'socially minded' man there is a residue of stubborn, proud individualism, the core of his existence as a human being which fills him with *Schadenfreude* when he is able to help impose upon others the same loss of individuality that he himself has painfully experienced.

**Power and conformity**

From this we derive a hypothesis of a process of social control that can be decisive in the establishment of a new power structure. This book is not primarily concerned with forms of domination, power and force; yet the sociology of power and domination should not overlook the factor of envy, since it is always the wish of those who subject themselves to power that others, still able to evade that power, should also subordinate themselves and conform to it. Phenomena such as the totalitarian state and modern dictatorship cannot be fully understood if the social relations between those who have, and those who have not yet conformed, are overlooked. Let us take a typical case:

A new centre of power has come into being. It may be merely a routine change, it may be usurpation or a party acceding to power by legitimate or illegitimate means, or again it may be a new departmental manager in a plant or officer in a military unit. A previously existing vacuum or balance of power has been altered; a new centre of power, whether vested in a group or an individual, exists, and it seeks to expand and to establish itself by bringing under its domination those groups and persons who have not yet submitted to it. At this stage some individuals or groups will already have lined up behind this new power, whether out of greed, cowardice, stupidity or genuine enthusiasm. But these men who have already submitted to the new power are not satisfied with conforming, themselves and almost invariably develop intense feelings of hostility towards those who continue to stand aside sceptically appraising the new power and considering whether to remain aloof.

This behaviour, if judged according to an independent system of values, may be altogether laudable. But to the system in question it may very well seem dilatory and subversive, as in Herman Wouk's novel *The Caine Mutiny* some of the officers and crew of a small warship dislike the new captain from the start, and sabotage his command. Tension, usually originating with the conformists, then arises between those who conform and those who do not. Why is this?

Anyone who has already adapted himself against his will, whether out of cowardice or for the sake of comfort, begrudges others their courage, the freedom they still enjoy. Anyone who has already committed himself to the new leaders, from calculation or from real enthusiasm, sees both himself and his chosen power group endangered by those who obviously prefer, and see it as politically feasible, to keep their distance. Those at the periphery of the power centre, though in no way entitled to wield authority, now begin to exert pressure on other people in the course of daily social life, within the framework of local groups and among business or neighbourhood connections, with the object of getting them to conform as well.

There is a variety of familiar social situations in which a similar ambivalence is apparent. A small professional group, such as a university department, a business or a small military unit, naturally desires, as a group, to gain the respect, recognition and support of other groups and institutions. Therefore every mark of distinction and every special achievement of every member of the group is of intrinsic interest to
every other member. And if the group is lucky enough to be given, or is able to choose, as its head someone who is sufficiently sure of his own value, or at least willing to combine it for the sake of his leading role with the achievement of his whole group, he is likely, as primus inter pares, to be able to do everything possible to provide every member of the group with ample opportunity for development. Observation shows, however, that even under such ideal conditions individual members are generally careful, if not anxious, to remain within certain limits: nobody wants to stand out too much, at least not if his potential achievement is unlikely to be compensated for within a short time by additional prestige or something similar accruing to the majority. At the same time everyone who sees and has a chance of rapid advancement knows that a success, at present open only to him, would also contribute to the prestige of the group as a whole, and that no one would dare to criticize him officially and in public. But secretly he fears the many small acts of sabotage which might be practised, sometimes almost unconsciously, by his fellow workers or colleagues who constantly compare themselves with him—because of their envy at his having achieved, or succeeded in, something ahead of them.

Envy in the sociology of conflict

The German sociologist Dahrendorf chooses the word ‘envy’ when explaining why the American sociologist C. Wright Mills, so prominent as a writer, was mercilessly branded a heretic even by those who shared his political opinions: ‘But much more can be read between the lines. They betray the intense mixture of anger, hatred and envy characteristic of the attitude of the profession towards its successful outsiders.’

But when dealing with a fundamental theory of social conflict, Dahrendorf stops one step short of the concept of envy. Georg Simmel’s sociology of conflict contains a detailed and fascinatingly perceptive phenomenology of envy; shortly after him, Max Scheler also made a thorough study of the problem. But Dahrendorf writes almost forty pages about this problem in his essay on social conflict without once mentioning the word ‘envy.’

1 R. Dahrendorf, Die angewandte Aufklärung. Gesellschaft und Soziologie in Amerika, Munich, 1963, p. 188.

In the first place the very word or concept ‘conflict’ partly conceals the phenomenon of envy. If I seek to define all hostility between men as conflict, I presuppose a concrete relationship, a mutual awareness, a preying on one another, etc. But the envious man can, in fact, sabotage the object of his envy when the latter has no idea of his existence, and when true conflict exists only in the envious man’s imagination and perhaps not even there. Conflict may, of course, sound more decorous, more democratic or more acceptable to our socially sensitive ears than does the old, starkly unequivocal word ‘envy.’ If I see two men (or groups) engaged in conflict, I have no need to ascertain which is the inferior. But if I speak of envy I must assume that one of the two opponents realizes the fact of his inferiority in situation, education, possessions or reputation.

In Dahrendorf and others envy vanishes from sight, because ‘conflict situations’ in which the one party’s motivation arises unmistakably from his inferior resources are simply subsumed under much more abstract concepts, in which the concept of envy is barely discernible to most people. For example:

All other inequalities of rank which may appear as the immediate structural point of departure or as the object of conflict—grades of prestige and income, unequal distribution of property, education etc.—are only emanations and special forms of the very generalized inequality in the distribution of legitimate power.

I would also question whether the term ‘conflict’ is at all suitable in sentences such as the following:

The inequality of rank of one party in general social conflict can mean a great many things. In this case what is meant may be inequality of income or of prestige: conflict between those on a higher or significantly lower wage scale; conflict between the highly regarded technicians in the printing trade and the lowlier ones in mining . . .

Between income groups and professional groups of this kind there cannot be any real conflict; at the most it may arise when envy is generated between unequally paid workers within the same industry, as

happened with the British engine-drivers who went on strike because the lower-ranking railway workers' wage was too close to their own. For the 'frictions' referred to above, for the mutual jostling between groups that can in fact take place only in the minds of individual members, the only correct word is 'envy.'

It may partly be the sociologists' predilection for observable processes which has led them to substitute the phenomenon and concept of conflict for that of envy. Envy is a silent, secretive process and not always verifiable. Conflict is overt behaviour and social action. Between the two, and partaking both of envy and of conflict, one might conceivably place tension. The preoccupation with conflict and conflict situations has led, however, to the neglect of numerous aspects of human and social relations which are explicable in terms of envy but not in terms of conflict. For envying can take place between the envier and the person reacting to envy without the least sign of conflict.

Of course envy in individuals and in groups may lead to behaviour and to actions which could rightly be subsumed under the sociology of conflict. But conflict or aggression should not, as unfortunately happens so often, be confused with envy, which makes researchers eventually pay more attention to conflict than to the primary phenomenon.

The sociology of conflict overlooks the fact that between the envious and the envied man no real possibility for conflict need exist. In contrast to jealousy, what is often particularly irritating to the envious man, and conducive to greater envy, is his inability to provoke open conflict with the object of his envy.

**Conflict without envy**

It is possible, though rarely so, for true conflict to arise between individuals and between groups which has nothing or very little to do with envy. (Where priorities are concerned, envy is always likely to be present.) If, for example, two opponents confront each other in a conflict situation, each holding the other in high esteem but each believing he must adhere to a different rule, envy would not enter into it.

Both fiction and history contain instances of close friends, or at any rate characters neither of whom could find anything to envy in the other, becoming firm opponents in an impending conflict because one obeys a universal moral law, the other a more limited, specific law. The conviction that I, from direct and observed experience, am following what I adjudge to be the right law, the proper standard, need not cause me to envy my opponent and need not arouse his envy against me. This could only happen after the conclusion or settlement of the conflict, when the loser was compelled to realize that for some reason he had obeyed the wrong law (wrong not only in pragmatic terms but revealed as false in the light of reappraisal). The consequence may then be intense anger, resentment, envy, against the victor: Why wasn't I clever or experienced enough to see at once that my choice of values was objectively the wrong one?

But so long as both opponents in the conflict situation believe unhesitatingly and firmly in the absolute, or at any rate overwhelming, righteousness of the accepted law upon which they take their stand, the entire conflict can be played out in circumstances that are completely devoid of envy.

And even when both opponents voluntarily recognize the same rules in a contest, or in business competition, they can remain untouched by any feeling of envy while the conflict is still in progress, as long as neither side knows who is going to win.

**Sociological ambivalence**

In 1965 an American sociologist, Robert K. Merton, published an essay in which he grappled laboriously with new concepts, on the subject of 'sociological ambivalence,' in which problems of envy were patently involved but were left untouched. Merton speaks of the ambivalence produced by the social structure between teacher and pupil when the pupil who has finished his education is unable to find a position comparable to that of the master. Later Merton investigates the 'hostile feelings' which society appears to harbour towards self-employed professionals, despite their manifest contributions to the general welfare. Here again he introduces the concept of ambivalence, coined by Eugen Bleuler in 1910, and shies away from the much simpler primary notion of envy.

What is even more striking is the fact that when, in present-day European investigations as to why working-class parents are reluctant to send their children to grammar school, envy and the Schadenfreude of neighbours, mentioned in so many words in the answers to the questions, are disguised by the sociologists with elegant flourishes like ‘affective distance’ or ‘traditionalism buttressed by social sanction’: ‘Our neighbours think we’re too big for our boots and are just waiting for things to go wrong.’ ‘My buddy said, “Don’t go and get ideas into your head.”’ ‘They think we’re stuck up, and are just waiting for him to drop out.’ ‘They say, “Look at the show-off.”’

Perhaps contemporary sociology is so ready to overlook the phenomenon of envy, a sensation which arises primarily in the aggressor, because it looks predominantly for interaction, for social interrelation. Anyone who concerns himself principally with social contacts and interaction is all too likely to neglect the behaviour of those who keep aloof and regard with envy and resentment the very people with whom they are not in social contact. But again, in applauding healthy and regular social interaction, we must not forget that this may occur between persons one of whom is intensely envious of the other.

As various criminal cases show, envy may be a very well-concealed and well-disguised form of behaviour whose victim discovers it in friend, servant, colleague, nurse or relative only when it is already too late. Shakespeare depicted a character of this kind in Iago. As a rule, envy is partly the result of social proximity, although this may be replaced by memory or imagination. The man who is marooned on an island, in the depths of the country or in prison imagines what he is missing, and what others—whether he knows them or not—are at that moment enjoying; he envies them without any social contact. One has only to recall the Count of Monte Cristo.

Today the social scientist is constantly being asked for a formula for the ideal society. But if envy is taken to be one of the chief causes of social friction, conflict, sabotage (minor and major) and various forms of crime, it is very difficult to determine whether it will best be diminished or relatively contained in a society having a maximum or a minimum of points of social contact.

**Georg Simmel on envy**

In Chapter 4 of his *Sociology*, which is concerned with conflict, Georg Simmel investigates the phenomenon of envy, which he sees as contained within the concepts of hatred, jealousy and ill-will. Like so many authors, Simmel is immediately confronted by terminological ambiguity:

> Finally, there is a fact, apparently of merely individual importance, yet in reality very significant sociologically, which may link extreme violence of antagonistic excitement, to close proximity: jealousy. Popular usage is not unequivocal in regard to this term, often failing to distinguish it from envy.

As we have already seen, Simmel here underrates the precision of the German language (as also of English and French). The big dictionaries, already available in his day, could have given him a clue. Simmel continues:

> Both affects are undoubtedly of the greatest importance in the formation of human relations. In both, an asset is involved whose attainment or preservation is impeded by a third party, either truly or symbolically. Where attainment is concerned, we should speak of envy, and where preservation, rather of jealousy; in this the semantic differentiation of the words is in itself, of course, quite meaningless and of importance only for the distinction of the psycho-sociological processes.

Here I would not agree with Simmel unconditionally: the use of the words is not incidental, as we have already shown in Chapter 2. Proverbial lore, as well as the literature of different cultures, has, over the course of centuries, ranged so much precise knowledge under the distinct concepts ‘jealousy’ and ‘envy’ that we should retain the existing terminology. On the whole Simmel, too, adheres to tradition:

> It is peculiar to the man described as jealous that the subject believes he has a rightful claim to possession, whereas envy is concerned not with the

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right to, but simply with the desirability of, what is denied; it is also a matter of indifference whether the asset is denied him because a third party owns it, or whether even its loss or renunciation by the latter would fail to procure it for him.  

Jealousy or envy?

Simmel’s definition needs greater precision: the expression ‘jealousy’ should be restricted to an asset upon which there is a legitimate claim, even if the jealous man is subjectively mistaken about his possible loss of that asset. A child in a family undoubtedly has a true a priori claim to its parents’ kindness, help and love, yet it may be tormented by jealousy of its siblings if it only believes it isn’t getting enough. Conversely, the husband whose wife is estranged from him has a right to claim her affections even though, seen objectively, her alienation is genuine. Simmel’s final observation is wholly correct, namely, that the envious man, in certain circumstances, does not even want to have the coveted asset, nor could he enjoy it, but would find it unbearable that another should do so. He becomes ill with annoyance over someone else’s private yacht although he has never wished to board a ship in his life.

Simmel clarifies this further:

Jealousy ... is determined in its inner direction and tone by the fact that a possession is withheld from us because it is held by another, and that were this to cease, it would at once become ours: the feelings of the envious man turn rather upon the possession, those of the jealous man upon the possessor. It is possible to envy a man’s fame without oneself having any pretensions to fame; but one is jealous of him if one believes that one is equally or more deserving of it. What embitters and corrodes the jealous man is a kind of emotional fiction—however unjustified and senseless—that the other has, so to speak, taken the fame away from him.

To continue with the example of fame, there is a further distinction to be made: if there is only one foremost literary prize and one poet has missed getting it, he may be jealous of the prize-winner; but the chemist who, contrary to his expectations, has not received the Nobel Prize for his discovery can only envy his colleague the physicist who does get it. In other words, in the case of jealousy there must be real competition, but as soon as parallel attainment of the coveted asset is or could have been factually possible, envy alone is involved.

Finally, Simmel says of jealousy that it is ‘a feeling so specific in degree and kind that, having arisen as the result of some exceptional emotional combination, it aggravates the situation which gave rise to it.’ This observation is very important. But it is also true of envy. For the envious man, too, by use of his imagination will often aggravate a real situation to such an extent that he never lacks cause for envy.

Begrudging others their assets

Simmel arrives at an interesting clarification of terms, distinguishing him from nearly all other writers on the subject, in his description of ill-will, of begrudging, which have always been central aspects of envy.

Approximately halfway between the clearly defined phenomena of envy and jealousy there is a third, belonging to the same scale, which might be termed begrudging: the envious desire for an object, not because it is of itself especially desirable to the subject, but only because others possess it. This emotional reaction develops two extreme forms which mutate into the negation of the subject’s own possessions. On the one hand there is the passionate form of begrudging which prefers to renounce the object itself, would indeed rather see it destroyed than allow another to have it; on the other, there is complete personal indifference or aversion to the object, and yet utter horror at the thought that someone else possesses it. Such forms of begrudging permeate human relations in every degree and variation. That great problematical area where human relations to things turn into cause and effect of their personal interrelations is largely covered by this type of affect.

These few sentences of Simmel’s contain an observation of great importance. He does not give specific examples, yet what he has indi-
cated here is the psycho-social dynamic, the source of numerous socially or culturally derived regulations usually known as 'sumptuary laws.'

Sociology of sexual jealousy

The American sociologist Kingsley Davis analyses jealousy and sexual possession as examples for his functional theory of society. He thinks it may seem surprising that an individual emotion, something purely psychological, might contribute to an understanding of culture and social organization, yet he attributes to jealousy a function not only in the individual's emotional state, but also in his immediate linkage to social organization:

... the manifestations of jealousy are determined by the normative and institutional structure of the given society. This structure defines the situations in which jealousy shows itself and regulates the form of its expression. It follows that unless jealous behaviour is observed in different cultures, unless a comparative point of view is adopted, it cannot be intelligently comprehended as a human phenomenon.9

The same applies to envy. Curiously enough, Davis concerns himself with it only incidentally, seeing it, in contrast to jealousy, not as the attitude of a possessor but as that of an observer or potential rival who would like to have what another has without envisaging any possibility of getting it away from him. Envy, he says, cannot assert itself simultaneously with jealousy in the same person, since the latter emotion presupposes a certain right. Other authors, as we have seen, believe in the possibility of a blend of jealousy and envy, each intensifying the other. Davis sees in envy an inevitable phenomenon of all social life. Anyone who has not got everything that he has been led to regard as desirable will be envious of others. 'But since envy usually goes contrary to the established distribution of this world's valuables, it is frowned upon by the group as a whole.'10

Davis shows in detail how wrong those writers were who have seen in sexual jealousy the expression of a completely physical state of affairs.

phenomenon of envy. A single reference to sibling jealousy cites a psychiatric essay of 1951, six lines of which are quoted, informing us that sibling jealousy observed by a mother in her own children may reactivate her own childhood experiences.\textsuperscript{12}

The most productive of the entries in the index are those under aggression and social conflict. Here, perhaps, we shall find something about envy, the more so since the stock answer of American researchers, when asked about envy, is nearly always that this represents a minor variant of the phenomenon of aggression.

According to this compendium, the modern behavioural sciences tell us about aggression: severely punished children tend to become aggressive men. Next comes the hypothesis, against which the authors have placed a large question mark, that societies like Germany, in which children have a disciplined upbringing, tend in consequence to have authoritarian political systems.\textsuperscript{13}

On page 258 we are informed, in a paltry couple of lines, that there is apparently something called ‘need aggression,’ the need for aggressive behaviour, which may assume such forms as murder or sadism. Envy is not mentioned once. On pages 267–70 the frustration theory, according to which the cause of aggression is not the attacker but the man who thwarts his drives, is described in some detail. Experimental proof is offered: In a summer camp for boys half of them were deliberately deprived, or given too little of something. The disappointed boys vented their displeasure on an ethnic minority—meaning that after the deprivation experiment they answered a questionnaire on Japanese and Mexicans more unfavourably than before the experiment.

The classic aggression-frustration hypothesis put forward by John Dollard (and others) in 1939 states that the occurrence of aggression always presupposes the existence of frustration, that is, the thwarting of aspiration. Berelson and Steiner comment on this with a question mark. But whatever may be thought of this hypothesis it does seem a little strange that not even at this point is envy so much as considered.

The few remaining allusions to aggression refer chiefly to behaviour discriminating against ethnic minorities. In various works it is claimed


\textsuperscript{12} Op. cit., p. 72.

\textsuperscript{13} Op. cit., pp. 72, 81, 82.
that economically underprivileged people have a tendency towards discrimination. This observation could, of course, be extended to include envy, but it is not.

Even the inventory's relatively numerous passages on conflict, social conflict and social class, however, entirely fail to mention the envy-motive. Other expressions such as 'revolution,' 'justice,' and 'equality,' where a discussion of our problem might conceivably have been expected, are simply not listed.

Although Berelson and Steiner found themselves greatly restricted by the meagre fare provided by a social science, dependent as it is on evidence drawn chiefly from rats, cats and pigeons, these authors nevertheless do not hesitate now and then to draw upon animal experiments for analogies and comparisons which might illuminate everyday situations in human existence. One such example shows once more how people stop just short of discussing the motive of envy-avoidance.

First there is an account of animal experiments concerned with 'approach-avoidance conflict,' where the issue is as follows: Where a goal possesses both pleasurable and frightening aspects, thus being at once attractive and potentially painful, there is a point on the way to the goal at which the organism becomes irresolute, and begins to waver; if it then proceeds further towards the goal, it reaches a point just short of it where avoidance behaviour becomes more marked. This is called 'approach-avoidance.'

In human existence, according to Berelson and Steiner, this can mean, for example, that a man will approach an attractive but dangerous sport in which, at the last moment, he will not engage. Or else someone would like to buy a luxury article, approaches it repeatedly, visits the shop window more and more frequently, takes hold of the door handle, even goes into the shop, but at the last moment avoids making the purchase. Why? 'Perhaps because the pain or guilt associated with the expenditure rises more sharply as the point of commitment is approached than does the attractiveness of the item.'

If it were realized precisely what part envy and envy-avoidance play in purchases of this kind, one might assume, from this example of Berelson's and Steiner's interpretive method, that it would have been entirely appropriate within the framework of their book to describe obvious forms of behaviour related to envy, hypothetical and incapable of proof though they might be. But nowhere does this occur in all the seven hundred pages of an inventory dated 1964 that purports to convey our present state of knowledge about man, especially man in his social context. Were an imaginary inhabitant of another planet to seek information from this book about Homo sapiens, the idea would never occur to him that anything like envy existed on this planet.

Theories of hostility

Though exponents of modern social sciences (sociology, social psychology, cultural anthropology) have concerned themselves exhaustively with the phenomenon of hostility, they have managed to write whole chapters about this subject, even in recent works, without ever asking what it is that underlies hostility.

Neil J. Smelser, a sociologist, in 1962 put forward a comprehensive theory of collective behaviour, by which he means group behaviour such as panic, mob action, riot, fanatical sects, etc. There is a detailed discussion of hostility, with references to literature on the subject, but not a single mention of such phenomena as envy, resentment and malevolence; 'hostility' is the only term. Even when he is investigating 'hostile belief' and 'hostile outbursts,' the envy which can only too easily be shown to underlie it never comes into view. It is vain to look in Smelser's index for envy, resentment, jealousy, egalitarianism or the sense of justice. Perhaps unconsciously, he carefully evades every phenomenon and every concept that could lead him even indirectly towards anything to do with these aspects of human nature. We find little here even about aggression, which, as we have seen elsewhere, is a favourite form of evasion for those refusing to face the fact of envy.

In Smelser's analysis of 'hostility' we do in fact discover why modern social science is so apt to overlook envy. There is repeated discussion of theories of hostile behaviour according to which such behaviour is the consequence of a perceived threat to a person's real economic, sexual, professional or social position. The authors admit, of course, that the possessor of these hostile feelings incorrectly assesses, exaggerates or

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actually invents the ostensible threat (American literature is concerned chiefly with hostility towards minorities such as Negroes and Jews, the subject feeling threatened in his own sphere by minority claims, power, etc.). But the point of departure is invariably that hostility is aroused when the subject imagines a real threat to his own real position.\(^{16}\)

The guilt of the attacked

According to this view of the hostile man, ill-feeling can never really arise if the subject does not see himself in any way effectively threatened by the object of hostility. It is a view that obliterates the age-old familiar and precisely formulated phenomenon of envy and envious hatred, which can, indeed, exist when the object of envy does not or cannot in any way constitute a threat to the envious man. It is far more true that men in all cultures feel threatened primarily by the envious man. Modern social science thus entirely reverses the situation: the primary threat issues from the person who is potentially enviable. But the social scientist ignores that envy. Hostility thus becomes a secondary phenomenon that will disappear as soon as all groups in a society are placed in a situation where everyone is equally secure and free from threat.

It is, of course, right to suppose that a white lower class which fears unemployment is specially prejudiced against its Negro equivalent in the same country, or that a middle class with diminishing wealth and prestige can easily be stirred up against a prominent well-to-do Jewish minority in its midst. But the hope, implicit or explicit, that all substantial hostilities will disappear as soon as a group or individual in a society ceases to worry about livelihood or position, is just as unrealistic and unfounded as the rather more extreme theory that there would be no more envy or resentment in a truly egalitarian society.

It is immediately apparent that these two assumptions about a peaceable society have different models in view. One can imagine a very stable society in which everyone had an absolutely assured and adequate place but in which at the same time there were a distinct hierarchy, marked social stratification and considerable inequalities. Those sociologists who believe that only the threatened man is hostile would see such a society of total social security as free of hostile feelings. But to sociologists who recognize the existence of phenomena such as envy and resentment that society would still be prone to disturbance as a result of provocative inequality. Only a permanently equal society would offer freedom from envy and hence from aggression—a state of mutual friendship between its members.

As we have been able to show repeatedly in this book from many different angles and cultural viewpoints, neither of these utopian societies, even if they were to approach their ideal, would be able to turn human beings into contented and peaceful sheep, as ‘progressive’ social science promises.

Once the process of envying has begun, the envious man so distorts the reality he experiences, in his imagination if not actually in the act of perception, that he never lacks reason for envy. The same applies to the man who feels insecure.

Everyone in his lifetime must have had an experience such as the following: Against the advice of some onlooker, one sets to work on something difficult, carpentry, say, which one insists on doing in one’s own way. Suddenly the malice of inanimate objects asserts itself. Things begin to go wrong. How often do we then exclaim: ‘You wanted that to happen!’ Yet we know perfectly well that the annoyance of our companion whose advice has been spurned cannot possibly affect the natural course of things. For primitive man there is never any question of the other man’s guilt in such a case: he is always convinced of it. But this archaic magical way of interpreting our environment, in seeing our neighbour’s evil eye on it, as it were, has not been so completely discarded by modern man that in most of us it cannot recur. It still persists in rural areas, and subliminally. In practical terms this means that if there ever were a society in which the individual or every group was guaranteed absolute economic security, and hence where no one could really threaten or objectively harm another, there would still remain plenty of unpleasant personal and group experiences which would still unerringly be attributed to other people’s meiavolence.

Why a society of unenvious equals?

The blind spot in regard to the problem of envy in the social science of this century, and particularly in ‘human behavioural science’ in the United States, cannot be fortuitous. It can be plainly shown how authors

shy away from the concept or phenomenon of envy, how they veil it in euphemism, how, if they are very brave, they mention it briefly as a peculiar hypothesis, to discard it at once with an expression of pitying scorn.

Many different observers, including some of the most progressive sociologists, have noted, often with approval, the resentment and sense of defiance to be found in the personality of many modern social scientists (Ruth Benedict, M. Tumin, C. Wright Mills, George Simpson). In American sociology and anthropology it is almost proverbial that the majority of professionals are men who are discontented with their place in society and culture, former members of some kind of underprivileged group or class—men, in short, rebelling against their own society. The proof is easy to find and the sources are so numerous that they can hardly be questioned. See, for instance, Edward Shils:

Professor [C. Wright] Mills implies that sociology has more to gain from a hostile attitude toward the existing order than from uncritical incorporation into it. It is true that, in taking this position, he stands in a distinguished tradition. Nonetheless, neither his viewpoint nor its opposite is correct. Neither the unqualified hatred of the outsider nor the uncritical affirmation of the patriot opens the path to truth about society. 17

The common denominator for this discontent, this unrest, is the egalitarian impulse; most of the problems experienced or imagined by such minds would theoretically be solved in a society of absolute equals. Hence the constant and strangely tenacious preoccupation of Anglo-Saxon social science with models and programmes for a society of absolute equals. The utopian desire for an egalitarian society cannot, however, have sprung from any other motive than that of an inability to come to terms with one's own envy, and/or with the supposed envy of one's less well-off fellow men. It must be obvious how such a man, even if only prompted by his unconscious, would carefully evade the phenomenon of envy or at least try to belittle it.

It is true that certain American sociologists have repeatedly encountered the problem of envy and have actually named it—Kingsley Davis, for example, in his textbook of sociology, or Arnold W. Green. But what is significant is that the greater the currency of other hypotheses, such as the frustration theory, the more consistent is the neglect of every approach, even in contemporary specialist literature, to a recognition of envy. Practically never has envy as an hypothesis been raised in order to be refuted or subjected to criticism; instead, it has been ignored, as too embarrassing. Envy touched too painfully on something personal which it was preferable to keep buried. This silence within the wider professional fraternity of behavioural scientists and psychologists about a central problem of man's social existence has had the result, however, of making their younger colleagues, who themselves might have had no grounds for repressing the phenomenon, less than fully perceptive of its existence. 18

17 Resentment towards one's own society as the sociologist's necessary point of departure is supported by, for example, the New York sociologist George Simpson (A Sociologist Abroad, The Hague, 1959, p. 168). C. Wright Mills maintains the same thing. For this he was criticized by Edward Shils ("Professor Mills on the Calling of Sociology," World Politics, Vol. 13, July 1961, p. 608). The cultural anthropologist Julian H. Steward, commenting on Ruth Benedict as revealed in her writings, published posthumously by Margaret Mead, in his review (Science, Vol. 129, February 6, 1959, pp. 322 f.), said: "As a scholarly profession, anthropology has drawn more than its share of non-conformists who are comforted by its findings that each culture has its own values and standards of behaviour and that the demands of our own society are no more right in an absolute sense than those of any other. Ruth Benedict, however, seemed to be an exception. Her outward calm, mild demeanour, and Mona Lisa smile seemed to indicate a good adjustment to her world. The error of this inference is startlingly disclosed by the materials published for the first time in Dr. Mead's book. These materials reveal a tortured, non-conformist individual who finally found a creative outlet, and we hope relief, in anthropology. . . ."

"Ruth Benedict's diaries and an unfinished autobiographical sketch, "The Story of My Life . . .," expose with surprising candour the black depressions and self-doubts that made her early life almost insupportable. These feelings, however, were so carefully concealed that Ruth Benedict was in effect two persons, a private self and a social self. The double pattern began in her earliest childhood, when Ruth Benedict shut part of herself off from her friends and family and lived in a secret world of imagination. . . ."

The inner torments and introspective search for an answer to life continued well into adulthood. Ruth Benedict tried teaching and embraced social causes to no avail. In large measure, she saw her difficulty as a consequence of being a woman in our own culture."

A disinclination to concern oneself with envy may also be connected with the following: Almost without exception all research concerning man has, when faced by envy, seen it as a serious disease. The latent ubiquity of this ailment is known, but it is also known that no society could exist in which envy was raised to the status of a normative virtue. Invariably it is emphasized that envy, once having taken root, is incurable, although it is not part of our normal endowment. Even superstition, the primitive 'anthropology' of simple societies, sees envy as a disease, the envious man as dangerously sick—a cancer from which the individual and the group must be protected—but never as a normal case of human behaviour and endeavour. Nowhere, with very few exceptions, do we find the belief that society must adapt itself to the envious man, but always that it must seek to protect itself against him. 

The extent of envy-avoidance in a population can also be ascertained from opinion polls. In the summer of 1966 the Institut für Demoskopie at my request repeated a question which had been put to the West German people some ten years before. The tendency to avoid envy had actually risen slightly. Of those asked, 53 per cent thought it sensible not to show how well one had got on. Among civil servants the figure rose to 63 per cent. The breakdown of the answers according to religion, refugee or native citizen, region, small or medium-sized town, shows only insignificant differences. West Berlin alone is noticeable for having less tendency to understatement.

Murder from envy

As we have already observed, one function of private property is to protect people against the envy and aggression of the physically less well endowed. For a society in which everyone owned an equal amount of property, or where property was shared out by the state, would not be an idyll devoid of envy but a hell in which no one could feel physically secure. Even in present society there are frequent cases of crimes whose motive is obviously envy of some physical superiority.

In 1963, after a basketball game in New York City, a drab-looking day labourer drove his car at the good-looking hero who had won the game and who was standing on the pavement with his parents and friends. The murderer, who had no interest whatever in the losing team, declared that he just could not stand seeing the glamour of that handsome athlete. 

Arson prompted by envy of more gifted fellow students may end in murder, as a story which appeared in the New York Times on June 1, 1967, strongly suggests. It may even happen at an elite university, with a very high academic standard, should it dare to offer an exceptional opportunity to the favoured few. During 1967 buildings housing Cornell University students were the victims of three fires, all very similar. In the worst fire, on April 5, eight students and a professor died in the blaze. On May 23 a second fire broke out in a building housing students, and a third occurred on May 31 in a building occupied by some of the students evacuated from the house burned on April 5. All three fires involved

Envy as the Subject of Philosophy

Until about thirty years ago philosophers quite often dealt with the problem of envy as one of the inescapable questions of existence. They sought to define its terms and to establish its phenomenology. This chapter does not aim at a complete account of the problem of envy in the history of Western philosophy, but rather is concerned with demonstrating the regularity with which this subject has been considered.

Aristotle

In his Rhetoric, Aristotle perceives plainly the degree to which envy is felt only towards those who are themselves our equals, our peers. What is decisive is that we do not ourselves really wish to have what we envy, nor do we hope to acquire it in the course of our envy, but would like to see it destroyed so far as the other person is concerned. The more nearly we are equal to the man with whom we compare ourselves, the greater is our envy. Equality may be that of birth, of kinship, of age, of situation, of social distinction or of material possessions. A sense of envy results, in effect, when what we lack, by comparison with the other, is small. Aristotle quotes Hesiod: Potter against potter. We envy those whose possessions or achievements are a reflection on our own. They are our neighbours and equals. It is they, above all, who make plain the nature of our failure. Aristotle goes on to discuss emulation, a feeling often mistaken for envy.¹


Francis Bacon

Bacon’s ninth essay, which is also one of the longest of the fifty-eight, is entitled Of Envy. In some of the other essays, too, he stresses the role of envy in human activity, against which he warns us, advising us how best to guard against it, as in the essays on ambition, bodily deformity and seditions and troubles, for example.

As many of Bacon’s biographers and commentators on his Essays have pointed out, there is no doubt that he himself suffered the effects of other people’s envy and observed it among his fellow courtiers. His discussion of the problem of envy, which he saw as one of the most intractable and fundamental factors of social life, contains rules of great importance concerning envy and its avoidance, while with unerring sociological vision he lays bare the essentials.

Bacon begins by discussing the evil eye, which may stem from envy and can be synonymous with it, and draws attention to the relationship between envy and witchcraft. It is improbable that Bacon believed that envy was based on witchcraft, as nearly all primitive peoples do; he simply recalled this primal motive for sorcery.² Whether this is meant to be ironic or serious is irrelevant. Since the envious act contains an element of witchcraft, the only way envy can be averted is by the method used in a case of sorcery or an evil spell. Thus, he says,

the wiser sort of great persons bring in ever upon the stage of life somebody upon whom to derive the envy that would come upon themselves; sometimes upon ministers and servants; sometimes upon colleagues and associates; and the like; and for that turn there are never wanting some persons of violent and undertaking natures, who, so they may have power and business, will take it at any cost.³

Tactics to counter envy

While the tactics recommended by Bacon for countering envy are always applicable, they have seldom been as clearly discerned as here. His

conviction that the only way to assuage envy is by propitiation or providing a substitute is illuminating. Yet Bacon suggests one other form of envy-avoidance, which is deliberate self-harm or abasement: ... whereas wise men will rather do sacrifice to envy, in suffering themselves sometimes of purpose to be crossed and overborne in things that do not much concern them.4

Nevertheless, Bacon goes on to suggest that the man who carries his greatness in a plain and open manner will attract less envy than one who does so craftily and hypocritically. The man who seeks, but clumsily, to conceal his greatness—his luck, reputation, etc.—or to belittle it, seems to be saying what he does not himself truly believe, that fate is to blame for treating him better than he deserves. Such a man gives the impression of being conscious of his unworthiness and lack of desert, thus truly arousing the envy of others.5 Elsewhere Bacon suggests that what especially inflames the envious man's animosity is the observation that his envy has rendered its object unsure of himself, so that he seeks to conciliate the destructive feelings by half-hearted gestures. Why is this?

An indirect answer is found in Bacon's phrase for the clumsy avoidance of envy, 'to disavow fortune,' which gives the appearance of casting doubt upon good fortune itself. It might be further added that if those who ought to benefit thereby—those, that is, who are favoured by fortune—reproach fortune, for the benefit of the envious, with unjustified partiality, they shatter the convention implicit in the concept of fortune or luck which is acknowledged by both the well placed and the less well placed in society, so that envy is given free rein.

From the start, Bacon distinguishes between two kinds of envy, public and private. Public envy is not merely envy that is openly admitted, but more exactly it is envy for the benefit of the public weal. This concept is similar to E. Raiga's 'indignation-envy.' Bacon could not have guessed that two centuries later a few social philosophers would succeed in so camouflaging or repressing private envy as almost always to present it in the guise of advocacy of the common weal. What since the nineteenth century has been called 'democratic envy' is most often, though by no means necessarily always, the presumed aggregate of the electors' private envy.

Public envy manifested in the public interest is a form of which no one need be ashamed, and by contrast with private or secret envy, as Bacon quite rightly recognized, there is something to be said in its favour.

For public envy is as an ostracism [presumably the source of Bacon's insight], that eclipseth men when they grow too great. And therefore it [the fear of envy] is a bridle also to great ones, to keep them within bounds.

This envy, being in the Latin word invidia, goeth in the modern languages by the name of discontentment; of which we shall speak in handling sedition.

Bacon is probably wrong in believing that invidia, literally 'a hostile look,' is concerned only with envy expressed in public opinion and not with the private person's spiteful envy. At any rate the current words in Spanish that derive from invidia all have the meaning of private envy. And by equating public envy with discontentment, Bacon circumscribes it. As is observable in a modern democracy, this form of envy, which keeps a check on politicians who have grown over-powerful, is also manifested in times of prosperity and by people who are far from having any cause for complaint.

Bacon devotes most space, however, to private or personal envy, which is a constituent of the 'public' form of envy and which probably plays a greater role in all societies. First he presents us with a typology of the envied and the envying man. The man devoid of virtue, who lacks all hope of ever attaining virtue, enviously causes the downfall of his more worthy fellows.6

His next observation is more interesting sociologically: 'Men of noble birth are noted to be envious towards new men when they rise. For the distance is altered, and it is like a deceit of the eye, that when others come on they think themselves go back.'7

Here Bacon is describing what might be called the envy of kings, which operates from the top downwards. One might call it the envy of aloofness, and it is a form that will be encountered repeatedly. This, perhaps, is absolute envy, because the man at the top truly has nothing to lose should others, through their own attainments, begin emulating his luxury and his wealth.

A mortgage with the world bank of fortune?

Bacon observes that those who are particularly envy-ridden are often the deformed, the lame and eunuchs—in his own words, persons who cannot possibly mend their case and hence attempt to impair another's. Yet he mentions heroic exceptions who by their selfless deeds have ennobled their very defects. But those whom Bacon regards as peculiarly liable to envy are persons who have endured temporary setbacks, catastrophes or deprivations: 'For they are men . . . who think other men's harms a redemption of their own sufferings.' An instance that exactly fits this case is the one given by the ethnologist Karsten concerning South American Indians (see p. 54).

This is extremely revealing. It is easy enough to understand that someone imprisoned in a vale of tears should look enviously upon those who are more fortunate. But why does Bacon lay so much stress on people who are recovering from a calamity? After the First World War there were, for instance, certain people who came back unscathed and, on the grounds of the privation they (and more especially others) had suffered, set themselves up as the strictest of moral arbiters at a time when privations were virtually a thing of the past. It might be supposed that a person who has emerged in good fettle from a bad spell would gratefully and gladly demonstrate his goodwill towards those whom fate has favoured. Perhaps, in fact, Bacon discovered a motive of decisive importance. For it might be that one who has escaped calamity, uncertain as to why fate has spared him, and filled with guilt towards those of his companions who were not spared, will take out a retrospective mortgage with 'fortune's tribunal,' the world bank of fortune, not only by doing penance himself but by insisting that others should do so too. One might interpret in the light of this hypothesis some of the ill-tempered, exigent, pseudo-ascetic character of many Central European, English and American writers since the Second World War.

In his catalogue of men especially prone to envy, Bacon mentions those in close proximity: ' . . . near kinsfolks, and fellows in office, and those that have been bred together, are more apt to envy their equals when they are raised. For it doth upbraid unto them their own fortunes, and pointeth at them and cometh oftener into their remembrance, and incurreth likewise more into the note of others.' Bacon also gave some thought to those who are not as a rule so readily envied.

Among these are persons whose advancement takes place when they have already achieved eminence. They appear to have earned their luck, and no one, Bacon believes, envies a man the settlement of his debt. What is of significance for the sociology of envy is that 'envy is ever joined with the comparing of a man's self; and where there is no comparison, no envy; and therefore kings are not envied but by kings.'

Bacon is also aware of the subjective time-element in envy, which is a function of the awareness of time in one who observes another's good fortune: ' . . . unworthy persons are most envied at their first coming in [to an exalted position], and afterwards overcome it better; whereas contrariwise, persons of worth and merit are most envied when their fortune continueth long. For by that time, though their virtue be the same, yet it hath not the same lustre; for fresh men grow up that darken it.'

In this, as in the ensuing instances, Bacon chiefly has in mind the life at court where people may gain or lose the monarch's favour for a variety of reasons. Thus he thinks that those of low degree, partly because their reputation is already such that little can be added to it: 'and envy is as the sunbeams, that beat hotter upon a bank or steep rising ground, than upon a flat. And for the same reason those that are advanced by degrees are less envied than those that are advanced suddenly and per saltum [at a bound].' The only antidote to envy named by Bacon is pity. Hence those who have earned their honours by great travail, perils and cares are less exposed to envy. They are sometimes pitied. 'Pity ever healeth envy.' It is therefore wise and prudent in politicians, having attained greatness, to lament continually their toilsome existence. Not because they themselves find it so, but in order to take the sting out of envy. Yet caution should be observed; the toil must stem only from those duties that

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devolve upon them. Self-imposed, superfluous cares might rather intensify envy.\(^\text{13}\)

**Adam Smith**

In his *Wealth of Nations*, after considering envy, malice and resentment, Adam Smith leaves no room for doubt that only the containment of this motive by a society founded upon law and order will permit inequality of property, and hence economic growth. Men can, indeed, co-exist with a fair measure of public safety even without any authority to shield them from injustice arising out of these passions. But not in a society with great disparity of property.

Wherever there is great property, there is great inequality. For one very rich man, there must be at least five hundred poor. The affluence of the few supposes the indigence of the many, who are often both driven by want, and prompted by envy, to invade his possessions. It is only under the shelter of the civil magistrate that the owner of that valuable property, which is acquired by the labour of many years, or perhaps of many successive generations, can sleep a single night in security. He is at all times surrounded by unknown enemies, whom, though he never provoked, he can never appease, and from whose injustice he can be protected only by the powerful arm of the civil magistrate continually held up to chastise it. The acquisition of valuable and extensive property, therefore, necessarily requires the establishment of civil government. Where there is no property, or at least none that exceeds the value of two or three days' labour, civil government is not so necessary.\(^\text{14}\)

Adam Smith is quite definitely wrong, however, in believing that there could exist any property so small that the owner would be safe against envious aggression.

**Immanuel Kant**

In his late work, *The Metaphysic of Morals* (1797), Kant discusses envy, which he regards as belonging to the 'abhorrent family of ingratitude and Schadenfreude.' These he calls 'The vice of human hate that is the complete opposite of human love.' It is a hate that is not 'open and violent, but secret and disguised, so that baseness is added to neglect of one's duty to one's neighbour, and thus one's duty to oneself also suffers.' Kant gives full expression to the philosophical doctrine and ethic of values, according to which envy is the very antithesis of virtue, the denial of humanity. His is one of the most complete definitions of envy:

> Envy (livor) is a tendency to perceive with displeasure the good of others, although it in no way detracts from one's own, and which, when it leads to action (in order to diminish that good) is called qualified envy, but otherwise only ill-will (*invidentia*); it is however only an indirect, malevolent frame of mind, namely a disinclination to see our own good overshadowed by the good of others, because we take its measure not from its intrinsic worth, but by comparison with the good of others and then go on to symbolize that evaluation.\(^\text{15}\)

In more primitive societies, as we have seen, for instance, among the Pacific Dobuans or the North American Navaho, it is held that another person's good is factually the cause of a man's own ill. A certain degree of rationality and maturity, or at least complete freedom from a magical view of things, is required before the envious man can fully realize that the man he envies does not possess something which, but for the possessor's existence, he, the envious man, might otherwise have.

Kant goes on to discuss an expression that neutralizes envy. It is so current today, particularly in America and England, that one may assume that it serves to repress the knowledge of envy's true nature and function in human relations. Kant writes: 'It is no doubt for this reason that the harmony and happiness of a marriage, family, &c., is sometimes described as enviable, as if it were permissible in certain cases to envy a person.' It is a turn of speech often used today, as it was used apparently in Kant's time, to give expression to genuine envy but in a socially acceptable form—sometimes, even, to warn the envied man against one's own envy or that of others. This may, indeed, represent a social control whereby influence is gained over another person's style of life, or over the pleasure he takes in life. The following sentence of Kant's


introduces three further fundamental insights into envy which are valid for any society:

'The impulse for envy is thus inherent in the nature of man, and only its manifestation makes of it an abominable vice, a passion not only distressing and tormenting to the subject, but intent on the destruction of the happiness of others, and one that is opposed to man's duty towards himself as towards other people.' 16

It is therefore natural for man to feel envious impulses. He will always compare himself with others, generally with those who are socially not too remote, but the vice that threatens personal relations, and hence society as a whole, becomes manifest only when the envious man proceeds to act, or fails to act, appropriately (by deliberate failure to warn or help), to the detriment of another, or at the very least gives enough play to his envy to cause himself harm.

Because envy is a purely destructive passion, quite unproductive of any positive value either for the individual or for society, Kant declares it to be an infringement of duty, both of the envious man towards himself and of the envier towards the envied man. Kant could scarcely have guessed that out of the roots of the French Revolution, of which he himself was so attentive a witness, there would within a hundred years arise for all mankind a new version of his categorical imperative, whose wording would be: 'Envy others so fiercely that the appeasement of your envy (impossible though that be) will become the foundation of all lawgiving.' Or more precisely: 'Envy others in such a way that your envious demands become the yardstick of all lawgiving.' (Only one word has been changed in Kant's phrasing—the word 'envy' has been substituted for the word 'act.')</p>

The psychology of ingratitude

With an insight into psychological correlations that is scarcely available to us now, Kant presents his psychology of ingratitude. The word 'envy' does not appear in this particular section, but Kant counts ingratitude among the 'horrid family of envy.' Almost a hundred years later Nietzsche gave a very similar interpretation of ingratitude, but our own age, obsessed by the desire to 'do good' to the most distant nations and peoples, is unwilling to admit that the recipients of its welfare, for reasons that are obvious, deeply envy and hate the givers and, in extreme cases, live only in the hope of the latter's destruction. Kant then goes on:

'Ingratitude towards a benefactor which, if taken to the point of hatred of that benefactor, is qualified ingratitude, but otherwise is termed thoughtlessness, though it is generally held to be a very dreadful vice; yet it is so notorious in man that to make an enemy as a result of benefactions rendered is not regarded as improbable.'

How can this discovery have been lost from sight so completely that, since 1950, the West has supposed that foreign policy could be superseded by development aid to the 'Third World'? One mentions this simply in order to show that we cannot afford to ignore the problems of envy.

What is significant in Kant's description is the remark that 'indeed, in the public view it is a vice greatly abhorred.' No one admits publicly, and hence public opinion does not admit, that ingratitude is the norm. It is astounding that countless benefactors allow themselves to be persuaded over and over that ingratitude with the resultant hatred is a rare and special case. It could be that by ignoring ingratitude many benefactors are able to repress in themselves a consciousness of their own envy of someone else. If a person were to admit that the recipients of his welfare were in fact envious of him, he would be forced to recognize that his own ambivalent feelings towards benefactors might be something as contemptible as envy and hatred. Since most people are both recipient and benefactor they retain a memory of earlier benefactions, which may cause the benefactor to harbour ambivalent feelings throughout his life.

How, then, does Kant explain the constant recurrence of ingratitude?

The reason that such a vice is possible lies in the misunderstanding of a man's duty towards himself, in that he imagines, because the benefactions of others subject him to an obligation, that he does not need them; nor will he ask for them, but bear the burdens of life alone, rather than put them upon others and thus become indebted to them: for he fears that by doing so he will sink to the level of client in relation to his patron, and this is repugnant to true self-esteem.

Thus, according to Kant, uninhibited gratitude is possible only towards those (ancestors, parents) whose benefactions cannot but pre-

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cede our own. But our gratitude towards our ‘contemporaries’ is but meagre—indeed, in order to conceal the inequality that lies between us and them it may well become the very opposite—namely, hatred and animosity.

To Kant ingratitude is a reprehensible vice not only because its example may cause men to desist from benefactions and hence diminish the amount of mutual human aid (which no social system can dispense with entirely), but also because ‘it is as though love were turned upside down and a mere lack of love further debased into an urge to hate the person who loves us.’

Kant believes, however, and experience has repeatedly proved him right, that a display of ingratitude will not necessarily bring about a decrease in benefactions, because the benefactor ‘may well be convinced that the very disdain of any such reward as gratitude only adds to the inner moral worth of his benefaction.’

However, I would add, benefaction in the face of hostile ingratitude only serves to intensify the passion and the principle of ingratitude, the giver having proved himself so much bigger, better and more unassailable than he previously appeared. Most of the observations made between 1955 and 1965 in areas receiving aid from the major industrial countries provide what is tantamount to experimental proof of Kant's maxims. This large-scale example of international benefaction is peculiarly clear because in the age of the Cold War only sovereign governments as opposed to private recipients could afford to show immediate and ostentatious ingratitude, an ingratitude almost proportionate to the benefits received.

Before Kant's discussion of the family of envy, and hence of ingratitude, he also examined the duty of gratitude, and in doing so he indirectly touched on some of the problems of envy.

That gratitude is a moral obligation essential for a peaceful society is deduced by Kant from the ineluctable fact, arising from our existence in a time-continuum, that 'no requital of a benefaction received can ever absolve us of the debt.'

The recipient can never catch up with the giver because the latter, from the viewpoint of merit, has the advantage of having been first in the field of benevolence. (Significantly, some primitive peoples have succeeded in evolving a practice and ethic of giving that eliminates the problem of priority in giving.) Kant considers that gratitude is not a mere opportunist maxim to secure a further benefit, but that the respect due to a person on account of his benefaction to us is a direct requirement of the moral law, in other words, a duty. But he goes even further:

‘But gratitude must be seen as a sacred duty, as one, that is, whose infringement . . . may destroy the very principle of the moral desire to do good. For that moral object is sacred in respect of which an obligation can never be fully redeemed by an equivalent act.’

If Kant sets so high a value on gratitude, because it is not humanly possible ever fully to requite the benefactor, it is surely because he sensed the social discord, the chronic envy and resentment, that must arise in a society where envy, and hence ingratitude, came to be sanctioned as the accepted response. The moral obligation of gratitude thus indirectly inhibits envious feelings of aggression. Without such an inhibition—exerted upon the individual by the cultural ethos, by the axioms of decency and by religion—there would be a danger that unconsidered benefactions in a society might have altogether unexpected consequences.

Kant also shows the frame of mind in which the duty of gratitude should be performed and the manner of its performance:

The lowest degree is to render equal services to the benefactor, should he be able to receive them (if still living), and if not, to extend them to others; not to regard a benefaction received as a burden of which one would be glad to be relieved (because the recipient stands one step below his patron, so that his pride is wounded); but to accept the occasion of it as a moral blessing, i.e., as a given opportunity to pledge this virtue of human love [gratitude] which represents both the sincerity of the benevolent mentality and the tenderness of benevolence (attention to the finest nuance of this in the concept of duty), thus cultivating human love.

Most of us know people who find it almost impossible to accept help, a kindness, a present or a benefaction. Psychiatry has described extreme

forms of such pathological modesty. What is in fact involved is not the virtue of modesty, but the idea of even the smallest obligation (i.e., the duty of gratitude) being so intolerable to some people that they would rather make themselves ridiculous, or hurt others' feelings, than accept anything from anyone. Are such people afraid of their own envy, or of the vice of ingratitude? Do they realize that they are simply incapable of gracefully accepting a natural benefaction without suffering from a corrosive sense of inferiority towards the benefactor, a feeling that will develop into hatred and ostentatious ingratitude?

Schopenhauer on envy

In Schopenhauer we find an analysis of human wickedness which concludes with an inquiry into envy. This philosopher believes that everybody has within him something that is morally altogether bad and that even the noblest character will at times display a surprising streak of evil. Schopenhauer recalls that, of all animals, man alone torments his own kind for entertainment. 'For truly in the heart of each one of us there is a wild beast that only awaits the opportunity to rant and roar, to hurt others, and, should they seek to bar its way, to destroy: it is here that all lust for war and fighting originates.' This leads Schopenhauer on to an analysis of envy: 'The worst trait in human nature, however, is Schadenfreude, for it is closely related to cruelty... generally... appearing where compassion should find a place. ... In another sense, envy is opposed to compassion, since it stems from an opposite cause.'

In his chapter 'On Judgment, Criticism, Applause and Fame,' Schopenhauer describes in detail the manifestations of envy. If the acerbity of his language betrays his disappointment and bitterness regarding contemporary philosophical criticism, some of his observations still remain valid and significant for the sociological study of literature.

Envy he describes as 'the soul of the alliance of mediocrity which everywhere foregathers instinctively and flourishes silently, being directed against individual excellence of whatever kind. For the latter is unwelcome in every individual sphere of action. ...'


Schopenhauer believes, for example, that it was the envy of German musicians that had caused them for a whole generation to refuse obstinately to recognize the merit of Rossini.22

Even more remarkable, however, is what Schopenhauer has to say about modes of behaviour to avoid arousing envy: '... the virtue of modesty was only discovered as a protection against envy,' and he quotes Goethe's saying: 'Only scoundrels are modest.'23

Envy, Schopenhauer believes has two favourite methods—to praise what is bad or, alternatively, to remain silent about what is good: '... for every one who gives praise to another, whether in his own field or in a related one, in principle deprives himself of it: he can praise only at the expense of his own reputation.'24

Among his remarks, Schopenhauer includes a quotation from an article in the London Times of October 9, 1858, a passage which gives 'the most unadorned and strongest expression' to the fact that envy 'is irreconcilable in regard to personal advantages.'25

There is no vice, of which a man can be guilty, no meanness, no shabbiness, no unkindness, which excites so much indignation among his contemporaries, friends and neighbours, as his success. This is the unpardonable crime, which reason cannot defend, nor humility mitigate. 'When heaven with such parts has blest him, Have I not reason to detest him?' is a genuine and natural expression of the vulgar human mind. The man who writes as we cannot write, who speaks as we cannot speak, labours as we cannot labour, thrives as we cannot thrive, has accumulated on his own person all the offences of which man can be guilty. Down with him! Why cumbereth he the ground?

Sören Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard's deep concern with envy is exceptional. His biographers seek the reason for this not only in his personal destiny, but also in the Danish environment which was especially prone to envy. At one point Kierkegaard writes:

Anyone who wishes to understand the nature of offence should make a study of human envy, a study I am offering as a luxury item and which I believe I have done thoroughly.  

Kierkegaard's discussion of envy is found throughout his work. By contrast with many authors of the mid-twentieth century, he uses the ascribed motive of envy in many passages as a self-evident explanation for certain human modes of behaviour, and especially to explain sudden reversals of feeling. Kierkegaard frequently speaks of the envy of the gods or of the deity, of the envy of ostracism and the argument of the potsherd which prevails above all better ones. He regards envy and stupidity as the two great forces in society, prevalent above all in the small town where the 'repellent lust of envy' is one of the favourite pastimes. Like Nietzsche a few decades later, Kierkegaard constantly points out the envy-motive concealed in apparently harmless and generally current turns of speech:

Great men are defeated by the trivial things ordinary men take in their stride. . . . How strange it is. Is it not odd, really something for the psychologist to ponder, the way in which it could justly be said that life envies the distinguished man, mockingly intimating to him that he is a man like any other, like the least of men, that the human element demands its rights.  

And elsewhere we read:

Envy is concealed admiration. An admirer who senses that devotion cannot make him happy will choose to become envious of that which he admires. He will speak a different language, and in this language he will now declare that which he really admires is a thing of no consequence, something foolish, illusory, perverse and highflown. Admiration is happy self-abandon, envy, unhappy self-assertion.

27 Ibid., Fire opbyggelige Taler (Four Edifying Discourses), Vol. V, p. 141.
28 See note 26.

According to Kierkegaard, mistrust also belongs to the same genus as envy, as do Schadenfreude and baseness. He writes:

And there is envy; it is quick to abandon a man, and yet it does not abandon him as it were by letting him go, no, it hastens to assist his fall. And this being once assured, envy will hasten to his dark corner whence he will summon his even more hideous cousin, malicious glee, that they may rejoice together—at their own cost.

Kierkegaard sees, too, envy's role in drawing unenvious people into class conflict. Who does not envy with us is against us! His aversion to envy as a legitimate weapon in social reform naturally causes him to be reproached with conservatism. Yet he correctly recognizes the difficult position, doubtless acute in any society, of the man who either cannot or will not envy:

And should one of the humble folk, whose heart was innocent of such secret envy of the power, honour and distinction of the powerful, the honoured and the distinguished, and who refuses to succumb to corruption from without—should he, without craven obsequiousness, and fearing no man, modestly, but with sincere delight, give due honour to those above him; and should he sometimes be happier and more joyous even perhaps than they, then he too will discover the twofold danger that threatens him. By his own kind he will, perchance, be rejected as a traitor, despised as a servile spirit; by those who are favoured he may be misunderstood and perhaps reviled as a presumptuous man.

Kierkegaard's writings provide not only a running commentary on envy in human existence, but in some places a step towards a philosophy of envy which is one of the most profound treatments of the subject. Kierkegaard depicts his era: It is a revolutionary but passionless and reflective age performing the dialectical feat of 'allowing everything to remain intact, but craftily robbing it of its meaning. Instead of culminating in rebellion it enervates the inner reality of things in a reflexive
tension which allows everything to remain intact and yet has changed the whole of life into an ambiguity.\textsuperscript{31}

Thus there is no intention to do away with royal power, to tear down what is excellent, to abolish Christian terminology, but

secretly they desire the knowledge that nothing decisive is meant by it. And they want to be unrepentant, for they have indeed destroyed nothing. They would no more like to have a great king than a hero of liberty, or someone with religious authority—no, what they want is to let what exists continue to exist in all innocence, while knowing in a more or less reflective knowledge that it does not exist.\textsuperscript{32}

\textbf{The age of levelling}

From here, Kierkegaard proceeds to the principle of envy. In the same way that enthusiasm is the unifying principle in an impassioned age, so

in a passionless and strongly reflective age \textit{envy is the negative unifying principle}. Yet this should not be immediately understood in the ethical sense as a reproach, no, the idea of reflection, if one may speak thus, is envy, and envy is therefore a twofold quality, being the selfishness of the individual and then again that of others against him.\textsuperscript{33}

Thus to Kierkegaard envy is primarily, as one might say, a social-psychological factor, condemning the individual to a false self-image:

\begin{quote}
Selfish envy in the form of the wish demands too much of the individual himself, and thus becomes an obstacle to him. It pampers him as would the predilection of a yielding mother, for envy of himself prevents the individual from surrendering himself. The envy of others in which the individual participates against others is envious in the negative critical sense.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

The reflective envy then becomes changed into ethical envy, like enclosed air which always develops its own poison, and this is then detestable envy.

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., \textit{En litterair Anmeldelse to Tidsaldre} (The Present Age), Vol. VIII, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{32}Op. cit., p. 76.
\textsuperscript{33}Op. cit.—‘against him’ refers to the individual.
\textsuperscript{34}Op. cit., p. 77.
\end{quote}
‘Them.’ Hence the censorious catch-phrase ‘One just doesn’t do such things’ usually implies a warning that to do them in fact is to display an individualism that might attract the envy of the less independent.

In his Christian Discourses of 1848, only a few years after his discovery of the approaching age of levelling, of which he saw the first signs a generation before Nietzsche, there is a strange application of the envy concept whereby the blame appears to be shifted to the envied man or what is enviable. He writes: ‘All earthly and worldly property is, strictly speaking, selfish, envious; its possession, envious or envied, is bound either way to impoverish others. What I have, no one else can have; the more I have, the less can anyone else have.’

Even entirely lawful possession or acquisition, and even a man’s readiness to share his earthly goods with others, could not obviate the fact that possession is of itself envious. This does not apply, however, to possessions of the mind. Because their very concept involves communication, possession of them is without envy and is beneficial. There are, however, other, more imperfect intellectual possessions, such as insight, knowledge, ability, talent, which are not in themselves communication. By possessing these a man may provoke the envy of others, and hence be a selfish person. ‘Thus the clever man becomes ever more clever, yet in the envious sense, in such a way that he seeks to derive advantage from the very fact that others become increasingly simple by comparison with the growth of his cleverness.’

It may at first seem strange that Kierkegaard should here designate the owner of a possession or of a skill, against which others can measure their relative inferiority, as the envious man. But if we reflect—and the view is also that of this book—that envy’s inevitable presence in this world is due to the fact that one person owns something, of whatever nature, which makes another feel the want of it, this use of the word is comprehensible.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Like Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, Nietzsche also recognized the function of envy in human society. The force of his observations must be attributed to countless experiences of being envied. His entire opus, from first to last, contains references to the problem of envy, but they are most abundant in his middle period, of which the central work is Human, All Too Human. As a classical philologist he was familiar with the Greek idea of the envy of the gods. He had, however, a tendency to idealize this and, like Kierkegaard, to underestimate the full import of envious manifestations in Athenian democracy. This realization came only much later, with the Dane, Svend Ranulf.

The concepts of envy and resentment are frequently to be met with in Nietzsche; there is no periphrasis and they are invariably understood in the sense of those authors we have already discussed. Nietzsche does not confuse the concepts jealousy and envy as unfortunately so many of his predecessors and successors have repeatedly done. In his anthropology, Nietzsche proceeds from ever latent envy, one of man’s deepest tendencies, which is aroused as soon as he finds himself in society. Yet Nietzsche hardly perceived the inevitability of envy, even in cases where the difference between the individuals under comparison is infinitesimal. No doubt Nietzsche focused too much on considerable and startling differences between the great and the small, the high and the low, to notice how little the intensity of envy depends on the objective margin between the envious man and his object.

Nietzsche, the philosopher, postulates a man who has finally succeeded in overcoming the envy within him. To Nietzsche, the French Revolution and all subsequent revolutions, the idea of equality and certain conceptions of social justice were all equally abhorrent, as they had been to Goethe, on whom he here draws for support. Yet here and there we find in Nietzsche thoughts which suggest the view that the social dynamic of these motives and ideas is indispensable, that the roots of social control lie in the desire for equality and justice, or in other words the envious impulse, and that without them human society as we know it is barely conceivable. Notable, too, is the clarity with which he perceives the need for every group (‘herd’) to provide a safety valve for the envy of its members so as to divert it from destroying the group. In one of his aphorisms, he declares that this function has been taken over by the priest. With uncanny insight he foresaw the manner in which the envious and resentful would succeed, during the twentieth century, in making people feel that happiness was a disgrace. He literally anticipates the problem with which Paul Tournier has to struggle.

Envy among the Greeks

In December 1872, Nietzsche discusses in Greek Philosophy and Other Essays what he describes as Homer’s contest. He suggests that nothing so much distinguishes the Greek world of antiquity from our own as its recognition of the agonistic element, the fight and joy in victory. This serves to explain the difference in tone between individual ethical concepts, for example those of Eris and of envy. The whole of Greek antiquity shows a view of resentment and envy entirely different from our own, hence the predicates resentment and envy were not only applicable to the nature of the wicked Eris, but also to the other goddess, good Eris. Nietzsche writes:

The Greek is *envious* and conceives of this quality not as a blemish, but as the effect of a beneficent deity. What a gulf of ethical judgment between us and him! Because he is envious he also feels, with every superfluity of honour, riches, splendour and fortune, the envious eye of a god resting on himself, and he fears this envy: in this case the latter reminds him of the transitoriness of every human lot: he dreads his very happiness and, sacrificing the best of it, he bows before the divine envy. 41

Nietzsche next supposes that this conception did not lead to estrangement between the Greek and his gods, but rather only to his renouncing all competition with them, so that he was impelled into jealous competition with every other living being, and even with the dead whose fame alone could excite consuming envy in the living. Nietzsche’s interpretation of the institution of ostracism is almost the same as the argument used in America in the twentieth century to justify anti-trust laws; an institution, that is, which, by banning or silencing the greatest, safely restores competition among a number of the less great.

‘The original sense of this peculiar institution however is not that of a safety-valve but that of a stimulant. The all-excelling individual was to be removed in order that the contest of forces might reawaken. . . .’ 42

The basic assumptions of these aphorisms in Human, All Too Human devoted to envy might be summed up as follows: Envy and jealousy, ‘the private parts of the human psyche,’ 43 adopt the strangest disguises. Whereas ordinary envy clucks as soon as the envied hen lays an egg, and so is mitigated, there is another and deeper form of envy: ‘. . . envy that in such a case becomes death silent, desiring that every mouth shall be sealed and always more and more angry because the desire is not gratified. Silent envy grows in silence.’ 44

Schadenfreude

There is a brilliant analysis of *Schadenfreude*, which, according to Nietzsche, came into existence only after man had learnt to see other men as belonging to his own kind, in other words, since the founding of society:

Malicious joy arises when a man consciously finds himself in evil plight and feels anxiety of remorse or pain. The misfortune that overtakes B. makes him equal to A., and A. is reconciled and no longer envious. If A. is prosperous, he still hoards up in his memory B.’s misfortune as a capital, so as to throw it in the scale as a counter-weight when he himself suffers adversity. In this case too he feels ‘malicious joy’ (*Schadenfreude*). The sentiment of equality thus applies its standards to the domain of luck and chance. Malicious joy is the commonest expression of victory and restoration of equality, even in a higher state of civilization. 45

Nietzsche believed that ‘where equality is really recognized and permanently established, we see the rise of that propensity that is generally considered immoral and would scarcely be conceivable in a state of nature—envy.’ 46

This sentence is at once right and wrong. Nietzsche is right in believing, like de Tocqueville fifty years earlier, that a society thoroughly imbued with the idea of equality will become increasingly envious as this principle becomes institutionalized. Contrary to what its champions since the French Revolution have maintained, equality is, in fact, the

expression of envy and is very far from being the one and only way of curing it. But Nietzsche is wrong in assuming that there had been a primitive state of nature where men had not been envious of each other. However, he brings out clearly the connection between envy, the idea of equality and the conception of social justice:

The envious man is susceptible to every sign of individual superiority to the common herd, and wishes to depress everyone once more to the level—or raise himself to the superior place. Hence arise two different modes of action, which Hesiod designated good and bad Eris. In the same way, in a condition of equality, there arises indignation if A. is prosperous above and B. unfortunate beneath their deserts and equality. These latter, however, are emotions of nobler natures. They feel the want of justice and equity in things that are independent of the arbitrary choice of men—or, in other words, they desire the equality recognized by man to be recognized as well by Nature and chance. They are angry that men of equal merits should not have equal fortune. \[footnote{47} \]

In a relatively short aphorism in *Dawn of Day* Nietzsche points out the connection between envy and nihilism. Under the heading 'The world destroyers' he writes:

'When some men fail to accomplish what they desire to do they exclaim angrily, “May the whole world perish!” This repulsive emotion is the pinnacle of envy, whose implication is “If I cannot have something, no one is to have anything, no one is to be anything!”' \[footnote{48} \]

Because magnanimous behaviour is more enraging to a man's enemies than is unconcealed envy, this being a 'plaintive variety of modesty,' Nietzsche suggests that envy is sometimes used as a cloak by those who are themselves not at all envious. \[footnote{49} \]

**Resentment**

In his *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche describes resentment.

All men of resentment are these physiologically distorted and worm-riddled persons, a whole quivering kingdom of burrowing revenge, inde-

fatigable and insatiable in its outbursts against the happy, and equally so in disguises for revenge, in pretenses for revenge: when will they really reach their final, fondest, most sublime triumph of revenge? At that time, doubtless, when they succeed in pushing their own misery, indeed all misery there is, into the consciousness of the happy; so that the latter begin one day to be ashamed of their happiness, and perchance say to themselves when they meet, 'It is a shame to be happy! There is too much misery!' \[footnote{50} \]

There can be no doubt that Nietzsche here forecasts one of the most momentous developments of the twentieth century, which alone made possible effusions such as Paul Tournier's on the subject of true and false guilt-feelings. Or again one need only recall the innumerable masochistic writings in which Westerners indulge in shame and self-indictment because of the inequality between them and the so-called developing countries. Nietzsche sees this development as the biggest and most fateful of misunderstandings. The world in which the happy and successful begin to doubt their right to happiness, he regards as a world turned upside down. Nietzsche follows this by writing about what he calls the tremendous historic mission of the ascetic priest in a society. The priest acts as a deflector of resentment by telling the sufferer searching for a cause, an instigator or, to be exact, a guilty instigator, of his suffering, that certainly there is a guilty person, but that person is the sufferer himself. \[footnote{51} \] Nietzsche believes that even if this were objectively false, it would still deflect resentment from action dangerous to society. A Marxist would here reproach Nietzsche with accepting religion solely as an opiate for the people in order to avoid class war; but seen against the background of this book, Nietzsche's view, devoid of religious sentiment, may have been realistic in that fundamentally no society can be effective or even attain a tolerable social climate, if it does not possess that kind of belief that will bring the underprivileged man to see, if not himself, then the effect of blind chance as a cause of his condition. We have already seen the dead ends in which primitive peoples stagnate as a result of conceiving that every misfortune or loss of asset experienced by the individual is deliberately engineered by a fellow tribesman.

Nietzsche examines resentment in many forms, and also its physiological manifestations, as a reactive and enduring mode of behaviour.


Resentment overcomes those people who are denied the proper positive reaction and who can find indemnity only in imaginary revenge. Such resentment is slave morality, and the slave rebellion in morality begins when resentment itself becomes creative and produces values.52

But significantly Nietzsche opposes attempts to seek the origin of justice, in his sense of the term, in the area of resentment. Some of his contemporaries, whom he calls ‘anarchists and anti-Semites,’ themselves filled with resentment, made an attempt to sanctify, in the name of justice, their own thirst for revenge, as though justice, in the last analysis, were only the sense of injury carried to a further stage.

He writes: ‘And that to which I alone call attention is the circumstance that it is the spirit of revenge from which develops this new nuance of scientific equity (for the benefit of hate, envy, mistrust, jealousy, suspicion, rancour, revenge).’ As opposed to this, Nietzsche maintains that a man is inspired by true justice when, and only when, even under the onslaught of personal injury, contumely, aspersion, his clear and lofty vision, remain unclouded. And even the man who attacks is closer to justice than is the man who reacts resentfully.53

Zarathustra mocks the detractors and snivellers to whose envy his happiness is intolerable: ‘How could they endure my happiness, if I did not put around it accidents, and winter-privations, and bear-skinned caps, and enmantling snowflakes!’54

Here we have the same thought as that already encountered in Francis Bacon, that because of the envious it is often necessary to simulate misfortune.

Max Scheler

Scheler presented a detailed analysis of the problem of envy in a study published between 1912 and 1914, Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moral en (Resentment in the Structuring of Ethics). He devotes about a hundred pages to a phenomenology of the envious man, whom, follow-


ing Nietzsche, he sees as the resentful man. Like Nietzsche before him, he stresses the subjective time factor necessary to the development of the sense of impotence: there is, of course, the expression ‘impotent anger.’ Resentment arises when a man is forced by others or by circumstances to remain in a situation which he dislikes and feels to be inconmensurate with his self-evaluation. Here Scheler anticipates by several decades the frustration theory of aggression, so dear especially to American social psychologists.

Scheler’s approach was necessarily limited because he worked exclusively on the hypothesis of so-called resentment types to which, by definition, woman belongs since she is always subordinate to man. Scheler does not recognize envy’s universal role in human existence, and more important still, he knows nothing of the conclusively significant body of data on envy among primitive peoples. He touches on envious crime, an example being the murderer who, in the early days of motor-ing, satisfied his hatred of motor-car drivers by fastening a wire between two trees across a main road outside Berlin, thus neatly decapitating a passing motorist. Scheler examines in detail the role of envy and resentment in political parties and in the demand for equality. Since he published his work before the First World War, it is not surprising that he felt able to make some very tart comments on the envy inherent in democracy.

Resentment and revenge

Scheler begins by explaining that the French word ressentiment is untranslatable, and further that Nietzsche had made of it a technical term. As such it must be retained. He believed the elements of the usual meaning of the word in French to be significant: ‘Ressentiment implies living through, and reliving, over and over, a certain emotional response reaction towards another, whereby that emotion undergoes progressive deepening and introversion into the very core of the personality, with a simultaneous distancing from the individual’s sphere of expression and action.55 The term further comprises the meaning that the quality of this emotion tends towards hostility. Scheler then quotes at length from

Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*, stressing, as the work does, that resentment is a form of self-poisoning which culminates in the vindictive impulse. What is involved is a group of emotions and affects, to which hatred, ill-will, envy, jealousy and spite also belong. Scheler then distinguishes between a counter-attack, a defensive gesture, such as a physical blow in immediate response to an insult, and the act of revenge which presupposes a certain lapse of time during which the reactive impulse is inhibited or controlled: a postponement, that is, of the counter-reaction till later on, in the sense of 'Next time I'll show you!' But when, under the influence of this inhibition, a person is able to predict that next time, too, he will be the under-dog, resentment begins. 56

The stressing of the time factor is important. Scheler writes:

Impulse and emotion, as it were, progress from vindictive feelings through rancour, envy and jealousy, to spite, approximating to genuine resentment. Revenge and envy represent types of hostile negation usually directed towards some definite object. They require definite causes for their manifestation, and their progress is determined by definite objects, so that, with the cessation of the cause, the emotion also disappears. 57

Scheler implies here that my envy will disappear when the envied property becomes my own. This is probably an over-optimistic view. He regards begrudging as a more dangerous feeling than mere envy because it seeks out those value factors in things and people from which it can derive painfully angry satisfaction. To the begrudging man, systematic destruction is, as it were, the structure of the individual concrete experience in social life. He neither sees nor experiences anything that does not correspond with his emotional situation. In the case of spite, the de­tructive impulse is even deeper and more internalized, while at the same time always ready to pounce, betraying itself in some uncontrolled gesture, a way of smiling, etc. Now Scheler continues:

None of these, however, amounts to resentment, but all are stages in the development of its points of departure. Vindictive feeling, envy, begrudging spite, Schadenfreude and ill-will become components of resentment only in the absence either of its moral subjugation (as, for example, genuine forgiveness in the case of revenge), or of action . . . e.g., a shaken fist; and where that absence is due to the fact that such behaviour is inhibited by a pronounced awareness of impotence. 58

Resentment types

Scheler distinguished various resentment types—those, for instance, which can be understood from the historical situation and others again from socio-biological differences, such as the generation gap which, he says, is usually fraught with the danger of resentment. Further, he cites the mother-in-law, especially the husband's mother, who appears in the folk literature of every nation, as a wicked, malignant figure. Scheler does not regard the active criminal as a true resentment type, only the one who commits certain kinds of crime, here characterized as malicious, coming within this category. One such is the murderer of motorists mentioned earlier. Scheler detected less cause for resentment in the industrial proletariat of his time, in so far as it was not infected by the resentment of certain leader types, than among the progressively declining craftsmen, the lower middle classes and the lower civil service. Within the framework of this study, however, Scheler does not examine more closely, from the viewpoint of class sociology, the causes of these kinds of resentment.

He believes that the structuring of ethics is affected by resentment only in so far as this brings about the collapse of an immemorial scale of values. True, he does not think that genuine or true moral value-judgements are ever based on resentment, but only false ones arising from fallacious values. This, the ethical relativist and sceptic, Nietzsche, failed to distinguish properly, although he had himself spoken of the distortion of the scale of values by resentment. The resentful man's whole perceptual mechanism is concentrated, Scheler believes, on abstracting from, and perceiving in, reality only that which is able to feed his malice and begrudging: 'Hence the resentful man is drawn as if under a spell towards manifestations such as joie de vivre, glamour, power, happiness, riches, strength. 59 Scheler stresses repeatedly the distorting

influence of resentment on the very structure and process of the perceptual act, a factor we have already shown as being applicable to envy generally.

At one point Scheler remarks:

"Impotent envy is also the most terrible kind of envy. Hence the form of envy which gives rise to the greatest amount of resentment is that directed against the individual and essential being of an unknown person: existential envy. For this envy, as it were, is forever muttering: 'I could forgive you anything, except that you are, and what you are; except that I am not what you are; that 'I,' in fact am not 'you.' ' This 'envy,' from the start, denies the other person his very existence, which as such is most strongly experienced as 'oppression' of, as 'a reproach' to the person of the subject."

**Nicolai Hartmann**

In his comprehensive *Ethics*, and under Scheler's stimulus, Nicolai Hartmann discusses envy a number of times. He recognizes the function of envy in the social revolutionary and eudaemonistic theories and movements since the end of the eighteenth century. In contrast to the individual eudaemonism of antiquity, the modern era has produced, in connection with a reassessment of the problems of social living, this form of 'social eudaemonism,' which he terms a truly practical ideal of life on an 'altruistic' basis: 'No longer does the happiness of the individual person constitute its comfort, but the welfare of all.' Bentham called it, more concisely, 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number.'

But if the happiness, which really means the comfort, of the greatest number becomes the standard, a strange perversion arises, as Hartmann shows: so many and so varied are the things that may be regarded as useful for the widest possible dissemination of comfort, that the final goal is lost from sight in questions of distribution, and ends up as utilitarianism. Unfortunately, this switching of concepts is not only theoretically confusing, it also leads to distortion in the social sphere itself, where, according to Hartmann, it gives rise to a move towards negativism or absence of content: 'Social eudaemonism . . . is rather a cramping and impoverishment of the sense of value; and in its extreme form it is, as regards values, pure nihilism.'

A few pages further on, Hartmann stresses the function of envy in this remarkable ethic for modern times. He speaks of the danger of false values, particularly in social existence:

"The oppressed man, the labourer, he who is exploited—or he who so regards himself—lives unavoidably under the belief that the man of means is the happier. He imagines that the rich have everything which he himself yearns for in vain. In the other conditions of life he sees only the hedonistic value. That there are in reality other values which are hidden—education, taste, knowledge—and that these are dearly paid for in effort, he does not see. He is not acquainted with the difficulty of mental work and the burden of great responsibilities."

**Social eudaemonism**

In his critique of social eudaemonism, Hartmann points out the irresponsibility of 'short-sighted social leaders' who abuse this falsification of values, that is, envy of those supposedly more happy, in order to 'hold up before the crowd a general happiness near at hand, and to incite them thereby to action. Such a vision, when it succeeds, is the means of setting the sluggish masses in motion.'

He has envy in mind when he goes on to say that this misrepresentation 'appeals to the lower instincts in man, to the crudest sense of values, and liberates passions which afterwards cannot be checked. But the tragedy is that even this arousing of passion rests upon an illusion.'

Hartmann's concluding critique, evidently having in view the times during which his *Ethics* was written, points out the inevitable corruption of eudaemonistic social movements because their only momentum was derived from envy:

"If an ordinary man is under such an illusion, it is quite natural. If a demagogue makes use of the illusion as a means to his own ends, the means..."
becomes a two-edged sword in his hand; but it is valuable—as seen from his point of view. If, however, the philosopher allows himself to be misled into justifying and sanctioning the illusion, this is due either to unscrupulousness on his part or to the deepest moral ignorance. Nevertheless, the social theories of modern times have trod this fateful course ever since their first appearance: and it must be regarded as the misfortune of the social movement up to our own day, that this kind of sanction has been set upon it and handed down to us. . . . Here as in so many other departments of our moral life, the principal work still remains to be done. 65

Hartmann breaks off at this point. What he doubtless had in mind was a social philosophy capable of showing how certain altruistic tasks can be done without exploiting envy. This is, perhaps, an impossible task, because the feeling of envy is much more constitutive of our inter-individual evaluations than he ever realized.

Eugène Raiga

The only writer up to now to have written a monograph on envy is Eugène Raiga. The twenty-four chapters of his book L'Envie comprise some 250 pages devoted to the group of phenomena that go to make up envy in the narrower sense. It appeared in 1932. Raiga had already published, fairly regularly since 1900, books mainly in the field of public law, and also of the economics of war, diplomacy and public administration.

Raiga cites Spinoza, according to whom human passions and their attributes are among the natural processes that are susceptible of examination. He opens with a quotation from Tartuffe, to the effect that envious men die, but envy does not. Raiga sees jealousy as the mother of envy and points out how often the one is mistaken for the other. But he regards envy as more comprehensive than jealousy. Both are of great importance in social life and are the most active and powerful motives in our behaviour. If it were possible to record an individual's jealousy and envy in the same way as the electrical impulses in his brain, it would be comparatively simple to explain his other affects and his behaviour.

Raiga then examines envy in an altogether conventional series of chapters. First, he seeks its origins, shows how it is linked with jealousy, discusses the phenomenon of 'envious indignation,' and considers envy and admiration. Two chapters are devoted to various forms of general and sexual jealousy. There follows the geography of envy: in the family, among friends, in the small town, and again in circles in the big city, such as those of lawyers, doctors and surgeons, officials, the military, poets and writers, painters and sculptors, thence to the role of envy in art criticism (already incisively described by Schopenhauer), envy in the world of scholarship and between victorious generals.

Three chapters are concerned with envy in democracy; particularly the envy of the masses and its function in socialist aspirations. Finally he investigates envy in religious life and on the international plane. The concluding chapter examines the social function of envy.

Like others, Raiga sees the distinction between jealousy and envy in the fact that jealousy postulates genuine expropriation of an asset hitherto possessed. He demonstrates the difference between envy and admiration with the example of antagonists in a competition, and disinterested strangers watching a tournament: the latter are able to admire the antagonists without envy. Raiga agrees with many other writers in regarding envy as a vice, a negative and destructive characteristic. It gives rise to only one virtue, that of modesty. Although Raiga can see no extenuating factor in envy or its subject, although all that the typically envious man achieves by his envy is that he never becomes or obtains that which he envies, yet the modesty evoked by his fear of envy, which is so obligatory in social life, is of social importance: even though such modesty is often simulated and insincere, it still makes co-existence possible. It gives those whose situation is lower, socially, the illusion that they have not been forced into that position. Essentially Raiga's treatment of envy resembles our own. He demonstrates its ubiquity and inevitability, and the part it plays in twentieth-century politics, and he indicates the reactions to that ubiquity which help to make social existence possible. Raiga seems not to have been aware of Max Scheler's great study of resentment, nor does he mention Nietzsche. The literature to which he refers consists for the most part of a few late nineteenth-century French psychologists and historians. Théodule Ribot is very often quoted, as are some French moralists, among them Diderot, La Bruyère and La Rochefoucauld, whose views he discusses. Schopenhauer is cited

once, and there are a few references to Henri Bergson's study of laughter, to Spinoza and Aristotle; J. Bourdeau, Pierre Janet, G. Tarde and Renan are mentioned a number of times.

What I miss most in Raiga is ethnographic data and the discoveries made by social anthropology concerning the phenomenon of envy among primitive peoples. However, it is in this field, particularly, that much research and writing have been done since the time his book appeared. Once he mentions envy in animals, such as the dog; but ethology, the study of behaviour, which has meanwhile made such great strides, plays no part in his investigation. Psychoanalysis exerted equally little influence on his work.

By a remarkable coincidence, only a year after Raiga brought out his book in Paris, the Danish sociologist Svend Ranulf began to publish quite independently his big, two-volume study of the envy of the gods and criminal justice in Athens, a far more scientific work than Raiga's essay.

Raiga also comments on the failure to discriminate between envy and jealousy, which we have already repeatedly encountered in English and German literature and everyday speech.

These terms, as Raiga stresses, are often seen as interchangeable, even by important writers of undoubted sensibility. He gives several examples from French literature, though La Rochefoucauld, to whom the point was important, makes a very clear distinction: he sees jealousy as an attitude that is often justified and reasonable, because it keeps watch over something that we have, yet fear to lose; whereas envy is a madness to which the prosperity of others is intolerable.

**Envy-indignation**

Rivarol, another French moralist, had already pointed out the remarkable fact that the mental faculty of comparison, which in the intellect is a source of justice, is a source of envy in the heart. Raiga elaborated this idea. Envy invariably arises out of the comparison of two situations.

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By definition, the very possibility of comparison must involve the diagnosis of inferiority in one of the parties. As we shall repeatedly see, this is not at all dependent upon either the absolute level of the persons under comparison or the absolute distance between them. Comparison is potential envy, in so far as no compensatory views and feelings effectively intervene. Envy and indignation are regarded by Raiga as identical psychological processes, but there are two kinds of envy—common and vulgar envy, which is reprehensible, and hence generally concealed, and envy-indignation, which may be excused or even justified (Francis Bacon's 'public envy'). Both kinds of envy, Raiga says, have the same origin. The distinction between them depends on people's impartiality and their sense of what is just and fair.

Raiga indicates that his concept 'envy-indignation' resembles the concept of nemesis described by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*—general indignation, a feeling between envy and malignance. (Nemesis, the Greek goddess, was responsible for good measure, and was regarded as the enemy of too much happiness, this embodying what the Greeks considered to be the envy of the gods.) Raiga writes: 'The noble action demanded by morality is that one should rejoice with others in their happiness, *gaudere felicitate aliena*, a virtue, indeed, which fine natures put into practice, but envy is there, ubiquitous upon this earth, and everything that contributes to the pride and joy of others causes it to suffer.'

Behind destructive and impotent envy Raiga recognizes that natural impulse or drive without which much of what we call civilization would never have come into being. The problem of the envy-ridden man is, indeed, to know whether his indignation is legitimate. We shall be confronted more than once in this book with the problem of the true and false legitimization of envy.

Envy is a subdued frame of mind, and is mostly camouflaged. One of its favourite weapons is irony. Raiga recalls Bergson's study of laughter of which the original function was to denigrate and to intimidate. The strategy of envy has always included the glorification of modesty and the
censure of pride, which is called a sin. It may be presumed that those who feel pride are fewer than those who ascribe it to others and begrudge it them.

Within the nuclear family, that is, between husband and wife, parents and children, envy, Raiga feels, should not be found. Among themselves they are equal, and the good of each one contributes to the good of the whole small group. As experience shows, however, the social structure of the family is in many cases unable to obviate tormenting and destructive feelings of envy among its members. (Here Raiga is not speaking of jealousy, to which the family is particularly prone.) Thus he postulates a possible cause for jealousy between husband and wife which has since been substantiated—in American experience, for instance. Because a number of professions and careers have been thrown open to both sexes, it can happen that one member of a couple becomes the other's competitor, earns more, gets better reviews or, if each has a different profession, enjoys more agreeable conditions of work.\(^2\)

In his chapter on envy between friends, Raiga gives various examples; mostly from fiction, to prove the thesis that even among close friends it is better for each, by an excess of modesty, to beg constant forgiveness for his superiority.\(^3\) Bacon, however, had early recognized the inefficacy of this tactic.

Raiga compares the proneness to envy of the inhabitants of small provincial towns to those of Paris, finding that the mutual envy so characteristic of the village community or the small town appears equally in the metropolis, but in individual circles such as the professions, neighbourhoods, between inmates of the same house, etc. In the capital city envy exists in a number of 'enclaves,' which Raiga describes in a separate chapter.\(^4\)

### Envy in France

Towards the end of the book, Raiga turns to envy in democracy. He contributes nothing to the various discoveries made by individual nineteenth-century writers, such as Jacob Burckhardt and Nietzsche. Some of Raiga's observations cast light on political life in Paris, making comprehensible much of what occurred in France after 1945. By nature the Frenchman is a passionate leveller, an anarchist. Raiga mentions the institution of ostracism in Athens and is faintly disapproving of Montesquieu, for viewing it as a very minor evil. The fear of the truly great, prevalent among French lower-middle-class people and the newly rich, has, it seems, given rise to the belief that the principles are all that count while individuals count for nothing. Raiga is very critical of electioneering in the twentieth century, but assumes that there are, from time to time, candidates with a sincere concern for the public weal. The hierarchy of the various ministries to be shared out by the prime minister among his followers was responsible for irreconcilable envy, particularly among politicians' wives.

Raiga is concerned about the systematic fomentation of envy and greed in the masses, but he also has hard things to say about the naive stupidity of those who ostentatiously dissipate their inherited wealth with a complete disregard for the envy of the lower classes. He recognizes envy as a phenomenon of social proximity; a grocer will hardly ever compare himself with a millionaire. But Raiga's age—the age of socialist egalitarianism—is one in which ever wider circles harbour at least the illusion that everyone is comparable with everyone else.

Raiga then returns to the distinction already made between simple, vulgar envy and envy-indignation or legitimate envy. He admits the possibility that oppressed, underprivileged classes, when a genuine injustice is involved, may be provoked to action by envy. But, he asks, who can and may decide when envy is legitimate? And what politician, when he incites the masses to envy, asks himself whether his object is power and its concomitant privileges, or whether his aim is to eliminate the injustice suffered by others?

Raiga has a low opinion of the utopian promises and ideas of socialists who use envy as a tool with which to build a society of people liberated from envy. He is scathing about the methods of a socialism vested in envy, and employing the hatred and vindictiveness of the envious to destroy a social system while having nothing to put in its place. Yet it is precisely the constancy of envy, a factor that can always be relied on, that explains the great success of socialist movements.\(^5\) A social revolution,
Raiga maintains, does nothing to alter man's general lot. It creates a new privileged class, different occupants for the club armchairs, but as a rule it produces more envious people than it has succeeded in placating. Contrary to its illusion, the Marxist revolution would not change human nature. Ambition, pride, vanity, jealousy and envy are unalterable active elements in human behaviour. A generation has elapsed since Raiga's little book, during which experience has increasingly taught us how right his diagnosis was.

Briefly he discusses envy between nations. These, like individuals, are capable of mutual envy and hatred. Since Raiga's book, history has furnished countless new examples of this. His prediction that the setting up of socialist governments and societies would not prevent envy between nations has, at any rate since 1945, been amply proved. Satellites of the Eastern bloc envy or are mutually envious of what they receive from the U.S.S.R. or the U.S.A., and socialist developing countries regard one another aggressively and with a jealous eye to see who is managing to get more development aid than the rest.

Raiga concludes by defining his own view of envy and its concomitant manifestations by means of a quotation from Spinoza, to the effect that there are no such things as vices, but only natural phenomena arising out of human nature. Raiga does not consider envy and jealousy to be innate, but as arising from social interplay or, as we should now say, in the course of the 'socialization process.' They are attributes of human co-existence, and since the envious must always be reckoned with, quite distinct modes of behaviour result. Raiga clearly regards some of the actions or behaviour designed to avert envy as socially highly desirable. Generally speaking, he seems to have given very little thought to the possible and perhaps extreme extent of the negative influence of this envy-avoidance compulsion, so inhibiting to cultural and individual development. What he patently lacks here is familiarity with the data of comparative ethnology.

Raiga's general definition of the envious man agrees with that of Scheler:

All the forms of envious manifestation considered in these chapters may be summed up in a few words: They are nothing other than the reaction of vanquished to victor, the weak to the strong, the attitude of the less talented to those with superior talent, of the poor to the rich, the humiliated to the arrogant. What is involved are disparate reactions of varying degrees of violence, which erupt or die down according to the situation, and which are dependent on temperament and character.

And because we are constantly on the defensive towards the envious, the whole of social life is correspondingly affected. According to Raiga, this is the social function of envy.

**Envious political parties**

Finally he reverts to the problem of socialists and of social revolutionary movements. These reject the allegation that they pander to envy, and proclaim the justice of their cause. Raiga reiterates that what members of such a party indubitably feel is envy, for they look upon themselves as the dispossessed, excluded from fortune's bounty. The feeling of sorrow and anger induced by the sight of the abundance of good things enjoyed by others, which is expressed in the cry 'Why they and not we?' deserves one name, and one only, and that is envy.

Yet the sheer volume of this cry, Raiga admits, calls for reflection and close comparison. The problem of merit requires consideration. Now Raiga believes that as the virtue of modesty arises from the reaction to vulgar envy, so the reaction to envy-indignation might give rise to a necessary examination of the right to privilege. Hence, his essay concludes, it might, in fact, be possible to see the universality of envy as contributing to the relative concord of society.

It is Raiga's virtue to have described the manifestations of envy in a large variety of social groups. He shows how little this problem has changed since antiquity; he warns against undue optimism regarding the possibility of eliminating envy from existence by this or that reform. For it is a basic fact of our lives and we must resign ourselves to reckoning with it, and in some measure protecting ourselves against it, by carefully calculated modesty. However, Raiga over-estimates precisely this possi-
bility of self-protection against the envious man by means of deliberate
everty-avoidance. Francis Bacon had already remarked upon the extent to
which the envious man is enraged by any attempt to deprive him of the
stimulus.

Raiga was a highly educated Parisian of the thirties, well versed in
modern literature and the classics and familiar with French political
intrigues of his day. The urbanity and courtesy of his culture may have
concealed from him certain extreme forms of envious manifestation.
Envious crime, for instance, is mentioned only casually. If, like his
contemporary José Ortega y Gasset, he warns against the revolt of the
envious masses and sees a society determined by envy hurtling towards
its doom, the basic tenor of his work is confident—somehow man will
succeed in dealing with envy. Raiga remains untouched by the meta-
physical horror induced by envy in Herman Melville, which haunted him
when he was writing Billy Budd.

He is far removed from the penetrating, flexible and brilliantly per-
tective analysis to which Max Scheler subjected the phenomenon of
resentment, and consequently that of envy. Nor can Raiga's essay be
compared with Svend Ranulf's imposing study, which, while taking
account of Scheler's work, methodically exploited with rare and scru-
pulous exactitude a comprehensive and homogeneous body of data. We
have considered Raiga's book in some detail, however, because it is the
only one we know that has envy as such for its subject and deals with
jealousy only as a peripheral phenomenon. Strange to say, resentment as
a special phenomenon hardly comes within Raiga's field of vision. Thus
L'Envie is an example of the kinds of observation and discovery made
about forty years ago, when it occurred to a clever French writer to
devote a monograph to envy.

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T IS ESSENTIAL to a democratic system that different parties should
alternate in office. Thus, from time to time one party will be more
successful than the other in attacking, criticizing and casting suspicion
on its rivals. Even in the unlikely event of elections being fought with
precise and logical arguments on a purely intellectual plane, it is unlikely,
to judge by the petty jealousy and often irrational squabbling that go on
between scholars and scientists, that the level and tone of democratic
debate would improve as a consequence. The aim will always be the
factious annihilation of the opposition's viewpoint; and however vulner-
able it may be to rational attack it will always be more profitably assailed
by an appeal to basic emotions.

The affinity between envy and democracy is castigated in H. L.
Mencken's essay 'A Blind Spot':

No doubt my distaste for democracy as a political theory is... due to an
inner lack—to a defect that is a good deal less in the theory than in myself.
In this case it is very probably my incapacity for envy. . . . In the face of
another man's good fortune I am as inert as a curb broker before Johann
Sebastian Bach. It gives me neither pleasure nor distress. The fact, for
example, that John D. Rockefeller had more money than I have is as
uninteresting to me as the fact that he believed in total immersion and wore
detachable cuffs. And the fact that some half-anonymous ass . . . has been
. . . appointed a professor at Harvard, or married to a rich wife, or even to a
beautiful and amiable one: this fact is as meaningless to me as the latest
piece of bogus news from eastern Europe.

The reason for all this does not lie in any native nobility or acquired