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# The Anatomy of Envy: A Study in Symbolic Behavior<sup>1</sup>

by George M. Foster

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I explore some of the ways in which man, through cultural forms and particularly through symbolic behavior, attempts to cope with his fear of the consequences of envy. Envy is, I believe, a pan-human phenomenon, abundantly present in every society, and present to a greater or lesser extent in every human being. I further believe that envy is viewed, at least subconsciously, as a particularly dangerous and destructive emotion, since it implies hostility, which leads to aggression and violence capable of destroying societies. Sensing the ever-present threat of envy to himself and to his society, man fears: he fears the consequences of his own envy, and he fears the consequences of the envy of others. As a result, in every society people use symbolic and nonsymbolic cultural forms whose function is to

neutralize, or reduce, or otherwise control the dangers they see stemming from envy, and especially their fear of envy.

It is probably because of the enormous hold that envy has on us, and a measure of the inner depths to which it stirs us, that we are reluctant to admit to envy, and to discuss it openly, except, perhaps, in situations formally defined as competitive, as pointed out below. As Schoeck has recently pointed out, envy is almost a taboo topic in daily conversation, in research, and in literature. Examining the subject indexes of major American and British anthropological and sociological journals over recent years, he found not a single instance of the topics "envy," "jealousy," or "resentment" (Schoeck 1969:9-11, 134-59). Examination of the indexes of books on psychiatry and psychology is equally nonproductive: the usual sequence is from "environment" to "epistemology."

Yet envy is with us all the time; it surrounds us, and penetrates to our innermost being. Far more often than we consciously realize, we feel some degree of distress either because we recognize that we are fortunate enough to have something desirable not shared by those around us, or because we see that others have something we might also like to have. But we are reluctant to attribute such feelings to envy because few things are more destructive to our self-image. We can admit to feelings of guilt, shame, false pride, and even momentary greed without necessarily damaging our egos. We can even safely confess to occasional overpowering anger, and although we recognize the destructive nature of great anger, our self-image does not suffer as long as we can justify that anger. But to admit to envy is enormously difficult for the average American; unlike anger, there is no socially acceptable justification that permits us to confess to strong envy. Envy is untenable

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The present paper, submitted in final form 9 x 170, was sent for comment to 50 scholars, of whom the following responded: R. J. Apthorpe, H. Russell Bernard, Bernhard Bock, Jan Brøgger, Judith K. Brown, Stephen C. Cappannari, Jean Cuisenier, Roy G. D'Andrade, James Faris, Susan T. Freeman, Pauline Kolenda, Michael Maccoby, Simon D. Messing, Isidoro Moreno-Navarro, John Paddock, Harriet R. Reynolds, James E. Ritchie, Vera St. Erlich, Joel S. Savishinsky, J. D. Seddon, Francis Lee Utley, and Beatrice Blyth Whiting. Their comments are printed after the text and are followed by a reply from the author.

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript was prepared while I was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, 1969-70. I am indebted to Joan S. Warmbrunn for aid in editing and typing the manuscript.



and unacceptable. As Schoeck (1969:142) says, "The envious man will confess to almost any other sin or emotional impulse before he will confess to his own envy."

For several years I have asked students in a large undergraduate lecture course how many believe themselves to be: (a) virtually without envy; (b) moderately envious, or envious upon occasion; (c) very envious. About 50% of the responses fall in the first category, 40% in the second, and only about 10% in the third. Moreover, the 90% who deny major envy tend to be vociferous and argumentative: it is a personal affront to them to suggest that they are much more envious than they care to believe. This is not surprising. The extent to which Americans subconsciously recognize their envy, and its destructive power, is shown by the lengths we go to *deny* it: as children we are taught by parents and teachers that few things are as reprehensible as envy of the good fortune of others. Rather, we are taught, we must rejoice in the success of friends and colleagues. At a conscious level our training works well; in general we Americans genuinely believe we are not envious.

In the face of widespread agreement that Americans are not envious, and perhaps in the face of the "commonsense" negation of the hypothesis that they are, how can the importance of envy in American society, and its role in molding cultural forms in the world's societies, be demonstrated? It is here that the anthropologist's comparative approach to data proves most useful, for when many American cultural forms are examined in the context of envy behavior in other societies (of which the evil eye is a clear example) it becomes more difficult to deny the significance of American forms.

A part of our problem in recognizing our own envy behavior is that this behavior so often takes symbolic forms, the meaning of which frequently is obscure to us because of the psychological sensitivity of the subject. That is, we usually recognize symbolic behavior in exotic societies more easily than we recognize the symbolic behavior we ourselves utilize in structuring and preserving our own views of ourselves and the world about us. When, for example, a Spanish village youth, following centuries-old Castilian custom, declares his love for a village girl by throwing a knob-headed club through her front door, and thus formally proposes marriage to her, the Freudian implications are fairly apparent. But many Americans who would accept this interpretation of a widespread Castilian custom might think twice about the suggestion that the new father's offer of a cigar to his male friends may be interpreted as a symbolic gesture whereby he shares his virility with them so that they need not envy him the good fortune of a child. In other words, a cross-cultural study of envy behavior tells us a great deal about a primordial emotion that our society, at least, has neglected to examine.

At the risk of oversimplification, I would say that man views envy phenomena along two distinct axes, which for lack of better terms can be called the *competitive* axis and the *fear* axis. Envy behavior falling along the competitive axis can be thought of as *manipulative*, since the emotion is fully recognized;

manipulative envy behavior is utilized to attain specific goals. To induce envy in another, through conspicuous consumption or other means, is to raise or further secure one's status vis-à-vis the competitor or challenger. Envy, therefore, is an important element in a continuing power struggle in social relations, as Veblen long ago pointed out. Envy is also an important element in the functioning of an industrial economy. Through advertising, customers are persuaded to feel envy for the Joneses, and simultaneously they are shown how they can keep up with the Joneses, i.e., how they can avoid feeling envy for the Joneses. The nature and implications of envy behavior played out along the competitive axis have been widely discussed in popular and scholarly writings, and they are recognized by all of us.

While fully recognizing the importance of the competitive axis, I am in this paper concerned with envy's other—essentially ignored—axis: the (largely) symbolic, and hence covert, behavior manifest in cultural institutions and normative forms that seem based upon fear. To overgeneralize for a moment, we can say that man fears being envied for what he has, and wishes to protect himself from the consequences of the envy of others; man also fears he will be accused of envying others, and he wishes to allay this suspicion; and finally, man fears to admit to himself that he is envious, so he searches for rationales and devices to deny to himself his envy and to account for, in terms other than personal responsibility, the conditions that place him in a position inferior to another.

Within these general limits, my goals are dual. First, I want to show that a congeries of apparently unrelated behavior forms and attitudes widely distributed among Americans can best be explained in terms of envy behavior, thus supporting my contention that we, too, are a far more envious people than we wish to admit. And second, I hope to demonstrate that the behavioral forms and cognitive orientations that are used in all societies to cope with the fear of the consequences of envy adhere to a model, a pattern that transcends the peculiarities of individual cultures. Specifically, I believe that these forms conform to a principle of limited possibilities, and that consequently it is possible to draw up a typology of devices that account for envy-related behavior in all societies. It is, of course, premature to attempt to spell out this typology in detail, but I attempt to indicate how the principle works by showing that a person who knows or suspects he is envied selects evasive action that is not random, but drawn from a series of ranked choices that can be predicted by the circumstances of his situation.

It is important to emphasize that in my analysis I am constantly operating on at least two levels, the overt cultural and the covert symbolic, and it is not always possible in each instance to specify levels. The problem can be illustrated by brief reference to my analysis of tipping, which I discuss at length in a later section. I suggest that the custom of tipping, at least as far as origins are concerned, is best explained as a symbolic device intended to buy off the envy of people less fortunate than the giver, since the recipient is, before or at the time of the tipping, in a



position to work harm on the tipper. I do not suggest that every time a person tips he consciously fears the envy of the waiter, for clearly he does not. Once a custom is instituted, for whatever reason, it acquires an inner dynamic, a life of its own, and each entrant into a society host to the custom unconsciously learns the custom, as well as the explanation, if any, that goes along with it. Customs once embedded in culture may also take on new functions that appear to be unconnected with origins.

But symbolic meanings cannot be ignored, even in customs as commonplace as tipping, if we wish fully to understand them. When, for example, the word "tip" is explained as the acronym of "To Insure Promptness," and when the custom's function is said to be to ensure good service, or perhaps to establish the superior status of the diner, we say merely that tipping is of psychological utility to us; we do not exhaust the theme.

Americans, like other peoples, prefer explanation to no explanation; the relative equilibrium of our personal universe varies directly with our ability to account for its phenomena. Thus, precisely because tipping is a psychologically sensitive act as well as a commonplace experience, we feel forced to account for it. Our inherent craving for order in causality makes it impossible for us to leave tipping unexplained, and, to judge by the confident responses of students and friends to the question of what the word "tip" means, we feel we have a satisfactory explanation.

It so happens that our explanations, in my opinion, are pure folklore, totally unrelated to fact. Why, in the face of frequent poor service in restaurants, do we continue to tip? It certainly is not because of what society will think of us: if "society" knew, it would doubtless applaud our strength of character in refusing to leave a tip for poor service. Since the waiter may be the only one to know that a tip is not left, and since tipping takes place after the act, why do we nonetheless find it almost impossible to avoid tipping? We can only conclude that being served by another—even badly—establishes a psychological relationship that requires, for our peace of mind, the fulfillment of the prescribed ritual. We prefer to be angry with ourselves rather than to risk the anger of the waiter who, even though we may expect never to see him again, in some mysterious fashion haunts us. Symbolic-comparative interpretation of tipping behavior not only accounts for origins, but it also explains to us a great deal about our individual tipping behavior.

#### THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ENVY AND JEALOUSY

In everyday English usage the nouns "envy" and "jealousy," and their adjectival forms "envious" and "jealous," tend to be regarded as synonymous. This is unfortunate, for such confusion obscures the quite different natures of the ties binding people who are experiencing the emotional states which we describe with the words envy and jealousy. The two words are

quite distinct in origin, and, although semantically related, they refer to distinct aspects of what may be called a social (and emotional) state, act, or condition.

The adjective "jealous" is derived from the Greek ζήλος via Latin *zelos*. The Oxford English Dictionary gives as Greek and Latin meanings "emulation," "zeal," and "jealousy"; its contemporary definitions include

Zealous or solicitous for the preservation or well-being of something possessed or esteemed; vigilant or careful in guarding; suspiciously careful or watchful,

and

Troubled by the belief, suspicion, or fear that the good which one desires to gain or keep for oneself has been or may be diverted to another; resentful towards another on account of known or suspected rivalry.

Obsolete definitions given by the OED include "anger," "wrath," and "indignation," usages whose significance will be apparent when we consider the meaning of the "jealousy" of the gods for man.

In contrast to "jealous" and "jealousy," which have a single root through Latin to Greek, the Latin and Greek forms for "envy" and "envious" are quite distinct; it is to the Latin that we owe contemporary English forms. English "envy" stems from Latin *invidia* (which survives unchanged in modern Italian, and almost unchanged in Spanish *envidia*). Latin *invidia* is related to *invidēre*, a verbal form compounded from *in-* ("upon") plus *vidēre* ("to see"), i.e., to look maliciously upon, to look askance at, to cast an evil eye upon. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the infinitive "to envy" as

To feel displeasure and ill-will at the superiority of (another person) in happiness, success, reputation, or the possession of anything desirable; to regard with discontent another's possession of (some superior advantage which one would like to have for himself).

The potential aggression in envy is apparent in the obsolete meanings given in the OED: "to feel a grudge against (a person); to regard (a person or an action) with dislike or disapproval." Aggression is even further indicated by a second, obsolete definition of envy deriving from Latin *invidiāre*, "to challenge, = to vie, to contend for mastery, to vie with, to seek to rival."

It is also worth noting that English "invidious" derives from Latin *invidia*, for, as will become apparent in the course of this discussion, invidious comparison is the base on which envy stands.

Although Greek φείσος, the word most commonly translated as envy in English, has no direct etymological bearing on our problem, the form is significant to us because it was used by the Greek poets and playwrights to speak of the envy of the gods for man. Liddell and Scott, in *A Greek-English Lexicon*, translate φείσος as "bear ill-will or malice, grudge, be envious or jealous," as "ill-will or malice, esp. envy



or jealousy of the good fortune of others," and—this is especially important—“*resent, feel righteous indignation at.*”

With etymological origins in mind, the distinction between envy and jealousy, as played out in symbolic and social forms, becomes clear.

Envy stems from the desire to acquire something possessed by another person, while jealousy is rooted in the fear of losing something already possessed. In schematic form both emotions involve a dyad, a pair of individuals whose relationship is mediated, or structured, by an intervening property or object. The intervening object may take innumerable forms, such as wealth, a material good, the love and affection of a human being, or it may be intangible, such as fame or good reputation. The mediating property is possessed by one member of the dyad; the other member does not possess it, but wishes to. It is this desire that creates the feeling of envy in the latter person, making him what I shall call an “envier.” As Schoeck says, “Envy is a directed emotion; without a target, without a victim, it cannot occur” (1969:7). It is important to note that an envier is not envious of the thing he would like to have; he is envious of the person who is fortunate enough to have it. The possession is the trigger, but not the target, of envy.

Should the possessor realize he is envied, and should he view this envy as a realistic threat to a valued possession, he may experience jealousy. In contrast to envy, however, in which the emotion is directed at the other person of the dyad, jealousy is centered on the valued possession. A jealous person is not jealous of the envier; he is jealous of what he possesses, and fears he may lose. Toward the person he perceives as envying him, he may feel irritation, or anger, or fear, or guilt. If we can judge by the cultural forms associated with envy, fear of the envier, and of the consequences of his envy, is the most common reaction of an envied person, even though this fear often may be subconscious. Under some circumstances, and specifically in so-called guilt cultures (as will be discussed later), fear may be replaced by feelings of guilt.

Perhaps the primary distinction between envy and jealousy can be made clear by suggesting that a man may be envious of another man for his beautiful wife (he *desires*, but does not *envy*, the wife), but the husband is jealous of his wife if he fears she may leave him. Jealousy is thus seen to be the normal counterpart of envy, something that is triggered when the envied perceives, or becomes conscious of, the envy, and views it as a significant threat. Imagined envy also can produce jealousy, for it is the perception of being envied, whether one is in fact envied or not, that triggers the emotion. It is probably also correct to speak of jealousy when the jealous person is concerned about losing something valued, in the absence of direct envy, as when a man fears his wife may leave him, not for another man, but out of boredom.

To set the limits of my analysis, I have defined envy (and incidentally jealousy) in rather specific, perhaps rigid, terms. In everyday speech “envy” often is used in a casual, unemotional sense, as when a busy professional man expresses momentary “envy” of a

colleague who finishes his work early and heads for the golf course. This is not the kind of envy about which I speak, for both know the tables will be turned another day, and the “envier” will be the one to leave early. Nor am I concerned with a business executive’s “envy” of the schoolboy who enjoys a long summer vacation. I am concerned with envy in its major dimensions, when both the envier and the envied are assailed by strong, often passionate feelings. To me, real envy of another implies, if not the wish to change places with the person envied, at least the willingness to make a real effort to achieve what is desired or, if this goal is impossible, to deprive the envied person of the object of envy. The kind of envy that interests me is that which has a major impact on the mental state and personality of the envier, perhaps warping judgment and producing irrational fantasies, and which arouses in the person envied real feelings of fear, discomfort, or guilt.

#### SOCIOECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS THAT BREED ENVY

As we have seen, envy is present when one person has something a second person would like to have. The desired property may be a tangible good, such as food or money, which the envier needs for his very physical survival, or it may be a quality, attribute, or recognition that his psyche craves, and which may be necessary for his psychological well-being. In considerable measure, envy exists only because man feels that there are insufficient quantities of the good things in life—however he may define “good” things—for everyone to have all he wishes. With respect to material goods, this insufficiency is easily seen. If we look back upon human history, scarcity is the striking thing. All societies have economic systems, because rules for allocating scarce resources to alternate ends are essential to the survival of a society. In societies characterized by absolute shortages of the resources necessary for physical survival, and especially in “deprivation” societies, envy behavior is particularly apparent. By the term “deprivation society” I refer not to simple poverty or the absence of material resources and the power that goes with them, but rather to societies in which some people are poor while others are not, in which the well-being and power of those with plenty is visible to, and resented by, those with little. Throughout history peasants have been the deprived people par excellence, but deprivation behavior similar to that of peasants seems to characterize Negro ghetto life, American Indian society, Chicano communities, prisoner-of-war camps, starvation volunteers in controlled experiments, and other situations in which deprived people know they are discriminated against.

Taking peasant society as representative of the type, I have described deprivation societies as characterized by an Image of Limited Good (Foster 1965a, 1965b, 1967), as societies in which life is played as a zero-sum game, in which one player’s advantage is at the expense of the other. Since much of the evidence that will be cited in support of the basic envy hy-



pothesis advanced in this paper comes from such societies, it is necessary to look a little more closely at the envy implications of the zero-sum game. The important point in such societies is that all resources—all of the good things in life—are seen as constituting a closed system, finite in quantity as far as the group is concerned, incapable of expansion or growth. Hence, any advantage achieved by one individual or family is seen as a loss to others, and the person who makes what the Western world lauds as “progress” is viewed as a threat to the stability of the entire community. Consequently, in Limited Good societies, people hope to hold onto what they have, but they are reluctant to advance beyond their peers because of the sanctions they know will be levelled against them. In these societies social health is seen as based on shared poverty, a delicate equilibrium in which relative positions are changed as little as possible. Although in zero-sum game societies anyone who has food, health, children, and a modicum of material well-being is envied, this envy becomes aggravated when either of two situations develops: (1) somebody, or some family, rises significantly above the average, or (2) somebody, or some family, falls significantly below the average.

The person who is seen or known to acquire more becomes much more vulnerable to the envy of his neighbors. He knows that his neighbors may convert their envy into direct or indirect aggression, because they see his success as being at their expense. He therefore is likely to fear the consequences of their envy. At the same time the “average man” who envies and attacks his successful neighbor becomes in turn—and knows that he becomes—an object of envy when a neighbor family, through some such disaster as crop failure, ill health, or death, falls behind him. The afflicted family or individual resents those not so afflicted, and this resentment—envy of the good fortune of the family that has lost nothing—may cause harm. In the Greek village in which they worked the Blums encountered “jealousy of tuberculosis,” the envy of the sufferer for the good health of those not afflicted (Blum and Blum 1965:136):

... his jealousy [read “envy”] becomes the wish that others have the illness too. The intent is what is dangerous, for it may magically succeed in making others ill.

In zero-sum game societies—or situations—it is the *relative* difference that triggers the latent envy always present, and this difference may be produced by both rising and falling fortunes of people in the same group.

In more complex and wealthier societies, material properties do not cause envy because of their survival value except among people at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale. Envy seems, rather, to be bred by the competitive nature of such societies, by the desire to excel, to reach the top, to “prove” oneself in some way. High corporate salaries are not valued because they are essential to physical survival; they are valued for their symbolic evidence of merit and success in a competitive system. Academic prizes, accolades, and awards are not essential to physical

survival (although they facilitate salary increases); rather, as with corporate salaries, they are visible evidence of successful competition. Even in complex societies, however, much of the game of life is played according to the rules of the zero sum. Only one man can be President of the United States at a time, so the success of one contender is at the expense of the others. Nobel prizes are limited, and decisions must be made among many meritorious candidates. And in every hierarchically structured organization, there is less and less room as one approaches the top, so that one person’s success directly, if not fatally, prejudices that of others. Limited Good, i.e., insufficient quantities of the good things in life (whether defined as more food or more high honors), therefore seems to me to underlie a great deal of and possibly all envy.

### OBJECTS CAUSING ENVY

The objects producing envy are legion. Yet some are generally more desired than others, and these objects of envy seem to correlate, at least in a rough way, with levels of social complexity. In primitive and peasant societies three items—food, children, and health—rank far above others. Following these come economic values such as cattle, good crops, and productive gardens. Interestingly, clothing and shelter seem less likely to cause envy than the foregoing. Although it is tempting to invoke Freudian explanations for food envy, what strikes me even more forcibly is the “package” that the three more common envy-causing items together produce: the survival of the family unit as the basic social and productive unit of a society. When the “package” is reasonably complete—that is, when a family unit has adequate food, children, and health—there is at least a fighting chance to obtain some of the other desired things; when it is incomplete, this chance is lost. The need for food cannot be postponed; under conditions of extreme deprivation it becomes man’s paramount desire, for loss of food means loss of life. Since it is normally present in all homes, small in bulk, movable, and easily appropriated, its envy value is obvious. In slightly longer-range terms, poor health and chronic illness are almost as destructive to family continuity as is lack of food, since they make food production difficult and perhaps impossible. In the still longer view, the family that cannot reproduce its members is doomed to extinction. In traditional societies, in which 50% or more of all children die during the first year of life, and in which the childhood years take an additional toll, it is clear that a healthy infant with good life chances is indeed an indispensable—and hence envy-causing—object. People, food to sustain people, and health to work are the elements which produce or make possible the additional necessities of life. Poor housing and scanty clothing, while deleterious to physical well-being, are not an absolute threat to existence, as evidenced by the survival of groups such as the Ona of Tierra del Fuego, who get by with minimal shelter and clothing.



In more affluent societies traces of envy behavior associated with food, health, and children survive, largely in the form of courteous phrases and acts—to be discussed below—that probably survive from earlier, less affluent times. As a society's productive base broadens, when food becomes abundant and starvation is not feared, when most infants survive to adulthood, and when scientific medicine and public health services vastly reduce the threat of ill health, other objects of envy emerge. In American society wealth and power, and the good things they are thought to bring (including prestige and status), are perhaps the most common items causing envy. In upwardly striving families the symbols of wealth and power, such as fine homes, clothing, cars, and travel, frequently stimulate envious feelings. In scientific and academic communities, as pointed out, professional recognition in the form of coveted prizes, election to professional offices, and the like replace wealth as the most desired objects, since prestige based on wealth can be carried only to moderate heights in these fields.

## THE ENVIERS AND THE ENVIED

Although individuals envy individuals, and groups envy groups, for purposes of analysis it seems simpler to deal with envy in the former terms, as a dyadic relationship between the "envied" and the "envier." Quite apart from the basic psychological emotion and the property causing the envy, the relationship between the partners in the dyad will determine a great deal about the nature of the envy that exists. Culturally, at least, envy between two people who are conceptual equals, at least as far as their potential access to the coveted property is concerned, is quite different from the envy of a lowly "have-not" for an exalted "have." In other words, envy, at least among living human beings, is played out along two planes, or lines: (1) between *conceptual equals*, and (2) between *conceptual nonequals*. A third kind of envy, which fits neither of these two patterns, must also be noted: that of the gods, and of the dead, for men. Each of these will be examined in turn.

### ENVY BETWEEN EQUALS

Every society designates those of its members who are deemed eligible to compete with each other for desired goals, i.e., who are conceptual equals as far as the goal is concerned. In contemporary American society, siblings are defined as equals in competing for the love of their parents, and for their material estates as well. In countries practicing primogeniture, the elder sibling outranks the younger, at least as far as inheritance is concerned: with respect to this tangible goal, they are not defined as equals. In American society white Anglo-Saxon Protestants have been defined as conceptual equals, in that any individual from this background can compete, with some expectation of success, for the highest rewards. Negroes, Mexicans, American Indians, Orientals, and to some extent Jews have not been defined as their

equals, in that to varying degrees members of these groups cannot compete with them with any realistic expectation of success.

As Davis (1936:401) long ago pointed out, envy between conceptual equals appears to be based largely or entirely on the concept of rivalry, in which competition for some desired property occurs between more or less evenly qualified and matched opponents. In Western society, at least, the competition, whether in sports, politics, cards, or for the affection of a woman, is to be carried out according to "rules of the game" to which the competitors are expected to conform. When someone has been declared winner in any competition, he is entitled to enjoy the rewards, whatever they may be; for these, however, he is envied by the loser, who also wanted to win them. Between equals, it seems to me, envy is *latent* until the competition has occurred. A player in a golf tournament cannot envy a competitor prior to the match (although he may envy him for his suspected superior skill) when there is as yet no winner, and hence nothing to envy; it is only when the outcome is decided that cause for envy exists.

In societies in which competition between equals is based on this gamesmanship model, society validates the winner's claim to superiority and protects his rights to the prize. Consequently the winner has no need to *fear* the aggression of the loser, nor need he have feelings of *guilt* about his success. Moreover, since society expects the loser to abide by the decision—to be a "good loser"—the winner does not have to feel *jealous* of the prize, be it a beautiful wife or a golf trophy, for which he is envied by the loser. In fact, of course, not every "player" will abide by the rules of the game, nor will every loser, even where the rules have been observed, successfully repress his envy-based hostility toward the winner.

### ENVY BETWEEN NONEQUALS

Societies not only define those of their members who are deemed eligible to compete with each other for desired goals; they also define those who are *not* equal to compete, i.e., who are *not* conceptual equals. No society permits a son to compete with his father for possession of the mother-wife, or a daughter to compete with her mother for the father-husband. Children and parents are not conceptual equals. Between nonequals, however defined, there is no gamesmanship model to describe and structure relationships. The superior has something the inferior wants, but there are no culturally sanctioned ways in which the inferior may compete for possession of the desired object. Envy here is that of the "have-not" for the "have," and society's concern is to structure itself in such fashion that the disruptive effects of this envy will be minimized. This is commonly accomplished by means of age-grades, social classes, or a caste system. By social definition and common agreement (in a traditional world) these categories are composed of members who are equal among themselves as individuals but not equal between themselves as members of classes, and hence are not eligible to compete with members of other classes for desired things. In



fact, both the family and the class-caste system may be looked upon as social inventions intended (among other things) to eliminate rivalry between those who occupy different positions by defining all relationships between classes or generations as noncompetitive. No class or caste system can, of course, eliminate the basic envy of the have-nots for the haves, any more than can the family institution eliminate the (usually subconscious) envy of the son for the father.

Since in a strict have/have-not relationship there is no socially sanctioned competition for a desired property, the attitudes and behavior of the two parties are quite different from those that prevail when competition is permitted. The "have," presumably, is quite satisfied with the status quo; he wants nothing more than to maintain it. The "have-not" is less apt to be satisfied, and more anxious to change the status quo. Two courses of action are open to him: he may suppress, or renounce, his desire to take from the "have," or he may take such steps as he sees open to him to take from the "have." Whatever these steps may be, his society defines this action as aggression, since he has no right to try to take that which is held by another in a different status. This aggression may run the gamut from threats to witchcraft to outright force, the attempt to take from the "have," or to destroy that property if it cannot be transferred (e.g., as with a good reputation). Under these circumstances the possessor is jealous of his property because he fears the envier's trespass, which is the enactment of the latter's wish to possess what he believes he is legally or morally entitled to hold. As Davis (1936:396) points out, it is this concept of trespass that enables us to appreciate how jealousy can be both a noble and a base emotion. To be jealous of, or zealous in the defense of, a good name or some other property or attribute which a person has struggled to achieve is viewed as praiseworthy; the individual not jealous under these circumstances is viewed as lacking in character or courage. Jealousy becomes a base and destructive emotion only when displayed in the absence of trespass.

Since in the absence of competition based on rules of the game an inferior can take from a superior only through aggression, a superior who suspects envy is not only jealous of his possession, he is also *fearful* of possible aggression: he fears the evil eye, he fears the consequences of being seen eating, he fears outright attack. In affluent Western society it is probably correct to say "fear" only when the possessor believes he may actually lose what he cherishes as, for example, in a revolutionary setting. For example, in contemporary American society, which is clearly revolutionary, I think it is quite correct to speak of the growing "fear" of the middle and upper classes of the consequences of the envy of the lower classes, of minority ethnic groups, and perhaps of youth itself. This envy is expressed in violence and aggression whose goal, at the very least, is the right to share fully in the power and wealth previously reserved to relatively few.

But when a person is quite confident of his ability to hold what he has—as in middle- and upper-class American society until very recent years—what takes

the form of fear in less complex societies is replaced by feelings of *guilt*. The functional equivalence of fear and guilt in envy settings is seen more clearly in the contrast between a "guilt culture" and a "shame culture." As Gouldner (1965:83) has pointed out,

The basic difference between shame and guilt cultures is the agent or the locus of reproach. In shame cultures the reproachful party is some person other than the reproached; in guilt cultures the reproach comes essentially from the *self*, so that the reproacher and the reproached are one and the same person.

Well-to-do Americans, and their counterparts in other Judaeo-Christian industrial societies, have at least until very recently not felt "fear" of the envy of those less fortunate than themselves, but they certainly often have felt guilt, the moral discomfort occasioned by being too conspicuously well off in the presence of poverty, injustice, and discrimination. Guilt is felt for things we do not realistically expect to lose, and fear is felt for those things we quite possibly may lose.

Can a person "envy down"? That is, can a superior envy an inferior? Except in very general and atypical senses, it seems that one normally does not envy down. It is possible, of course, to argue that a rich man may envy a poor man for his beautiful wife, or that a busy banker envies the barefoot boy, fishing pole over his shoulder, on his way to the stream on a lazy summer day. But, granting possible exceptions, envy in general is of superiors, or between equals.

#### ENVY OF THE GODS, AND OF THE DEAD

In speaking of the envy of the gods, and of the dead, it is well to remember that we are dealing with phenomena of quite a different order than when we speak of the envy of humans. The envy of the gods, and of the dead, are psychological projections, extensions of man's cognitive orientation, eloquent testimonials to his generic and all-embracing fear of envy. We observe the envious behavior of peasants, or of colleagues, but we cannot observe the envious behavior of the gods or of the dead. We can observe only *man's reactions* to something he himself, in his imagination and fear, has created. When a man speaks of the envy or jealousy of the gods or of the dead, he is simply attributing to them the same emotions, the same passions, which consciously and unconsciously he recognizes in himself.

While many peoples fear the "envy" and "jealousy" of the gods, this fear is certainly best exemplified, and documented, in ancient Greek society. At first glance the Greek gods, who envy or are jealous of mortals, seem to contradict the proposition that one does not "envy down," for, although the Greeks anthropomorphized their deities, attributing to them the emotional qualities of man, they certainly did not see themselves as the conceptual equals of their gods. The answer to this apparent paradox begins to appear when we ask "for what did the gods envy the Greeks?" As Gouldner (1965:27) points out, the an-



swer is excess in any direction, and particularly an excess of success. The gods envy those mortals who rise too high, who dare to approximate the gods, or who imply through their actions and words that they do not need the favor of the gods to ensure success in their undertakings. In other words, it is the *hubris* of outstanding mortals, their arrogant pride, that provokes the "envy" or "jealousy" of deities. The obsolete definitions for ζηλος, "anger," "wrath," and "indignation," and for φεισνος, "resent," "feel righteous indignation at," are thus seen to have special importance in the present context. Although the gods *may* have been thought to feel envy and jealousy, in the contemporary senses of the words, it is clear that often what was meant was something quite different, something quite in keeping with the attitudes of gods who felt challenged by unworthies.

Ranulf, in his exhaustive study of the jealousy of the Greek gods, gives many instances in which is manifested by the gods in the face of behavior they feel to be immoral, improper, morally objectionable, or morally reprehensible (1933-34, vol.1:106-11). Thus, loose translations that read "jealousy of the gods" and "worthy of envy" in fact mean "moral disapproval on the part of the gods" and "deserving of blame." Clearly, when we speak of the envy or jealousy of the gods for man, we must know the context in which the Greek form is used, and not simply assume that "envy" and "jealousy" are simple, direct translations that adequately convey meaning. Often, we will find the gods feel anger or moral indignation at the *hubris* of the successful or daring man, for which they feel it necessary to punish him. Men—and deities—who see themselves on a moral plane qualitatively different from that of other, "inferior" beings resent behavior that challenges this view. Whether it is a white racist in the Old South who strikes down an "uppity" black man, or a Greek god who humbles the too successful Athenian, the same social and psychological processes are at work. The more powerful beings are exercising control to maintain a moral order which they see threatened by unqualified usurpers. They act not from envy or jealousy but from indignation and resentment.

In the case of the dead, I think it is semantically correct to speak of man's fear of their envy of the living. This envy is simply an extension of or projection from the widespread (at least in Western society) envy of the old for the young, of age for youth. In both instances there is no doubt about the coveted object that triggers envy: it is life itself, and the vitality that permits full participation in life. Although many societies provide compensations for advanced age in the form of honor, distinction, and even power, old age, with the end obviously drawing near, suffers invidious comparison with youth, with vigor, with opportunity. My impression is that, whatever the pleasures and reliefs of retirement, of freedom from worry about growing children, of time to putter, most people in our society who reach their seventies and eighties do not look upon this as the happiest period in their lives.

For believers in Judaeo-Christian and Moslem societies, the pain of old age and imminent death is eased

by the thought of a glorious afterlife, but in a majority of the world's societies the afterworld is not a particularly attractive place. More often than not it is a cold, gray, drab abode where conscious existence continues at most for several generations, after which the last traces of an individual existence are extinguished. With good reason the dead can be thought to envy the living, for with all of its hardships, its pain, its suffering, life is a more interesting experience than death. In such societies man sees the envy of the dead as particularly threatening because it is sparked by his supreme and most valued possession, the one which normally he fights hardest to hold on to: life. To feel envied because of life therefore places particular burdens on a culture in finding ways to alleviate what otherwise might well be perpetual panic. Later, we will note some of the ways in which this problem is met.

### THE EXPRESSION OF ENVY

Envy is expressed in direct and indirect, overt and symbolic forms. In less complex societies envy usually seems to be expressed toward the person envied by means of direct aggression and its functional equivalent, witchcraft. Although direct aggression and witchcraft are overlapping traits, found simultaneously in the same society, it is noteworthy that in small, tightly integrated social units in which outright violence would be self-destructive, direct aggression often seems played down, its place taken by an inordinate development of witchcraft. Conversely, in larger, less tightly integrated societies, greater degrees of violence can be withstood, and witchcraft often is less developed or feared.

In peasant societies envy is expressed to third persons by gossip, backbiting, and defamation, potent weapons for dissuading people who seek to rise above their level. Again quoting the Blums' study in Greece (1965:128),

... it was said that when good things happen to a villager, the other villagers express their envy in gossip, criticism, and calumny.

These, in all peasant villages studied by anthropologists, are the most powerful forms of social control.

In more complex societies, and especially in Western European society and its overseas offshoots, compliments appear to constitute a principal avenue of expression of envy, at least insofar as the psychological base is concerned. Most Americans, I find, are astonished by and disbelieving of the suggestion that praise and compliments may represent envious behavior, but when we realize that most societies discourage compliments and praise, because they recognize them for what they often are—aggressive behavior—the argument becomes more plausible. To pay a compliment (at least to a conceptual equal) often seems to be a culturally sanctioned device whereby in nondisruptive fashion envy of another may be expressed. The true feelings of the speaker (who may not himself recognize them) are dressed up, sweet-



ened, and made palatable, but for all the courtesy the actors often sense that compliments but thinly veil repressed sentiments of potential aggression: the person complimented has, of course, been told he has something the complimenter would very much like to have himself. This is why in America the recipient of a compliment often experiences some degree of embarrassment, floundering in his attempt to respond in just the right manner, not quite certain as to whether he should deny the validity of the compliment, or say "thank you," thus verifying the complimenter's charge.

The symbolic nature of compliments is well described by the Spanish novelist Miguel de Unamuno. In *Abel Sánchez: The History of a Passion* (1956), Joaquín Monegro is a physician, cursed all his life by envy of his childhood friend, Abel Sánchez, a successful painter. In one scene Joaquín goes to his club, where an implacable man named Federico Cuadrado would ask, whenever he heard anyone speak well of another, "against whom is that eulogy directed?" Unamuno continues, through the voice of Federico (p.103):

"I can't be fooled," he would say in his small, cold, cutting voice. "When someone is vigorously praised, the speaker always has someone else in mind whom he is trying to debase with this eulogy, a second someone who is a rival to the praised party. . . . You can be sure that no one eulogizes with good intentions."

The perspicacity of Unamuno's insight is striking when we examine attitudes toward compliments in other societies. In Tzintzuntzan, Mexico, the peasant village I know best, compliments are largely absent; they make people feel uncomfortable. This is generally true of peasant societies. Banfield (1958:144) writes of south Italy,

. . . one of the most interesting superstitions is the belief that invidious comment, even though made to flatter, will bring harm to the one who is put in the enviable light.

Even more striking is the following Italian incident, reported by Cancian (1961:8):

My attempt, in private, to praise a peasant friend for his large farm and able system of farming brought a prompt and vigorous denial that he did anything special. He said, "There is no system, you just plant." This attitude was expressed by others in forced discussions of farming.

Cancian offers this as illustrating the peasant's lack of confidence in his own ability. I think it is clear, however, that the peasant viewed the praise as threatening, since it reminded him of his vulnerability to envy triggered by the results of his superior farming methods. He was not denying hope of progress, but that anyone should have to envy him.

Guthrie cites a similar case in a Philippine village, where the phrase "he will be brought down" is commonly used whenever anyone prospers or appears to progress more rapidly than his neighbors. According to Guthrie (1970:6-7),

In the face of this outlook, individuals felt obliged to deny

their own effort, insisting that their achievements were a matter of luck and that their successes were undeserved.

In Greece, Campbell (1966:165) says,

It does not please a man to be told by another that his sheep are in excellent condition. Praise and admiration, it is thought, indicate the desire of the admirer (which may be quite unconscious) to possess what is pleasing to his eye. And since that is not possible, frustration is inevitably followed by envy.

Hamady (1960:166) writes that in the Arab world there are

some compliments which, even if well intended, are considered portentous. Laudatory expressions may attract the contrary of what they propose to say, because envy may be mixed with them. That is why a mother is not simply told that her son is handsome and healthy, or a proprietor that his house is splendid. It is feared that the son might fall sick and the house might burn.

In Timbuctoo, Miner (1953:103) writes of

the belief that compliments from nonintimates bring evil upon those praised. People therefore tend to avoid direct compliments and fear those directed to them.

And, of course, the elaborate precautions that have sprung up in many societies to neutralize the dangers of the evil eye are the best possible evidence of the fear of praise: it is usually the complimented child who is in the greatest danger of all.

One does not have to go to the underdeveloped world to find compliments unwelcome. Harry Golden, writing of the East Side of New York (1960:102), remarked,

Too much praise was the greatest danger, because it would call attention to the evil spirits who, out of jealousy, would harm a handsome child, a prosperous business, or a happy home.

And, speaking generally of his countrymen, the Mexican psychiatrist Díaz-Guerrero writes (1967:63, my translation),

We have the case of those persons who react antagonistically to approbation. I recall an instance: one says to a person, "*Caramba*, congratulations for having obtained these results, or for having done this job which has turned out very well." And the person replies, "Don't make fun of me," or "Don't say anything about it; it annoys me when people say that I have done well."

In suggesting that praise and compliments in Western society have an underlying psychological base of envy, I do not, of course, mean that everyone who compliments is even subconsciously displaying envy. It is not, I believe, inconsistent to analyze complimenting as a *cultural form* stemming from envy at a deep psychological level, and at the same time to recognize that the average American's compliment is often genuinely intended, with no implication of



envy. There are probably situations in which compliments are *always* nonaggressive, intended only to please, or to ingratiate, as when a male guest compliments his hostess's cooking. Since their roles are noncompetitive, and since the complimenter is enjoying the object complimented, he can hardly feel envy. A female guest's compliment might, however, veil envy if she felt she were not, but would like to be, as good a cook as the hostess.

When a superior compliments an inferior envy normally seems not to be present *if* the superior is secure in his position. A parent's praise of a child, intended to encourage him in some activity, can hardly be thought of as envious behavior, since the difference in status is clear. By the same token, a professor's praise of a good student paper normally would not be thought of as based on envy; in fact, it may well be thought of as a self-compliment, since superior performance by a student is evidence of the professor's skill in teaching. "Complimenting down," therefore, may be an expression of pleasure or satisfaction, based on security. By the same token, it may be an assertion of superiority, a claim to special qualifications not fully shared by the person praised. And, in a fluid setting (as in business, the professions, and the academic world), where bright and aggressive "comers," nominal inferiors, are in fact breathing closely on the heels of superiors, the compliment may indeed represent aggression toward a challenger, a near-equal who clearly sees that he is able to compete on equal terms.

Moral indignation, like complimenting, may also on occasion represent a socially sanctioned way of expressing envy, although the object of envy would appear to be more diffuse and less specific than with a compliment. Ranulf, in *The Jealousy of the Gods and Criminal Law at Athens* (1933-34), drawing from Greek mythology and the works of Greek playwrights and poets, argues persuasively that "the disinterested tendency to inflict punishment, manifested in the criminal laws and in the belief that the gods punish injustice" (1933-34, vol. 1:159), correlates positively with a society marked by a high degree of envy. That is, the disinterested tendency to inflict punishment for behavior that does not immediately concern the individual (i.e., society or the gods, rather than the individual, assumes responsibility) is disguised envy. Evidence supporting the hypothesis that moral indignation is disguised envy is harder to find than evidence for the hypothesis on complimenting, at least in the anthropological literature, but it seems clear that in some situations the argument is valid. In puritanical societies especially—which by definition are marked by a high degree of moral indignation—suppressed envy of those who violate conventional norms to enjoy prohibited pleasures seems to mark much condemnatory behavior.

Moral indignation, which is always at least potentially repressive, may also be a response to fear of the consequences of envy. I have already suggested that in contemporary American society upper- and middle-class people, for the first time in many years, are beginning to feel real fear of the consequences of the envy, translated into violent action, of segments of

society which have not shared extensively in power and well-being. The traditional guilt response remains, but it shares the stage with what for most affluent people is a new experience: real apprehension that their traditional favored status will drastically change. In this setting, moral indignation at the excesses of university students, rioting ghetto blacks, and striking Chicano grape-pickers is a common response. To appeal to conventional (read "traditional") norms by exhibiting shocked outrage not only reassures the threatened person of the moral unassailability of his position, but to him also justifies the repressive action which he feels is essential to the solution of the problem. Whether moral indignation is interpreted as a way of expressing envy of others, or of responding to the fear of the envy of others, its consequence—repressive action—is the same.

### THE RECOGNITION OF ENVY

Envy is sensed, or acknowledged, or suspected both by the envied and the envier. In simpler societies a person may explain ill health or other misfortune as the result of the envy of others, or he may fear the envy of others because he recognizes that with respect to some "good" he is in a more favorable position than they are. He may also sense envy in some form of direct physical aggression against him or his property. Certain beliefs and superstitions are institutional recognitions of envy. The evil eye is the most widespread of cultural definitions of situations in which envy is present, and where its harmful effects must be guarded against. Although children are the prime targets of the "eye," other valued property such as animals and crops may be damaged.

At first thought it may appear that the evil eye belief does not conform to the structure of envy outlined earlier in this paper—that envy is directed at the *possessor* of the desired object, not at the object itself—for it is the child who is afflicted, not the parent. But on second thought it is clear that by harming the child—or the animal or crop—the envier is striking at the parent or the owner by attacking his most vulnerable spot. Thus the immediate victim of the "eye" is only an incidental sufferer; the parent or owner is the one envied, and the one against whom the primary aggression is directed.

In Mexico and Guatemala envy is recognized institutionally in the folk illness called *chipil*. The post-weaning physical decline that afflicts many children in these countries, and which in considerable measure is due to protein-calorie deficiencies resulting from withdrawal of the breast, is popularly explained as due to the envy of the child toward the new foetus in his mother's womb which, when born, will replace him in his mother's affection. Without naming it, Ammar (1954:108-9) describes a similar phenomenon in Egypt:

It is assumed that the knee-baby is always jealous [read "envious"] of the lap-baby, and the yard-baby is jealous of the knee-baby. . . . It is also acknowledged that the youngest child becomes jealous immediately his mother's abdo-



men becomes enlarged in pregnancy and he is usually told of the forthcoming event.

Other noninstitutionalized behavior forms also reveal how deep-seated may be the fear of envy. In Tzintzuntzan, for example, most of the early opposition to installing glass windows in street walls was caused not by fear of thieves but by the fear that passersby would look inside and envy what they saw. Friends have told me in so many words that this is why they opposed windows.

The sensing of the presence of envy or potential envy is also revealed in certain positive acts performed by people who find themselves in a position in which, by cultural convention, they may reasonably be suspected of envy. These acts, which will be discussed below, usually take the form of symbolic reassurances that they do not covet what another possesses.

#### CULTURAL CONTROL OF THE FEAR OF ENVY

All societies appear to have cultural forms, attitudinal norms, and cognitive outlooks that serve to reduce the fear of the consequences of envy, thereby contributing to the stability of the social group as well as to the psychological well-being of the individual. Although these behavior traits are cultural, their effect is psychological, since in every instance an individual who feels he is in an untenable or potentially untenable position (i.e., one that threatens his physical or mental well-being) is provided an out—there is an act which he can perform or an explanation he can offer which he feels reduces the undesirable characteristics of the situation causing his behavior. These acts, attitudinal norms, and cognitive outlooks that serve to reduce anxiety stemming from fear of envy fall into three distinct categories: (1) those employed by a person who fears the envy of others for what he possesses; (2) those employed by a person who fears he may be suspected of envious feelings, and who wishes to demonstrate that such suspicion is groundless; and (3) those employed by a person who fears to admit to himself that he is envious because this admission will damage his self-image.

#### CULTURAL FORMS USED BY A PERSON WHO FEARS THE ENVY OF OTHERS

Four distinct but intimately related types of behavior may be initiated by people who fear the consequences of the envy of others, and who wish to reduce their vulnerability. I have called these types (1) *concealment*, (2) *denial*, (3) the “*sop*” (i.e., symbolic sharing), and (4) *true sharing*. The striking thing about these forms of behavior is not that they fall into only four major categories, but that they fall along a continuum of preferred choices, in the order I have listed them. That is, an individual does not choose one or the other according to momentary whim, or even according to cultural dictates. Rather, and largely apart from cultural specifics, people prefer, if at all possible, to conceal

whatever properties they fear may be envied. When concealment seems impossible or inappropriate, their second choice is to deny that anyone can have reason to envy them. When denial is deemed inadequate as a response, symbolic sharing of the desired object, in the form of the “*sop*,” is the next choice. And finally, if no other alternatives are viable, people who fear the envy of others will be forced into true sharing, the distribution of a significant part of the possession for which they are envied.

*Concealment.* The basic logic of concealment is aptly described by the Reichel-Dolmatoffs (1961:403) for the small mestizo town of Aritama in Colombia:

The best prophylactic measure an individual can take . . . consists in not appearing enviable in the first place and in pretending to be poor, ill, and already in trouble. One should, therefore, never boast of one's health and property, never make an ostentatious display of one's belongings or qualities, never let it be known that one possesses some advantage over others.

Kenny (1966:34) describes the same attitude in a small Spanish village in Soria: “There remains a desire to appear poor, even if one is not. . . .” On the strategy of concealment, nothing I have found is so graphic as the Indian villagers' words paraphrased by the Wisers (1951:157):

Our walls which conceal all that we treasure, are a necessary part of our defense . . . they are needed against those ruthless ones who come to extort . . . our fathers built them strong enough to shut out the enemy, and made them of earth so that they might be inconspicuous. . . . But they are a better protection if instead of being kept strong they are allowed to become dilapidated. Dilapidation makes it harder for the covetous visitor to tell who is actually poor and who simulates poverty. . . . Old walls tell no tales.

Where children are envied, elaborate symbolic and nonsymbolic steps may be taken to conceal pregnancy. In Tzintzuntzan, a pregnant woman tightens her abdominal garments for as long as possible to hide the fact that she is expecting. When physical concealment is no longer possible, euphemisms are used to speak of pregnancy and childbirth. Pregnancy is an “illness,” and the act of delivery is “to get well.” The birth of an infant receives no publicity, and new fathers try not to mention the event, even to good friends. When the news finally leaks out, well-wishers are told they “have a new servant at your disposal in your house,” a symbolic offer to share which reduces the danger of envy, because if the well-wisher in fact can have the child, he has no need to be envious. Abbott (1903:123) reports a similar birth secrecy pattern in Greece:

When the first symptoms of his approach have manifested themselves, great care is taken to conceal the fact from the neighbors. Otherwise it is feared that the confinement will be attended by much suffering, due to the evil influence of ill-wishers or to the evil eye. For the same reason the midwife is summoned in all secrecy and under a false pretense.



In Tzintzuntzan, as in Mediterranean and Latin American countries in general, the 40-day "quarantine" period, when mothers are expected to remain concealed within their homes, seems functionally designed to lengthen the period in which mother and infant are spared the danger of prying eyes, until they develop or are restored to normal strength. Ammar (1954:97) writes about Silwa, Egypt that "on enquiring about the sex of a child, if it is a boy, his sex is usually hidden at first to be declared afterwards." The *couvade* may be looked upon both as concealment and denial, since by focusing attention on the healthy father, it spares the mother and infant danger from evil spirits.

Concealment also takes more abstract forms, particularly in the concepts of private property and the right to personal privacy. The former facilitates seclusion, which may make concealment more feasible, and the latter is institutionalized recognition (at least in some cultures) that man must be permitted devices that enable him to escape the worst of envy. Yet, significantly, the exercise of the right to privacy in those societies where it is permitted more often than not seems to have just the opposite effect, to heighten suspicion, to stimulate envy. As Schoeck (1969:295) points out,

If a man really makes use of his right to be alone, the annoyance, envy and mistrust of his fellow citizens will be aroused, even in cultures where a private life is a permissible and long-established institution.

It therefore sometimes becomes necessary, as will be pointed out in the following section, to demonstrate that one does not value privacy; this is a way of denying that there is anything hidden that may be worth envying.

*Denial.* Denial of reason to be envied takes the forms of both verbal protestations and symbolic acts. Speaking of their Greek village, the Blums (1965:40) report:

The man who is successful denies it in order to forestall other people's envy, the demands of relatives, neighbors, and tax collectors, and the wrath of the gods, who also envy worldly success and strike down men who are "overweeningly proud."

In the Arab world, according to Hamady (1960:172),

Successful people greatly fear the vicious eye and often rich people denounce the reality of their fortune to keep away the bad influence of envious eyes.

In Tzintzuntzan, when a friend admires a new possession the owner characteristically replies with some such answer as, "Really? I find it very ugly," thus symbolically suggesting that the admirer is mistaken in his appraisal and that he therefore has no reason to envy him. In non-Western society compliments—quantitatively far less frequent than in the United States, as we have seen—are discounted routinely. In Mexico a person who is told he looks well is made most uncomfortable, and he replies by assuring the speaker that appearances are deceiving, that in fact

his health is most precarious, and that last week he was at death's door. Isabel Kelly (personal communication) tells of an instance in Xochimilco, near Mexico City, in which she told a woman, the assistant to a *curandera* (female folk medical practitioner) that she had very lovely hair. The woman replied that formerly she had had a great deal more hair, but that recently much of it had fallen out. And, by way of explanation, she added, "It's because I have kidney trouble." Obviously, however lovely her hair might appear to another woman, she was hardly a person to be envied. The Reichel-Dolmatoffs (1961:313) find the same health syndrome in Aritama:

To admit openly that one is healthy is to challenge the social order. The usual and more acceptable attitude is one of complaints, of exaggeration of the importance of any boil, cough, any sneeze. To live "suffering" is perhaps not a Christian virtue, but in Aritama it is the best way to demonstrate that one is a well-meaning and harmless member of the community.

Ammar (1954:97), describing the 40-day postnatal quarantine in Egypt, speaks of the "secrecy and psychological delicacy" surrounding the mother's activities:

... when a visitor comes to the house the mother covers herself as well as the child and pretends to be feeling rather uncomfortable, either groaning or suffering from pain.

Obviously she is hardly to be envied.

Symbolic denial of reason to envy also takes such forms as dressing children poorly, allowing them to run dirty, or giving them unattractive names. Wolf (1968:37) says that in Taiwan

parents commonly give their sons deprecatory nicknames such as Small Snake, or Thin Dog, hoping by this display of scorn to make their most valued possession less attractive to malicious ghosts.

Ammar (1954:92) tells of a man in Silwa, Egypt, whose children died early because they had attractive names; later children were called by such names as "Pot" and "Sack" so that they would not be envied, and they survived. Ammar also describes (1954:111) how children to the age of ten are allowed to be dirty and unkempt:

Mothers justify this neglect on the grounds that the child at this stage, where he is usually out with other children and thus exposed to the public, should not appear attractive for fear of the evil eye.

Among the Madigas of India symbolic denial that a child is valued is common. According to Srinivas (1942:148), the child is given a denigrating name, and

is put into a winnow and drawn on a manure-pit and a paternal aunt kicks the winnow with the child in it with her left foot, to deceive the fate into a belief that the child's parents are so indifferent to its value that the child is hardly worth taking away from them.

The evil eye is also thought by many believers to



threaten material possessions. In Mediterranean countries beads and other amulets often worn by donkeys reflect their owner's apprehensions, and in an amusing contemporary extension of this pattern, Egyptian owners of automobiles sometimes attach a worn and dirty shoe to the grille of the vehicle. Symbolically they are denying reason to be envied, since obviously the car is so unreliable that often they are reduced to walking home after a breakdown (Hussein Fahim, personal communication).

Mourning rites, emphasizing somber clothing and the avoidance of pleasurable activities, also constitute symbolic denial that the life of the survivors is worth coveting. Thorough mourning rituals, which may extend to self-mutilation, make life look so unattractive that no ghost would wish to share it. Mourning rites seem designed to deceive the spirits of the dead into believing they have left behind nothing of consequence. Nearly two centuries ago Brand (1777:28) recognized the symbolic significance of one element in mourning, the funeral procession. In the paragraph headed "Of following the corps to the grave, what it is an emblem of," he wrote:

The going of the Corps before, shewed that their Friend was gone before them to the State of Death; and their following after, was much as to say, that they must also in a short Time follow him thither.

By symbolically telling the deceased that they will follow him in a short time, the living hope to counteract possible envy of their good fortune in continuing to be alive.

Refusal to exercise the right to privacy, in those societies where the right is recognized, also constitutes a denial of reason to envy. Schoeck, from his vantage point of a German with long residence in the United States, remarks (1969:295-96):

Anyone who lives long enough among Americans today must notice how greatly many of them still fear to indulge in what their fellow men might consider to be undue privacy. In so far as possible they try to show that they have nothing to hide [hence, nothing to envy]. A drive after dark through a middle-class suburb will reveal countless families behind the uncurtained windows of a living-room or dining-room, as in a goldfish bowl. With few exceptions, modern Americans still fight shy of surrounding their houses with fences or hedges, at least of the kind that might give complete concealment.

Similarly, in the Spanish peasant village of Becedas, Avila, Spain, Stanley Brandes (personal communication) has noted that almost inevitably when visitors come to a home the door to the street is left slightly ajar, so that passersby may look inside. He interprets this custom as symbolic behavior intended to indicate that the host and visitor have nothing to conceal from the other villagers.

In the United States the behavioral forms commonly associated with the character trait of *modesty* can be thought of as denial of reason to envy. A "modest" person, in responding to praise or a compliment, is likely to say "Oh, it was nothing at all," or "It wasn't really anything." Such response constitutes

denial of special ability or excellence and, of course, at a deeper psychological level, of reason to envy. In American small towns families that are significantly wealthier than most others often manifest a standard of living, in home, dress, and other activities, that is below that which they are capable of supporting, and below that which they might enjoy if they lived in larger cities in more affluent neighborhoods. In many middle- and upper-class American families, modesty is instilled in children from an early age. They are taught, however indirectly, that life will be easier if they give as little reason as possible for others to envy them. Modesty is, in fact, a "have your cake and eat it, too" character trait, since it not only reduces possible envy, but is also a safe way in which to enjoy the praise frequently lavished on modest people. By being modest, a person is declaring his adherence to the egalitarian ideals of our society, behavior which can only evoke approbation.

In the United States, some complimenting may represent symbolic denial of reason to envy. Friends tell me that on occasion they have felt superior to or more fortunate than colleagues or friends in such things as acquisition of a new car or home, critical acclaim for a professional publication, or receipt of a scientific award, and that because of this they have felt vaguely uncomfortable; in fact, they sense possible envy because of their good fortune or success. In order to reduce this discomfort, they quickly compliment the person in question on *his* car or home, a recent professional publication, or a scientific honor, thereby symbolically denying that they themselves are to be envied.

*The sop.* In common English usage a "sop" is a token item given to assuage the disappointment of someone who has lost in a competition, or who has not had success comparable to others. We "throw a sop" to placate such a person. A sop can thus be thought of as the loser's compensation, a symbolic sharing of good fortune by the winner with someone who does not in fact share in the good fortune. In other words, the sop is a device to buy off the possible envy of the loser. That the idea of a sop may be psychologically discomforting is indicated by the frequency with which it takes the form of a humorous "booby prize." As in other sensitive situations, humor is called in to gloss over what might otherwise be a more painful experience.

Symbolic sharing, and the symbolic offer to share, can thus be described as "sop behavior." Interestingly, Spanish terminology and usage are parallel. The noun *remojo* comes from the verb *remojarse*, "to soak something in water," i.e., to "sop" it. In a figurative sense it means to invite friends to drink, to celebrate the debut of a garment, a purchased item, or some other happy event for the host. A *remojo*, therefore, is a symbolic sharing. In Tzintzuntzan, when friends note that someone has a new possession, they may shout "El remojo, el remojo," meaning, "Give us a sop to make up for the new possession you have." Usually no sop is given, but the lucky person is careful to acknowledge the request by assuring the askers that



the object is at their disposal, thereby removing cause for possible envy.<sup>2</sup> For more striking acquisitions owners may forestall action by offering something before being asked. On one occasion a storekeeper who significantly improved his building and enlarged his stock gave his regular customers small gifts, telling them these were their *remojo*.

Sop behavior is seen in the widespread Spanish and Spanish American custom whereby upon emerging from the baptismal service in the church, the godfather scatters coins—the *bolo*—to the village children who have gathered for the event, thus symbolically sharing with them the good fortune of the family in having a new member. In Greece sop behavior is manifest in the village studied by the Blums (1965:40):

The owner of an admired object is quick to recognize that to admire is to want. In order to forestall the damage of envy, and to placate the admirer and establish a more favorable balance of obligation, the owner of the admired object gives something small to avoid having to give something larger; he may offer some portion of the admired object to the person who admires it. Thus, the gypsy who admires a dress is given a coin in order to forestall her potent curses, and the government is offered acreage if the landowner fears his large properties might be sequestered.

In Jordan, according to Lutfiyya (1966:56),

If the guest admires any item in the house during his stay, the host will offer it to him as a gift. The guest, of course, is expected to decline the offer.

Similarly, in the Egyptian village described by Ammar (1954:82-83),

... in the good old days if a visitor expressed his appreciation of an object or a utensil, the host usually offered it to him.

Although this is no longer the rule,

the spirit ... still persists in the case of a woman visitor who, for instance, admires the tea offered to her whereupon her hostess usually wraps some dry tea to take with her, and the same might happen in the case of a pot or a jar which could be spared, being given to the admirer.

In Turkey a person who brings good news may be rewarded with a tip which has a special name, *mush-tuluk*, used only for this occasion (communicated by Steven Dedijer). The southern American custom of *lagniappe*, a small tip given to a boy who is sent to bring something, represents similar sop behavior. The Turk who receives pleasing information may well be envied by the bearer of the news, who also might like similar good luck, and the small boy might well like for himself that which he brings. In both

<sup>2</sup> The force of *remojo* behavior was once brought home to me when an unmarried woman told of a dream in which a recently deceased friend had returned from heaven wearing new shoes, which she offered to the dreamer with the explanation that they were too large for her, and that anyway when she went to heaven she was given "a new dress and everything, very elegant, for me to enter into Heaven." Even in Heaven envy is feared!

cases the tip symbolically compensates the bearers and neutralizes their possible envy.

In addition to *lagniappe*, sop behavior appears in a number of forms in American culture, as when the new bride kisses the groom's friends, thus symbolically and harmlessly sharing her favors with them. And for her unmarried girl friends who may envy her good fortune, the sop is her bridal bouquet. The groom shares *his* good fortune in symbolic fashion by throwing her garter, for which his unmarried friends scramble for possession. And what could be a greater symbolic sop than the custom of the new father passing out cigars to his male friends upon the occasion of the birth of a child? He is saying, symbolically, "Don't envy me my masculinity; here, I will share it with you, so you too can be virile."

Middle- and upper-class Americans, when travelling for business, and particularly for pleasure, often feel compelled to bring home presents for friends and relatives who have been left at home, who have not had the pleasure of travelling and seeing the world. As many readers of this paper will recognize, the chore of finding the right present for the right person often weighs heavily on travellers. This is, of course, sop behavior, a symbolic sharing with the less fortunate of the joys of the trip. The postcard with the ubiquitous "Having wonderful time, wish you were here" greeting is also a symbolic expression of a desire to share. After all, if a friend or relative who confesses to a good time expresses the feeling he would be enjoying himself even more in the recipient's company, the recipient can hardly wish the traveller ill.<sup>3</sup>

Sop behavior may also be represented when in America friends and neighbors send food to the home in which a death has occurred. The common explanation is that many mourners will come, they must be fed, and this neighborly gesture in some small way reduces the load on the bereaved family. Although this is certainly the overt justification for this custom, and the contemporary reason why we engage in this behavior, I doubt that this explanation accounts for the origin of the custom. As I have pointed out, people who fall behind others—in wealth, health, or a functionally complete working family—have reason to envy more fortunate people. Death, especially of a working adult, is one of the harshest of all blows, economic as well as psychological, and the survivors have good reason to envy more fortunate families. In Tzintzuntzan mourners who come to the wake bring small presents: a liter of dry beans, a small bag of shelled corn, five pesos, a bottle of alcoholic beverage, and the like. *Cooked* food usually is not among the items proffered. In the context of the envy syndrome, in a community where

<sup>3</sup> That travel may be a sensitive envy-provoking area is evident by the behavior of American academicians who are almost apologetic about travel not associated with research or other professional activities, which validate and thus justify—in fact, force upon one—travel. Academicians often are apologetic when forced to confess "We were really just tourists." The colleague to whom the confession is made must then hasten to assure the speaker that the role of the tourist can be an honorable one, that he himself has travelled as a tourist, thus reassuring the first speaker that he harbors him no grudge for his good luck in travelling.



envy is rife, we appear to have in this custom a sop, a token, symbolic gesture whereby the mourners tell members of the bereaved family, "you have suffered a loss, but you need not feel envious of us, for we bring you gifts to make up for the loss of your loved one." Whatever the rationale in contemporary America, it seems likely that the practice of bringing cooked food to the home of the recently deceased owes its origin to the custom of an earlier time, when feelings and motivations were less disguised than today.

In an earlier generation in small Middle Western towns, middle- and upper-class people, as individuals, as families, and through service clubs, Boy Scouts, and other organizations, delivered Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets of food (and toys, in the latter case) to impoverished families deemed worthy of such "charity." Thanksgiving and Christmas seemed sweeter once this duty had been executed. In England the Boxing Day custom of giving presents to servants and tradesmen on the day after Christmas is certainly sop behavior, symbolic sharing of the good fortune of the privileged classes.

The English custom of the "harvest supper," described by Brand in 1777 (p.303), also suggests sop behavior:

When the Fruits of the Earth are gathered in, and laid in their proper Receptacles, it is common, in the most of Country Places to provide a plentiful Supper for the *Harvest-Men*, and the Servants of the Family; which is called a *Harvest-Supper*, and in some Places a *Mell-Supper*, a *Churn-Supper*, &c. At this the Servant and his Master are alike, and every Thing is done with an equal Freedom. They sit at the same Table, converse freely together, and spend the remaining Part of the Night in dancing, singing, & without any Difference or Distinction.

Brand adds (p.308):

The Respect, shewn to Servants at this Season, seems to have sprung from a grateful Sense of their good Services.

Comparative analysis, however, strongly suggests that fear of possible envy rather than gratitude for help is the psychological motivation underlying this custom.

Sop behavior also marks the relationships of many peoples with their dead. Annual or periodic grave offerings of food and drink fall into this category, as do other propitiatory rites that serve to assure the dead that their descendants still think of them and wish them well. Still, considering the basic unattractiveness of the afterworld of most primitive peoples, these seem like weak sops indeed, hardly adequate to the task of buying off the envy of the deceased. But what better way is there to cope with this primordial fear of the dead? I find it tempting to speculate that heaven (in the Judaeo-Christian and Moslem forms) is basically a device invented to allay fear of the envy of the departed. If true, this is sop behavior at its imaginative best. What better means could there be, to assuage the envy of the dead, than to provide them a celestial abode far more splendid than that which they have left behind? From the standpoint of envy-reducing concepts, the establishment of heaven was a double-barrelled success. Not only did it reduce to

near zero the danger of envy of the deceased, but in a class system with drastic differences in access to the good things in life, it has been the single most effective belief, through thousands of years of history, in reducing envy between classes, and in making low status and poverty bearable. And it so turns the tables that the living envy the dead, placing the latter on the defensive. Life, with its sorrows and suffering, is but a brief prelude to the true substance of existence, where all are equal before God, so that death can be anticipated with equanimity, if not with outright joy.

Most sop behavior involves a token gift. But *offers* to share, in the absence of an actual presentation, must also be classed as sop behavior. The Spanish language and customs seem particularly rich at this level. In Spain and Spanish America courtesy requires that when someone admires something belonging to another (as, for example, a dress, a necktie), that person says, "It's yours." A similar symbolic sharing offer is seen in the custom where, when a person is asked where he lives, he replies, "*Your* house (i.e., that of the asker) is at such-and-such an address." Who knows, perhaps the asker has a less desirable home, and envy may be present in his query; by placing the house at his disposal, possible envy is neutralized, since one doesn't envy the possessor of things he already has. The widespread European custom of offering to share food in public dining rooms (discussed below) also constitutes a symbolic offer without actual transfer of possession.

*True sharing.* True sharing, by which I mean a significant sharing going well beyond symbolic sop levels, takes many forms—from a social commitment to informal distribution of the good things in life to the graduated income tax, grudgingly extracted from the sharer. However sharing is accomplished, when its degree is significant it has a leveling influence which reduces the envy that is based upon differential access to desired things. Most true sharing appears to be accomplished within institutional frameworks, where the legal and/or moral sanctions are so great that the individual has little or no choice. This type of sharing will be discussed in the following section. But there is no absolutely hard and fast line between voluntary and institutionalized sharing: rather, we are dealing with a continuum in which one shades into the other.

Real, as contrasted to symbolic, sharing can be achieved on the basis of an informal social commitment to equality in which an individual is willing to be pressured by public opinion into sharing his well-being with his colleagues. Jayawardena (1963:48) describes how, in the total absence of a formal institutional framework, equality is maintained on Guianese sugar plantations by voluntary sharing of hospitality.

High expenditure on conviviality has the important function of helping to maintain the solidarity of the group. The formal structure of labour relations emphasizes the independence of each labourer, but there is an "informal structure" which maintains group cohesion. The organizing principle here is the equality of social status and prestige among all labourers expressed in the notion of *mati*.



The word *mati* connotes the idea of group solidarity, ties, and friendship, a highly desired bond of equality. According to Jayawardena (1963:50),

One of the ways in which the tie of *mati* is affirmed is conviviality, especially drinking together, which signifies social equality.

Jayawardena then describes (p.52) how

conviviality maintains the bonds of *mati* indirectly by siphoning off wealth in excess of that required to maintain a minimum standard of living. Social equality is bound up with living at a similar standard, but differences in skill, strength, capacity to work and a variety of other factors result in unequal incomes and opportunities. Income in excess of the common level of requirements could be used for "capital improvements," in raising living standards, saving and investment, acquiring prestige goods, etc., and so for asserting superior social status [which certainly would breed envy]. But a high expenditure on conviviality prevents this potential cleavage within the relatively homogeneous group. Great esteem is attached to liberality and parsimony is disapproved of. Low-status labourers in particular criticize more abstemious upwardly mobile persons on this score. The emphasis on spending thus performs a double function—reaffirming the bonds of *mati* and inhibiting status differentiation.

The Latin American *mayordomía* fiesta system, which will be discussed below, accomplishes the same end of shared poverty, but within a formal institutional structure.

*The sequence of preferred choices: an illustration from eating customs.* A series of isolated examples cannot fully show that there is a progression of alternate choices of envy-reducing behavior, a sequence which depends on the likelihood of success of each. I consider this sequence of preferred choices to be one of the most impressive things about envy behavior. The abundance of examples of envy behavior from the realm of food and eating make this topic particularly well-suited to illustrate our theoretical point: that concealment, the preferred behavior, gives way to an ordered sequence of alternate devices when hiding of food is not feasible.

Since food is a scarce and much-desired commodity in most of the world, and has been so throughout human history, not surprisingly the person seen dining or in possession of food may be envied, or suspect he is being envied, by those without food. This fear of envy is manifest in many places as, for example, the southern Spanish village of Yegen where the British writer Gerald Brenan lived before the war. Brenan writes (1957:133):

Quite a number of women of the poorer sort seemed to feel an antipathy for food and would rather be offered a cup of coffee than a good meal. Others were ashamed [read "afraid"] of being seen to eat and, if compelled to do so in public, would sit in a corner with their backs to the room. I once knew a family of well-to-do people, of partly gypsy descent, each of whom cooked his own food and ate it at a separate table, with his back to the others.

Brenan correctly describes the conditions that lead to eating secretly (1957:133):

One must expect such feelings to arise in a country where for many people food is scarce and any sort of eating an act of daring and extravagance.

Simple concealment is the most effective way of avoiding possible envy of food, and certainly it is the most economical. In Egypt (Ammar 1954:116), southern Italy (Banfield 1958:112), and Tepoztlán, Mexico (Lewis 1951:297), to name a few places, food carried from market to home, or from home to home, is concealed from prying eyes beneath a cloth. In peasant villages such as those of rural Mexico and Guatemala, houses of adobe walls and tile roofs further facilitate concealment, since cooking and eating need not be visible from the street. But when friends and neighbors drop in, as they often do, anyone seen eating usually feels compelled to share his meal. Hence, any device which can reduce the time one is vulnerable, that is, the time one is eating, and avoid calling attention to the fact that one is enjoying food, has protective value. In Mexico and Guatemala people usually eat in silence, each on his own chair, often with no table. Children are trained to silence by being told that "the guardian angel is giving you your food," or "Be quiet, for the Virgin is serving you." This training is so effective that on one occasion in Tzintzuntzan I saw a hundred children gathered in a patio for a government-sponsored school breakfast, all eating in near-silence, hurriedly, and without the play and jostling that would be inevitable in the United States. In Egypt, according to Ammar (1954:116), although children display food freely

... adults are quite secretive and scrupulous about their food. . . . [they] are wary of being exposed to the eye of a stranger while they are eating; they feel that if they do not ask the stranger to join them in the meal, he might have a bad effect on what they are eating.

Specific cultural forms denying that one has food, or that the food one has is worth envying, seem rare. Perhaps the custom in Tzintzuntzan whereby the host at a wedding or baptismal fiesta apologizes profusely for his poor fare (however elaborate and bountiful it may be), reminding his guests that he is a humble man with a poor house, and craving their forgiveness for his inability to attend to them "in the style they merit," is symbolic behavior intended to deny that the food usually present in the home is worth envying.

In contrast, sop behavior is highly developed in food envy situations. When people must dine out in public, as do muleteers, tradesmen, or other travelers staying in public houses, they cannot avoid exposing themselves to the gaze, and possible envy, of strangers. The particular form of sop behavior adopted to neutralize this danger depends on the perceived relationships between the persons involved. Between conceptual equals—as by definition are all persons who have access to the same dining room—sop behavior takes the form of the diner inviting the new arrival to the dining room to share his meal with him, a formal invitation extended with full knowledge that it will not be accepted. Between nonequals—as by definition are the diner and the



waiter—the sop takes the form of a tip, a small amount of money proportionate to the value of the meal or drink. In this fashion the waiter is symbolically invited to share in the good fortune of the diner, although at a subsequent time, and, presumably, in a different place and on a lesser scale.

In Spain and Spanish America—to this day in small country inns—a diner greets each conceptual equal who enters the room with “*Gusta [Usted comer]?*” (“Would you care to share my meal?”), thereby symbolically inviting the stranger (or friend) to partake of the good fortune of the diner. The new arrival ritually replies “*Buen provecho*” (“Good appetite,” i.e., may your food agree with you), thereby reassuring the diner that he has no reason to fear envy, and that he may eat in peace. The entrant normally would not think of accepting the invitation, and the courtesy appears to have the double function of acknowledging the possible presence of envy and, at the same time, eliminating its cause.

That the fear of envy when seen dining is, or in the past has been, widespread is indicated by the number of countries and languages in which forms similar to the Spanish are found. In Yugoslavia a person entering a room of diners says “*prijatno*” (“may you enjoy it”), to which the diner’s response is “*muala*” (“thank you”) if he is a stranger in a public restaurant, or *izvolte* (“please take [food],” i.e., share with me) if the diner is a friend (communicated by Steven Dedijer). In Egypt, according to Robert Fernea (personal communication),

When you are surprised at your food you say *Idfadal*. The response from the passerby is *Allah Khallik*—which literally means “God let you,” in fact, “God let you continue to exist,” i.e., “May you not suffer the evil effects of envy because of your food, least of all my envy.”

German *Mahlzeit*, French *bon appetit*, Greek *kali óreksi*, and even the breezy American *enjoy your food*, while certainly a step further removed from a sense of envy, convey the same good wishes.

In public dining rooms and bars, a waiter as well as an arriving guest may very well envy the diner or drinker. Since the waiter in fact has much greater control over the well-being of the diner than does the casual stranger—the food or drink are in the waiter’s actual possession—his good will is even more desirable. It therefore makes sense to be even more considerate of the waiter than of the casual fellow diner, by *insisting* that in some small way he participate in the diner’s good fortune. This is accomplished by means of the tip, a symbolic sharing with the waiter which, one hopes, will neutralize his envy. The diner or drinker is in effect saying to the waiter, “You need not envy me; look, I am giving you something so that you, too, can enjoy what I am enjoying.” The strength of this argument is apparent if we consider the collective evidence of the etymology of “tip” and “to tip” in several languages:

French: *pourboire*, from *pour* ‘for’ + *boire* ‘to drink’  
 German: *Trinkgeld*, from *trinken* ‘to drink’ + *Geld* ‘money’

Spanish: *propina*, from *propinar* ‘to give a drink to, to treat’  
 Portuguese: *gorgeta* ‘drink money’; also *dar gorgeta* ‘to give money for drink’  
 Polish: *napiwek*, from *na* ‘for’ + *piwo* ‘beer’  
 Swedish: *dricks*, from *dricka* ‘to drink’  
 Finnish: *juomarahaa*, from *juoma* ‘drink’, + *rahaa* ‘money’  
 Icelandic: *drykkjupeningar*, from *drykkju* ‘drink’ + *peningar* ‘money (gold)’  
 Russian: *chaevye* [*den’gi*] = ‘tea [money]’; also *dat’ na chây* ‘to give for tea’  
 Croatian: *Napojnica* ‘to give to get a drink’; from *napiti* ‘to fill oneself with drink, to get drunk’

A tip, clearly, is money given to a waiter to buy off his possible envy, to equalize the relationship between server and served. English *tip*, in the light of this comparative evidence, can only come from *tipple*. Tipping is not, as is often averred, a device in a class-conscious society for asserting superiority over servile people; it is payment, pure and simple, for protection, the need for which is sensed at a deep psychological level. This is not the appropriate place to explain why *other* people are also tipped, such as barbers and porters. I would only point out that most people tipped have at the time of tipping very considerable power over the tipper or his possessions. A barber holding a razor is a man whose good will is highly desirable. So is that of a porter, who could easily disappear with one’s bags. Finally, perhaps the moral indignation with which we inveigh against the excesses of tipping in itself reveals deep-seated psychological discomfort.

Real hospitality, the actual sharing of food, also alleviates the fear that one’s good fortune is envied. In an affluent society or in well-to-do circles, hospitality is a genuine source of satisfaction, an act far removed from the primitive fear of envy. Still, it seems likely that at least one of the roots of hospitality lies in the fear of envy. Speaking of the village he studied in southern Spain, Pitt-Rivers (1954:61) suggests that the custom of offering food has very little to do with “the community of mankind” spirit, but is rather a precaution to avoid arousing the envy of the person not eating. Among the Arabs, says Hamady (1960:172),

To avert the danger of a suspect’s covetous eye from someone who is eating, he is invited to partake of the food or at any rate is offered a morsel.

In Tzintzuntzan the peculiar (to Americans) situation in which at a baptism or wedding feast the guest list is never fully known in advance is explicable in terms of fear of envy. The hosts must ceremonially escort honored guests from their homes to the home of the host; in so doing, they are highly conspicuous, and onlookers of course know that a fiesta is in process. Any friend or neighbor seen on his doorstep as the procession passes by is invited to “accompany” the group, i.e., to come to eat. Most refuse, but some



accept, and no prediction as to how many extra guests will arrive is possible. Consequently, the host's wife must prepare far more food than will probably be consumed, against the contingency that very large numbers will come (Foster 1965a:30-31).

Full sharing of food is the most logical device for coping with the fear of envy when house construction and spacing make secrecy difficult or impossible. In much of Africa, stick-walled, grass-roofed huts make it impossible to conceal the fact that people are cooking or eating. Hence, fear is ever-present. Wilson (1963) writes about the Nyakyusa of Malawi that witchcraft and sorcery, due above all else to envy, are much feared. Since "it is believed that the impulse to witchcraft comes from the lust for milk and meat" on the part of neighbors, "neighbors must be fed or they get angry; feeding a witch on milk or beef pacifies him. . . ." (p.164). "Good food rouses the envy of witches . . . , and the man who eats alone is felt to be in danger . . ." (p.105). Since the houses of the Nyakyusa are relatively flimsy and closely spaced, it is hard to conceal from a neighbor the fact that one has milk and meat. Hence, they have solved the food-envy problem in a fashion diametrically opposed to that of Mexican peasants: it is considered very bad manners for a person to eat alone. As Wilson says (p.67),

For conversation to flow merrily and discussion be profound there must be *ifyakwangalela*—"the wherewithal for good fellowship", that is, food and drink—and very great stress is laid on sharing these. Men and boys are expected to eat regularly with age-mates. . . . From the time a small boy begins to herd he is encouraged to bring home two or three friends to eat with him, and in turn he visits each of them. . . .

Since men and boys eat by turn in each other's houses, no one gains or loses. Thus, both Mexican peasants and the Nyakyusa have found culturally appropriate ways to cope with the fear of food envy. The peasants first attempt to hide their good fortune, then they symbolically share it, and only as a last resort do they actually do so. The Nyakyusa, on the other hand, are forced by home types and settlement patterns to meet the problem head-on, and they resolve it by placing negative sanctions against eating alone, against *not* sharing food. Both are logical functions of total culture patterns.

In view of the role of housing as determinative of the options open to fearful diners, the evidence from the Copper Eskimo is interesting. Jenness (1922:90) writes:

In the winter, when each housewife cooks in her own hut, she can hide away some of the choicer portions of the meat for her husband and herself to eat after all the visitors have left; but in summer, when most of the cooking is done out of doors, everyone gathers round the pot to eat and no concealment is possible.

#### CULTURAL FORMS USED BY A PERSON WHO FEARS HE MAY BE SUSPECTED OF ENVY

We now turn to those cultural devices used by people who feel they may be suspected of envy, or whose

position or situation is such that they may reasonably be suspected of envy. These devices are far less numerous and varied than those used by people who fear envy. They consist largely of symbolic expressions calculated to reassure the listener that actual or implied praise does not in fact mean envy, or that the recipient of the gesture need not fear the initiator of the action. Symbolic reassurance has already been partially discussed, in treating of food anxiety. In cultures in which the evil eye is feared, people go to great lengths to exculpate themselves from possible charges of wishing harm. These consist either of asking God's blessing for the child, or for saying in symbolic form that the child really is not envious in the least. Ammar (1954:97) tells how in his Egyptian village visitors in referring to a baby

must be careful not to praise it openly, unless they use the safeguarding phrases such as "God preserve him" (or her), "may the Prophet's blessing be upon him."

The same pattern prevails in other parts of the Arab world, where, according to Hamady (1960:166),

a pious formula, thought to annihilate the bad magic effect of praise accompanies the compliment—*Allah yihfazu* (God protect him) or *Ism Allah 'aleyh* (God's name on him).

In Timbuctoo, according to Miner (1953:112), since compliments from strangers are believed to cause harm to fall upon the object of the compliments, praise must be qualified by some such circumlocution as "God should see it." In Mexico one may say "God bless you" when admiring a child, but more often an admirer strikes or bites the child on the cheek, or slaps it on the rump. This act suggests disdain, symbolically saying, "I praised the child, but I didn't really mean it. Would I slap or bite someone that I really esteem?" In other words, "You have no need to fear my envy, for it does not exist." In Greece, "the one who envies . . . is known to be dangerous" (Blum and Blum 1965:40). If envy is expressed through admiration, according to the Blums (1965:40), and

if the admirer himself is conscious of his power and wants to forestall it in some situation where he genuinely wishes no harm, he will perform a ritual of riddance upon himself, spitting and publicly imputing the worthlessness of that which he admires in order to protect it from the spell he might otherwise cast upon it.

In Greece it is almost obligatory to say *méyeiá*, "wear it in good health," to someone who appears in a new dress or shoes, thereby assuring the owner that he or she is in no danger of envy (Christopher n.d.:22), while in Egypt, according to Robert Fernea (personal communication, 1964), the similar *Mabruk* ("blessings [on you]") is uttered, to which the response is *Allah Barik fik* ("God bless you").

Fear of the evil eye consequent upon praise, and of envy of fortune, is a dominant theme in Isaac Bashevis Singer's novel, *The Manor* (1969), which tells the story of a Hassidic Jewish family in Poland from the time of the 1863 Polish insurrection until the end of the 19th century. The hero of the story, Calman Jacoby, starts from modest origins and attains busi-



ness success, but experiences at every step of progress the fear of envy. In one scene, in which Miriam Lieba, the daughter of Calman and his wife Zelda, is introduced to Temerel, the wife of a rabbi, Temerel initiates the following exchange (p.65):

A beautiful girl!  
Thank you.  
And tall. May she escape the Evil Eye.

Temerel thus indicates that her praise is not based on personal envy for a younger and more beautiful woman, and that she wishes her well.

In a later scene Miriam Lieba declines to marry Temerel's son, so Calman asks his next youngest daughter Tsipele, "not quite eleven," if she will marry the man, a wish to which she accedes. Speaking to her Calman says (p.69), "You are—may the Evil Eye spare you—a beautiful girl."

And in a much later scene (p.229) Calman considers his uncontrollable son by his second wife: "At first Calman consoled himself saying that it was all because the boy was, may the Evil Eye spare him, so amazingly strong."

On another occasion, Calman reflects upon his growing wealth, and its implications for his relationships with his coreligionists and employees: "Yes, Calman had already learned that envy was the people's worst trait" (p.159).

Curiously enough, boasting—usually seen as ostentatious behavior calculated to induce envy in others—may also be used as a device to assure another that he is not envied for his possessions. Writing from Egypt more than a century ago, Lady Duff Gordon (1969:148), with her usual perspicacity, recognized that some boasting was politeness

so that one may not be supposed to be envious of one's neighbours' nice things. My Sakka (water carrier) admired my bracelet yesterday, as he was watering the verandah floor, and instantly told me of all the gold necklaces and ear-rings he had bought for his wife and daughters, that I might not be uneasy and fear his envious eye.

In sports and other competition, and in politics in America and England, the loser is expected to offer "congratulations" to the winner, acknowledging that the competition has been fair, and that he wishes the winner well. Failure to offer congratulations is rightly interpreted as evidence of ill-feeling, a grudge which, in fair competition between equals, marks the loser as a poor sport, one who did not deserve to win.

In all these instances the speaker addresses someone who has *more* of something than the speaker appears to have at the moment, and who therefore may reasonably suspect that the speaker's friendliness masks envy, which he—the speaker—must counter to prove his good intentions. Reassurance can also be directed downward as, for example, when the person who hears someone sneeze says to him, "*Salud*," "*Gesundheit*," or "*God bless you*." In some societies a sneeze symbolizes the loss of the soul which, if not recovered, leads to death. In others it is recognized, more realistically, as the possible early warning of illness, the loss of health, perhaps produced by witch-

craft or some other envious feeling. To wish a sneezer "health" is thus an elementary precaution that calls the sneezer's attention to the fact that it is hoped he will remain in good health, that no one wishes him to fall ill. In Africa the same pattern is found among the Ibo, as recorded by Chinua Achebe in the novel *Things Fall Apart* (1959). The mother, Ekwefi, is stealthily following a priestess who is taking her ten-year-old daughter, Ezinma, through the night. Achebe writes (p.9),

The air was cool and damp with dew. Ezinma sneezed. Ekwefi muttered, "Life to you." At the same time the priestess also said, "life to you, my daughter."

A person who recognizes or confesses to being worse off with respect to some good than a friend or relative is also in a position where he may reasonably be suspected of envy of the more fortunate person. Literature, and everyday experience, are replete with instances in which a complainer—because of health, ungrateful children, or some other unpleasant experience—will hasten to assure the listener that "I hope you will never have to suffer what I have suffered." To cite a single instance, in *The Manor* Calman wishes to show Temerel through his house, but she declines, saying, "I have—may you be spared the same—a headache" (Singer 1969:66). Having confessed to indisposition, and thereby placing herself in a position in which her society acknowledged the likelihood of envy, she declares that she is not guilty of the potential charge by her pious wish that Calman will not suffer the same pain.

To show no interest in the possessions of others is also an envy-reducing mechanism, doubtless much more widely used than appears to be reported in the literature. Korten (1968:60) describes how this mechanism works in Ethiopia:

The asking of questions, other than those which form a ritualized part of the greeting and which in turn have appropriate ritualized answers, is considered very impolite. . . . The normal curiosity and questioning of children is met with sharp rebuke and children soon learn to avoid such behavior. . . . it is the mark of the noble's good breeding that he does not express curiosity. Likewise if a guest examines personal articles belonging to his host, it is considered rude and a sign of poor breeding.

The same psychological device is apparent in the Egyptian custom whereby a barren woman, who is particularly apt to be envious of a pregnant woman or a new mother, will avoid contact with the child until it is past the dangerous early months if she wishes to prove her good will (Robert Fernea, personal communication, 1964).

In societies where diners dislike being observed, spontaneous withdrawal at mealtime or calculated lack of interest in another's food reduces the likelihood that one may be accused of envious thoughts. Moerman (1968:10) reports that in Thailand "village etiquette forbids all but intimates to watch someone eat." Not surprisingly, Moerman continues (p.10), even the most inquisitive villagers,



who would stay for hours poking into every inch of our house, would leave once we unrolled the dining mat. Children would be upbraided for not disappearing, or at least for not averting their gaze while we ate.

In Ceylon, Yalman (1969:81) reports that Sinhalese villagers do not like being seen while eating, and that they almost always cook and eat indoors behind firmly closed shutters. "My own informants would retire in haste if they found me eating in darkness inside my hut," an act of good manners calculated to assure the diner that he is not envied his food.

Finally, as pointed out earlier, by not complimenting and not praising, one avoids giving the impression that one envies the possession or attribute of the person complimented or praised. No single behavior trait calculated to reassure the possessor of a desired property that he is in no danger is as widespread as this.

#### CULTURAL FORMS USED BY A PERSON AFRAID TO RECOGNIZE HIS OWN ENVY

Early in this paper I noted how remarkable it is that one can admit to feelings of guilt, shame, pride, greed, and even anger without loss of self-esteem, but that it is almost impossible, at least in American society, to admit to feelings of envy. I think the explanation of this difference, or at least a very important part of the explanation, lies in the fact that in feeling guilt, shame, pride, greed, anger, and other similar emotions, a person is not necessarily comparing himself to another or evaluating his performance against that of another with respect to some quality or characteristic. But in recognizing envy in himself, a person is acknowledging inferiority *with respect to another*; he measures himself against someone else, and finds himself wanting. It is, I think, this implied admission of inferiority, rather than the admission of envy, that is so difficult for us to accept. Sullivan, one of the few psychiatrists who have written on envy, sees it in this light (1953:355):

This element of self-pity is within calling distance of a group of substitutive activities that I have already mentioned—that enormously popular business of entertaining envy. Envy perhaps is in no sense self-pity, but certainly it is substitutive activity. It is called out in all sorts and kinds of situations where the person with customarily low self-esteem is disturbed. And it saves one from invidious comparisons which would be anything but uplifting to one's self-regard.

Again (Sullivan 1956:129),

... we find that the people who are much at the mercy of envy have learned to appraise themselves as unsatisfactory—that is, as inadequate human beings.

And finally (Sullivan 1956:132-33),

... envy is not pleasant because any formulation of it—any implicit process connected with it—necessarily starts with the point that you need something, some material thing that, unhappily, someone else has. This easily leads to the question, Why don't you have it? And that is itself enough

in some cases to provoke insecurity, for apparently the other fellow is better at assembling those material props of security than you are, which makes you even more inferior.

To admit to inferiority, either openly or masked as envy, is neither pleasant nor easy. Cultures must therefore provide the envious person, the one who feels inferior, with rationalizations and other devices which help him continue to function as a reasonably well-adjusted individual. The cultural devices we find that do this job generally function *by removing the locus of responsibility* from the person who feels envious or otherwise inferior, and placing it outside his sphere of control. Inferiority perceived as due to uncontrollable agents or conditions outside the individual, while unpleasant, may be at least bearable. Inferiority perceived as due to personal inadequacy, lack of competence, or poor judgment is much more difficult to accept, since it is so damaging to the self-image.

In looking at the ways in which the locus of responsibility is placed beyond the control of an individual, it is clear that the concept of "fate," of "luck,"—either in some generalized form, or as the will of a deity—is the most widespread form of rationalization that makes an inferior position bearable. To be "down on one's luck" is not to admit moral inferiority; it is to account for a condition in terms of events over which one obviously can have no control. If he attributes a competitor's advantage to luck, fate, or chance, an individual suffers no diminution in status, since by definition the competitor has no moral claim to superiority. If fate deals one a bad blow, it is disagreeable, but it is even more disagreeable to have to believe that the "bad blow" is due to one's own shortcomings.

Among cultural forms that may play a role in envy reduction in this context, the principle of division by lot seems important. In some peasant societies, scarce—and often communal—resources are allocated by lot for various periods to different members of the society. These may include hunting and fishing rights, pasture land or cultivable fields, or the right to exploit common lands for fruit or firewood. Rural Spain illustrates particularly well the principle of lot in allocating resources. Since the results of drawing lots are governed by fate, the losers, however rueful they may feel, are clearly not inferior to the winners, who in turn cannot be envied because fate has smiled on them. Moreover, the goal of ultimate and average equality is furthered by setting time limits on the exploitation of resources, since this year's loser may be next year's winner.

#### INSTITUTIONAL FORMS THAT REDUCE ENVY

I have already described how cultural forms which reduce envy and the fear of envy present the individual, at least theoretically, with the option of choice. A loser cannot be forced to congratulate a winner; a diner of strong character can fail to leave a tip if he feels it is not merited; and a peasant does not



necessarily have to hide his well-being. But societies are also often characterized by more formal institutionalized devices to cope with envy, which leave the individual much less choice. In American society devices that are at least semi-institutional include socialization practices which teach children that envy is shameful, and the congeries of ideas about fair play, rules of the game, and losing without loss of face.

#### REDISTRIBUTIVE MECHANISMS

Among the most important of institutional forms that serve to reduce envy are so-called redistributive, or siphon, mechanisms, which serve to draw off excessive well-being from some people and to redistribute it among those less well off. In complex societies the several forms of taxation are the principal devices designed to achieve not absolute equality but a narrowing of the gap. In peasant and preindustrial societies, ceremonial expenditures often achieve the same end. In many Latin American peasant communities the annual round of fiestas is sponsored by one or more *mayordomos* for each event, who often make expenditures that plunge them into debt for months or even years, thereby reducing them to a level at or (temporarily) below that of previously less affluent neighbors. Through the institution of the fiesta, a community marshals public opinion to the point where only the strongest individual can resist. Society refuses to allow the average person to reach a permanent plateau where he can be envied. I have described how this mechanism works in Tzintzuntzan (Foster 1967: Chap. 10), and it is not necessary to repeat the details here. Apart from religious festivals, the elaborate expenditures attendant upon baptism, marriage, and death found in many parts of the peasant and preindustrial world also fit the model of redistributive mechanisms.

#### ENCAPSULATION

There are also institutional forms more rigid than ceremonial systems that compel, or very nearly compel, an individual to adopt or conform to envy-reducing rules. I speak here of mechanisms that break complex societies into smaller, more homogeneous units, among which relationships are so ordered as to reduce the opportunity for the have-nots to envy the haves. In theory, if not always in practice, a major strength of an egalitarian society derives from the fact that since differences in access to good things are slight, envy is reduced to a level where it is not a seriously disruptive force in the society. Schoeck (1969:105) sees this when he writes:

The utopian desire for an egalitarian society cannot . . . 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.

In classical peasant societies people seem to sense this basic structural principle, and seek to adhere to it by enforcing an egalitarian poverty for everyone. Curiously, however, envy becomes the dominant de-

vice used to enforce egalitarianism, so that the cure is at least as bad as the illness. Logically, it would seem, envy should be less prevalent within an egalitarian society, or an egalitarian subunit of a larger society. In fact, I doubt that this is the case.

*Encapsulation* is a device making use of the egalitarian principle to produce subsocieties within wider civilizations, in which all members ideally have about the same access to what are considered to be the good things in life. Encapsulated social units are marked off from each other by social, psychological, cultural, and often physical boundaries. When all or most of the people in a country accept the principle of subsocieties, each with its own rights, perquisites, and obligations to others, envy seems greatly reduced between people of different statuses—at least in traditional, slowly changing societies—since it does not occur to the person with less that he can realistically achieve the level of the person with more. A caste system is the encapsulation device par excellence; a class system is a less rigid, less frozen functional equivalent. So-called plural societies are composed of two or more encapsulated social units. Encapsulation also takes the form of private clubs with restricted membership, retirement communities and homes, restrictive suburban neighborhoods, and other institutions that bring together people of comparable means and statuses, excluding those deemed not meeting entrance requirements. The family, too, with its hierarchical division between two basic categories, parents and children, can be thought of as conforming to an encapsulation model.

A major problem associated with encapsulation is the defining and enforcing of boundaries. Physical segregation is the most obvious way of drawing boundaries between social subunits and, at least for the upper classes, the psychological benefits are obvious. Urban ghettos serve to reduce guilt (or fear of envy) feelings among privileged classes by keeping poverty beyond their sight. In colonial Africa the "African towns" of European African cities likewise served the same function. But, since cross-caste or class relationships are unavoidable even in encapsulated societies, physical boundaries, however sharply drawn, are not sufficient to maintain the subunit. Cultural forms, including implicit premises about group relationships, are essential to the support of segregated units. And, of course, as in India, encapsulation is by no means invariably based on segregation.

The concept of pollution is one of the most ingenious of cultural inventions designed to support an encapsulated society where envy between haves and have-nots is bound to be present. Whereas in Western society we have invented the tip to cope with the fear of harm that might follow being seen eating, or being served, by less fortunate people, the high-caste Hindu has solved this problem by refusing to be seen eating at all by other than members of castes of equal status. By eating only with those people who are equals, or accepting food only from equals or superiors, one runs no danger of ill effects. Whatever the origin of



the caste system in India, the Brahman taboo against being seen eating by members of lower castes certainly is an efficient device to avoid the dangers of food envy.

In the pre-Civil War American South the problem of boundary maintenance was solved in a different, but equally effective, fashion by defining the Negro slave as a nonperson who consequently could be no more of a threat than any other kind of nonperson. His potential envy threat thus neutralized (at least to the satisfaction of his masters), he could safely be used in the kitchen and at the table, in the nursery and in the parlor, without fear of undesirable consequences.

Within families, encapsulation is achieved in part through segregation and in part by means of commonly agreed upon rules of behavior (such as the "commonly agreed upon" rules in India that inhibit low-caste people from infringing upon high-caste people). Novels and historical accounts suggest that the 19th- and early 20th-century upper-class English family was almost as segregated a society as Britain itself, or its overseas colonies. Children were relegated to the nursery, under the care of nanny, where they ate alone; at an early age they were bundled off to boarding school, and thus permitted only occasional contact with their parents. And, when in the presence of these august persons, they were to be "seen but not heard." Physical segregation is far less marked in families in most societies, although in middle- and upper-class America we perhaps still see traces of it in early bedtimes, enforced afternoon naps, and the like. More important in enforcing the dichotomy between family age-grades has been the ability of parents to insist that children adhere to what culture defines as "proper" behavior. In the past in our society, children and youth have been encapsulated because they lacked the power (and perhaps the desire) to do otherwise.

Encapsulation reduces the visibility of a single family or individual across subunit boundaries, since as a member of a group, the family or individual

appears to lack the distinctive characteristics that would set it (or him) apart if standing alone. Envious eyes from without have no single obvious target. This reduced visibility principle enables us to extend the definition of encapsulation beyond formal social institutions to any situation in which an individual or a class may freely enjoy the good things in life without feeling vulnerable, because of excessive conspicuousness, to the envy of others. The American Easter parade is an example of such an extension of the definition: by wearing new clothes when many other people are doing the same thing, the wearer assuages possible guilt feelings in that the envy or criticism of people who do not have new clothing, or whose new clothing is less elegant, is diluted among many people. Even in a peasant village such as Tzintzuntzan, new clothing may safely be worn, without fear of criticism, only on the occasion of the annual village fiesta, in late winter.

When the traditional encapsulation forms of a society begin to be questioned, almost always by encapsulated groups who feel they have suffered at the hands of more powerful groups, revolution threatens. The latent envy of the poor, of minority ethnic groups, of youth—and apparently even of women—begins to be translated into action, ideological and violent at the same time. When subordinate encapsulated groups feel they have the power to challenge the established order successfully, envy becomes a potent force in bringing about social change. This is what is happening in contemporary American society. In the past disadvantaged encapsulated groups have borne their status with patience, assured that with the passage of time, and by self-improvement, they too would enjoy the good things in life. Encapsulation in America, in the form of caste, class, and family groups, has been a potent factor for generations in suppressing envy between groups, and thereby contributing to a basic social stability. It is clear that in the future this device will work much less well. How envy can be controlled, or if it can be controlled, remains to be seen.

## Abstract

Envy is a pan-human phenomenon, universally feared, at least subconsciously, as a particularly dangerous emotion, since it implies hostility and aggression capable of destroying individuals and even societies. Especially in Western society, man has rather successfully repressed his true feelings about envy, which he is taught is the most shameful and reprehensible of all emotions. But even while denying it, man in all cultures has found devices, most but not all of which are symbolic, to cope with his fear of the consequences of envy.

In this paper I distinguish between envy and jealousy (the terms are badly confused in English), note the objects that most frequently cause envy (food, children, and health), and analyze envy relationships between both conceptual equals and conceptual nonequals (concluding that one does not "envy down"). I then note the ways in which envy is expressed, including the symbolic "compliment," much

feared in many societies because it is recognized as an expression of envy. Particularly striking is the fact that in those situations in which the envy of others is feared, culture dictates a strategy of evasive behavior based on a specific sequence of preferred choices. That is, when an individual fears envy he first attempts to *conceal* his good fortune; when this is not practical, he falls back on *denial* that there is reason to envy him; when this is not adequate, he *symbolically shares*, and only as a last resort does he *truly share*. This sequence is illustrated with a detailed comparative analysis of food-envy behavior, including tipping, which is explained as a symbolic device to buy off the envy of the waiter.

Cultural forms used by an individual to cope with the fear that he is suspected of envy are then noted, as are those used by a person who fears to acknowledge his own envy. Finally, institutional devices to reduce envy are discussed briefly. The paper stresses the ways in which cultural forms have been developed to aid man in coping with psychological problems.



## Comments

by R. J. APTHORPE☆

*Geneva, Switzerland.* 2 IX 71

It is not only "in peasant societies [that] envy is expressed to third persons by gossip, backbiting, and defamation." I think I have quite often heard American women in small groups on "social" occasions, for instance, acknowledging ("admitting" would beg the question here) their envy of something that is at present in someone else's possession but could have been theirs had a determined enough effort been made at the right time. It is not my experience that "it is almost impossible, at least in American society, to admit to feelings of envy." Could it be that Foster had mainly men, interacting on other sorts of occasions, in mind? My disagreement here is as much about method as content. Affirmations that "a society," whether "American" or "peasant" or something else, has or does not have this or that cultural orientation are meaningless if the situation or kind of situation or relationship or sector concerned and its significance are not specified. I do not agree that envy, as an emotion, a cognitive orientation, or a behaviour node, may be inherently or culturally untenable; it all depends, in the last analysis, on what occasion or circumstance it is that one has in mind. To leave this out of the discussion is to settle for a pot-calling-kettle-black kind of argument.

For comparative sociology on the imaginative and compendious scale to which Foster addresses himself here as in his earlier work on *Limited Good*, two tasks are of compelling importance. The first is definitional, the second distributional. The method of apt illustration is apt as an aid to the former. For the latter it is not. Evaluating "The Anatomy of Envy" from these two points of view, I do not find it to be very helpful on the distributional count—i.e., as descriptive of where and in what context the phenomenon in question occurs, and with what degree of significance pragmatically and positivistically—although certainly the ideas of "redistributive mechanisms" and "encapsulation" are pertinent. It is as an essay in conceptualization that it is very suggestive ("guilt is felt for things we do not realistically expect to lose, and fear is felt for those things we quite possibly may lose"). Simmel (1955) on envy and jealousy could also be construed in effect as saying, to borrow phrases I have used elsewhere, that "envy is to competition what jealousy is to hierarchy" and "honour and its obverse

shame contrast with respect and its obverse guilt." It is an odd omission that Simmel does not appear in Foster's bibliography; their respective positions and points of departure are very similar.

by H. RUSSELL BERNARD☆

*Pullman, Wash., U.S.A.* 18 x 71

In this article, Foster opens up a vast area of study. His algorithmic model of envy avoidance behavior (concealment, denial, sop sharing, and true sharing) makes intuitive sense. Several cautions and suggestions are offered here towards strengthening the model:

1. Foster cites fear of envy from others, fear of suspicion of envy, and fear of being envious as determinants for envy avoidance behavior. The distinction of these three stimuli seems neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. I am not sure that they are separable in a productive way. For example, spitting when admiring a child cannot be easily assigned to one or another of these slots. Motivation is generally a tenuous basis for constructing a behavioral typology, anyway.

2. The idea that we avoid admitting to envy because it is tantamount to an admission of inferiority is powerful. Foster notes that we often transfer the locus of responsibility for our misfortunes by blaming it on fate or luck. This is one way to avoid focusing envy on some other person. The argument might be taken a step further. It seems to me that disclaiming responsibility for past misfortunes also removes some responsibility for future actions designed to correct the situation. In some societies, including our own, people may literally get away with murder using this ploy. If one can make it stick, a public declaration of no responsibility for one's deeds yields enormous power.

3. An important corollary to the second point is that controlled use of envy may be just as important as its avoidance. If the manipulation of envy yields power (by reducing opponents to a feeling of inferiority), then envy avoidance may very well be the effect rather than the cause of the behavior Foster discusses. In any case, I think the notion of envy manipulation is particularly well suited to understanding the competitive behavior exhibited in the so-called battle of the sexes. This subject will, no doubt, occupy us for years to come. In the context of Foster's contribution, we might raise these questions: Do men innately envy women, or is it the other way around?

Is the notion of innate envy between the sexes a shibboleth? Do women have the basic power of shame, and do men everywhere fear this? Or is this a peculiarly "civilized" concern? Finally, do men and women create and use envy to control each other's behavior? If the answer to the last question is affirmative (as it seems to be in Western society, at least), then a much more general question is needed: To what extent do people everywhere use culturally normative means to incite envy as a means for achieving personal ends? Foster's present article is a major contribution in its explication of envy avoidance. But this may be only half the story.

4. Finally, I would suggest that comparative study of both envy avoidance and envy-stimulating behavior is clearly called for by Foster's efforts. Two particularly fruitful areas might be the complex institutions of cursing and of hospitality (commensality).

by BERNARD BOCK☆

*Braunschweig, Germany.* 9 VIII 71

Another essential stimulus to envy, besides those Foster chiefly deals with (wealth and power, prestige and professional recognition), is the ability to appreciate the ideal values of human life, for example, art, music, poetry, nature, charity. Whether this cause of envy must be restricted to affluent societies or whether it even occurs in preaffluent groups is the question.

Foster believes that concealment or modesty is a result of fear of being envied. In many cases, this is true. Francis Bacon, in his essay "Of Envy," mentions the clever and successful statesmen who incessantly complain of the burden of their office in order to put a check on possible enviers. He also says that a wise man will make allowances for envy by suffering himself to be contradicted and outvoted by others in unimportant matters. Nevertheless, it seems to me that there is another cause of understatement besides the fear of being envied. Some people in fact turn from external appearances to the immaterial values mentioned above. Regardless of possible enviers, they simply try to shape their lives according to interior standards; so they detest waste and pomp and grand style. From the methodological point of view, it is important to remember that the same symbol—understatement, in this case—may stand for different motivations and will, therefore, require various interpretations. The same applies to modesty, a form of behavior which may be explained as the author suggests, but



may also be rooted in philosophical or religious persuasions such as genuine humility.

by JAN BRØGGER☆

*Oslo, Norway. 9 IX 71*

After having read Foster's interesting and provocative paper on envy, one may be somewhat reluctant to express appreciation too openly, since, as he convincingly demonstrates, compliments are most of the time expressions of concealed envy.

Foster certainly has laid a solid foundation for further analysis of the role of envy in human culture. It has for some time been perfectly legitimate to assume that human institutions or social forms are shaped by individual choices with reference to values (Barth 1966), i.e., that human beings seek to maximize values of tangible and intangible kinds. We have also been told that "individuals faced with choice of action will commonly use such choice so as to gain power" (Leach 1964). Now we are told that envy is also a very general motive in human affairs. Barth and Leach have paved the way for a dynamic analysis of social forms that has already demonstrated its value. I feel that Foster's contribution may prove to be of equal importance. Although he operates on a more descriptive level, his assumption of almost universal envy makes it possible to analyse institutionalized behaviour as the management of the various threats of envy. The interesting glimpses he gives us of strategies developed towards this end—concealment, symbolic sharing, etc.—invite further analysis, this time of the more personal management of the emotional problems of envy. Such analysis demands special empathy on the part of the anthropologist, as well as the courage to unmask symbolic behaviour, a courage which Foster deeply demonstrates.

Reading his paper, however, one sometimes worries about the power of his thinking: almost any human symbolic act may with some skill be reduced to disguised envy, in the same way as a psychoanalytic zealot may reduce almost everything to repressed sex. This is unfortunate not only because it is misleading, but because it unnecessarily arouses the scepticism of psychology prevalent among anthropologists. When, for instance, Foster claims (p. 177) that "mourning rites, emphasizing somber clothing and the avoidance of pleasurable activities, also constitute symbolic denial that the life of the survivors is worth coveting," he neglects other, more obvious, interpretations in order to prove his point. The main significance of mourning

rites may, I believe, be revealed if they are studied as symbolic transactions among the living. In the rural Mediterranean region, widows dress in black, not because they fear the envy of the dead, but partly because they fear the gossip and criticism of the village and partly, I believe, to express genuine grief. This reminds us of the fact that symbolic expressions often are overdetermined; like dream-symbols, they have more than one referent.

Foster certainly paints a sombre picture of human nature, in a way reminiscent of Freud. But, discussing the role of the superego, Freud reminded us that man is not only more immoral than he believes, but also more moral. Thus, if compliments are expressions of concealed envy, they may also be expressions of real enthusiasm. With this in mind, we may safely congratulate Foster on his paper.

by JUDITH K. BROWN☆

*Rochester, Mich., U.S.A. 25 VIII 71*

Foster provides a fresh perspective on an aspect of behavior largely ignored in the anthropological literature. He suggests that envy is pan-human because "the good things" are everywhere scarce and unevenly distributed. I would like to add that the uneven distribution of "good things" first becomes obvious in earliest childhood, a time when the individual is particularly impotent and vulnerable. It is perhaps this early experience and subsequent parental suppression of envy that accounts for the strong denial of envy Foster encountered in his students.

Foster notes the child's envy of both parents and siblings. A particularly dramatic description of childhood envy and its suppression among the Gusi of Kenya is given by LeVine and LeVine (1963), who report that the cranky, recently displaced Gusi weanling cries frequently and is said to harbor "murderous jealousy" for the new baby. But a child's envy need not be only a disruptive force. For example, Whiting (1960; Burton and Whiting 1961) has suggested that status envy of the parent by the child is the necessary precursor of identification.

Foster mentions two societal mechanisms for reducing envy; redistribution and encapsulation. I would like to suggest a third: the child-rearing methods used in the kibbutz, and probably (though information is very scant) in China, in which a conscious effort is made to reduce the opportunity for envy of material goods among children. Bettelheim (1969) reports only partial success in eliminating envy among kibbutz children and

adolescents. Lazure (1962) tested and interviewed a small number of Chinese adolescents and noted frequent expressions of hostility toward younger children (whose life is freer and more leisurely). Thus child-rearing experiments that seek to equalize the material "good things" fail to eliminate envy. The nonmaterial "good things," such as nurturance and indulgence, cannot be distributed evenly to all children by fiat.

It appears impossible to eliminate envy, and difficult to reduce it. Foster suggests we admit more freely that envy does exist. Surely this is a first step toward the constructive channeling of this ubiquitous and powerful emotion.

by STEPHEN C. CAPPANNARI☆

*Nashville, Tenn., U.S.A. 10 IX 71*

Foster's analysis of the meaning of envy in the concealment of pregnancy, the denigration of infants, etc., makes sense to me. He would probably agree that this is not the only interpretation of these customs, which may have multiple meanings. One older explanation is that given high infant mortality, one can ill afford the investment of great emotion and social recognition of an individual who is not likely to survive, and it may be easier to lose a child when little overt value has been invested in him.

In this highly original paper, envy is treated largely, and, I think, properly, as a potentially disruptive force. However, I would suggest that the manner in which a people deals with this prevalent emotion may have a positive and integrative value, and that it may be as much one's duty to envy as it is to gossip (Gluckman 1963).

Foster points out, for example, that no society can eliminate the (usually subconscious) envy of the son for the father. One consequence, or perhaps more properly, correlate, of this envy is that the child covets and has high regard for the privileges of fatherhood. Everywhere, the child learns that he cannot immediately displace his father but can achieve this envied status at a later time by internalizing certain controls and manifesting behavior appropriate to his group. Is it not possible then that in its ontogeny envy is not a fortuitous and somewhat pathological expression of sibling rivalry or Oedipal conflict, but instead is subtly fostered (no pun intended) as a mechanism for the enhancement of certain values?

In the U.S.A. at present there are many men over 30 who have achieved prominence or "success" in business, the military, or some profession and who are perturbed because they sense



that some members of the younger generation no longer manifest envy toward them. I am not concerned here with such interpretations of this attitudinal shift as whether it is a symptom of social disorganization or of progress. My point is simply that envy has functioned in more stable societies as a reaffirmation of values. It can be viewed in this context as an emotion which has contributed positively to the sanction and maintenance of a social system.

by JEAN CUISENIER☆

Paris, France. 14 ix 71

In his suggestive paper, Foster opposes envy and jealousy (p. 168): "envy stems from the desire to acquire something possessed by another person, while jealousy is rooted in the fear of losing something already possessed." He adds that "both emotions involve a dyad, a pair of individuals whose relationship is mediated, or structured, by an intervening property or object." I agree with him on this and on his definitions in general. In this area, the English cultural tradition is close to that of the French. The word *envie* comes from old Provençal (10th-century) *enveia*, *eveia*, *evea*, close to the Catalan word *enveja*, all Roman expressions directly derived from the Latin *invidia*. The opposition envy/jealousy is a classic one among French moralists. As Littré (1878:1446, translation mine)<sup>1</sup> quotes La Rochefoucauld (Max. 28), "Jealousy is somehow right and rational, since it aims at keeping something that belongs to us, whereas envy is a rage that cannot tolerate possession by someone else."

In Catholic countries, envy is not merely submitted to vague moral disapproval: it is one of the major vices, and, as doctrine progresses, it becomes one of the seven deadly sins. Hence comes the abundant iconography of envy, in which the snake is the major figure. Thus in the *Miroir de vie et de mort*, a miniature shows a large tree with seven roots, each taking the shape of a snake and ending in the figure of a woman: the first, *radix luxuriae*, looks at herself in a mirror; the second, *radix gulae*, holds a glass in her hand; the third, *radix avaritiae*, closes a chest; the fourth, *radix acidiae*, turns away from the altar; the fifth, *radix iracundiae*, tears her hair; the sixth (related to our topic), *radix invidiae*, carries a beast in her breast; the seventh, *radix superbiae*, has no particular attributes. We recog-

<sup>1</sup> "La jalousie est en quelque manière juste et raisonnable, puisqu'elle ne tend qu'à conserver un bien qui nous appartient; au lieu que l'envie est une fureur qui ne peut souffrir le bien des autres."

nize here the tree of evil of the 12th-century theologians, where vices are at the roots, and the roots are at the same time the seven heads of the Apocalypse's dragon (Male 1923:108-9).

I disagree with Foster when he considers envy a universal feeling. He does not demonstrate the universality of envy either empirically or theoretically. He provides us with numerous examples, borrowed from various cultures; but we cannot decide if envy can be observed in *all* cultures, *most* cultures, or *many* cultures for lack of an adequate method of assembling a corpus of all cases observed or a sample of them (Murdock 1949, Miguelez 1969). To Foster, all the cases of envy observed stem from the fact (p. 168) that "all societies have economic systems, because rules for allocating scarce resources to alternate ends are essential to the survival of a society." Thus his theory of the universality of envy rests on a conception of economy that may be appropriate for deprivation and market-oriented systems, but is doubtful for others. Is it not meaningful that he should devote so much space to "deprivation societies" to shed light on the mechanisms of envy? Typical examples are borrowed from peasant societies or marginal social groups such as those of war prisoners or inhabitants of Negro ghettos of the United States.

Envy may, in some deprivation societies, hold a special position in the structure of the system of feelings. In the French societies, it does not. Neither learned nor popular literature gives a prominent place in the universe of feelings to envy. For example, envy serves a structuring function in only two tale-types, no. 328, "the boy who robs the (treasures)? of the ogre," and no. 531, "Golden Locks beauty" (Aarne and Thompson 1928; Delarue and Teneze 1957-63, vol. 1:330-41; vol. 2:316-37); envy appears only subsidiarily in popular prints, always superseded by the themes of competition and love.

I even wonder if we should accept Foster's explanation of envy in "deprivation societies" themselves. Of these I shall give only one example: Arab societies, in which the structure of the social system creates the conditions for ever-renewed competition between segments, not for the possession of a set amount of goods, but for the conquest of a ceaselessly widening world (Evans-Pritchard 1949, Murphy and Kasdan 1959). In these societies, where, as Foster notes, one is not unacquainted with envy, social agents do not play a zero-sum game, what is won and what is lost are not balanced,

everything is always at stake, and conquest and growth are structurally possible (Sahlins 1961, Cuisenier 1972).

by ROY G. D'ANDRADE☆

La Jolla, Calif., U.S.A. 3 ix 71

In the United States it is a relatively common practice to give small presents to families when they move into a new house or apartment. (1) How can one tell if this custom is based on envy (or defense against envy)? (2) What if two different observers disagree about the role of envy with respect to this custom? (3) Would the same interpretation concerning the role of envy with respect to this custom hold true everywhere this custom is practiced? (4) How homogeneous are populations with respect to the *amount* of envy (or the *amount* of fear about other people's envy) that individuals experience concerning such customs?

by JAMES FARIS☆

Storrs, Conn., U.S.A. 14 ix 71

Foster has assembled data to suggest that particular cultural symbols are manifestations of and ways of dealing with a "psychological problem" found in all human societies—envy. There is scientific and methodological weakness in this, but it is the social message that strikes me as insipid if not dangerous.

Considering first the science: psychological (as well as ecological, neurochemical, and even atomic) explanations for *social* phenomena are sometimes necessary, but they are rarely sufficient. For sufficient explanations, social scientists must rely on *social processes*—otherwise we beg the questions of our discipline (Newcomer n.d.) and the understanding of human society. Moreover, a scientific account (a theory that generates the facts) would not generalize from behavior (exactly what Foster is doing), but would look at the social (historical-material) *process* by which the facts are produced. And finally, Foster has chosen to focus on behavioral manifestations (envy) as a *thing* rather than on the social relationships culturally symbolized. Science can hardly progress examining things instead of relationships (Leach 1961, Barth 1969, Magubane 1971). This last criticism is particularly important, for cultural symbols of social relationships cannot be understood if divorced from the *form* of those relationships.

Although Foster briefly discusses the causes of envy, he fails to distinguish between relationships that



manifest (1) basic competition for survival in classless circumstances and (2) alienation produced by divorce from control of the means of production. Certainly most of the data he presents are from peasant and other oppressed populations whose surplus labor is expropriated (Wolf 1966). Envy is nearly "universal" because very much of the world is in the grip of imperialism, and hardly because of "psychological problems" stemming from "pan-human" origins. Indeed, since the 15th century, colonialism has made the observation of (1) above increasingly difficult.

The job of a *social science* is to understand and analyze the social and cultural forms of people's existence in order to be able to best give them the tools with which they may improve their existence. Foster would, I am sure, agree with this (cf. Foster 1969). But the present paper does the reverse. The origins of much of the behavior of oppressed peoples rest *not* in their heads, but in their social relations of production—their relationship to control of their surplus labor. Foster is concerned about "how envy can be controlled, or if it can be controlled," for if it is not, it is capable of "destroying societies." We ought not to be discussing *control*, but how the oppression that produces Foster's data can be stopped—through overthrow of the social relationships generating the alienation Foster documents as envy.

Ghettos *do not* "serve to reduce guilt (or fear of envy) feelings among the privileged classes by keeping poverty beyond their sight" (p. 185). This kind of spurious functionalism fails to point out that ghettos exist because they are profitable (cf. Tabb 1970) and that envy and jealousy amongst oppressed peoples are perpetrated by ruling-class interests precisely because capitalism demands a divided mass to keep down wages and direct attentions away from the locus of oppression. Foster's paper, insofar as it assigns this behavior to universal propensities of the species, aids this effort.

Foster resurrects his old concept of "limited good"—a generalization which does not transcend the data on which it is based—when if he examined the historical-material conditions generating the data, he would see why leadership roles are avoided, why emotional exposure is repugnant, and why a facade of egalitarianism is maintained in peasant societies. Local leaders are constantly exploited, coopted, or eliminated by wider systems, and emotional exposure and marked status differences in a community reduce the ability of local people to cope success-

fully with outside agencies (cf. Faris 1971).

Foster doubts that envy would disappear in "egalitarian societies." This may be so, but until we can experience a truly classless society, we have no test. I would maintain that with the abolition of private property and class structure, "to each according to his need" (Marx 1938) could become a base for creative work and relatively envyless social relationships. To the degree to which individual competition for survival is abolished in a given society, so too will isomorphic cultural and social institutions arise in that society. Losing in a zero-sum game may then elicit compassion, serving others would be prior to serving self, and true sharing would not simply be, as Foster states, "a last resort" (p. 186). But this is a deduction which awaits falsification.

Foster, like the late Oscar Lewis (cf. 1961, 1966), presents behavioral data in which he explains manifestations of oppression in terms of cultural concomitants (symbols) of particular sets of sociopsychological circumstances. We can alternatively view these data as an indictment of capitalism (cf. Burzum 1967), and explain them in terms of the form of social relationships they symbolize.

by SUSAN T. FREEMAN☆

Chicago, Ill., U.S.A. 3 IX 71

Foster's contribution is welcome and will be provocative in the best sense. Most of the ethnographic cases he presents seem to support his thesis. He has, in a sense, done some ethnography on the ethnographies, addressing himself to a question on which data have been collected, important to our informants themselves, but never adequately synthesized.

The envy model is, of course, open to the same criticism that can be leveled against any model claiming universality and attributing covert meaning to behavior: many of the data may have seemingly better alternative explanations in other frames of reference, including native ones, but the assumption of a pan-human, unconscious frame of reference permits the author to regard alternative explanations as "displacements" within his system.

Leaving this issue aside, and without quibbling over specific interpretations within Foster's framework, there arise further issues concerning the structure of the analysis and the limits Foster sets for himself.

1. Foster assumes that his model is in clearest evidence in the same socie-

ties he has characterized as holding an "image of limited good" (Foster 1960-61, 1965*b*). The present paper thus lays itself open to all of the criticism of the notion of limited good. (Among the discussions provoked by the 1965 paper are Bennett 1966, Foster 1966, Kaplan and Saler 1966, Kearney 1969, Kennedy 1966, and Piker 1966.) Further, in this paper Foster has expanded on the idea of "deprivation societies" as applicable to the peasant material on which he focuses. While his definition of "deprivation society" and his application of it are not internally inconsistent, the definition itself saps the word of any real utility: it applies almost everywhere.

2. Foster draws the vast bulk of exemplary data from societies where he hopes to find his hypothesis best supported and where many authors' treatment of their field data has been at least partly conditioned by the literature on "peasants," "gossip and envy," etc., some of the notions dating from Foster's own essay on interpersonal relations in peasant societies (Foster 1960-61). Since the present hypothesis is presented as being of universal application, it would have been in order *not* to confine the discussion in this way but to examine a wider spectrum of societies, including tribal groups. Would the ethnographic cases still appear to support the theory? An extension of the ethnographic universe would have provided a better preliminary test of the model's potential utility.

3. The distinction of competitive and fear axes in envy behavior is well taken, but the paper proceeds as if behavior in any single society were confined to one axis alone. This is questionable in general and most doubtful precisely in those societies on which Foster focuses—"peasant" societies. So we come full circle to the crucial criticism, leveled against the notion of limited good and also applicable here, that these societies (indeed any) are not closed systems. The very factors that in Foster's terms make peasantry "deprivation societies par excellence" are the same factors that at times place "peasants" in contexts where conspicuous display and emulation are the order of the day. This is not to say that Foster's model fails to describe envy behavior accurately, but that it does not handle the totality of envy behavior in any single instance. Of all the cases cited, the ubiquitous examples drawn from American culture are those which suffer most in this respect, for the fear axis in America is vastly eclipsed by competitive emphases.



In a survey of culture and personality theory and research, Singer (1961:17) said 10 years ago that since World War II "human nature" and the "psychic unity of mankind," or at least the problem of their relation to culture, has reasserted itself among anthropologists." He cited Redfield's concept of "developed human nature"—"in whatever established group [men] develop, certain outcomes of the development are always the same" (p. 21)—and Kluckhohn's statement, made late in life, that "the anthropologist for 2 generations has been obsessed with the differences between peoples, neglecting the equally real similarities—upon which the 'universal culture pattern' as well as the psychological uniformities are clearly built" (p. 20), but had little research to report upon in this section of his survey. Foster has introduced such a new kind of culture-personality study in his concern for envy as a "pan-human" phenomenon—a "psychological uniformity," a feature of "developed human nature."

Foster catalogues parallel envy phenomena from every part of the world. One is fascinated partly, perhaps, because the topic is *sub rosa* (*sub rosa in our culture*, as Foster suggests, and are there not cultural differences in willingness to recognize and admit to envy?) and partly because of the ingenious categories and examples he uses, such as the various words for "tip" in European languages.

He gives us a new standard for identifying cultural data. In my own area, I was intrigued to see the Indian caste system as an envy-reducing structure. It is not that Indianists have not thought of such an interpretation; it is that Foster makes it respectable and acceptable as anthropology.

Having reversed the emphasis from cultural diversity to psychic unity, one finds, after the cataloguing is done, that one wishes to flip again and to ask old comparative questions: Is there more envy in one culture than in another? How could one measure such differences? If one were to go on and explore each strand of human psychology in Foster's way—by the collection and typing of parallel data—one might move on to love, hate, altruism, and so on. With comparison, we might come back to Sapir's concern with real and spurious cultures. Such a comparative perspective would be attractive to modern youth, who perhaps as never before look to anthropology for answers, and look upon tribal and peasant cultures more sympathetically than did past generations. The com-

parative study of human passions toward which Foster beckons might be an answer.

by MICHAEL MACCOBY☆

Washington, D. C., U.S.A. 29 ix 71

Foster's rich and enlightening analysis of the way cultures deal with envy is particularly interesting for a psychoanalyst. My clinical experience in both the United States and Mexico confirms his observation that people are likely to deny envy. The reason is that envy implies destructive feelings toward the envied person as well as a deep sense of self-contempt. As May (1967:76) points out in his theological discussion of envy, it is the only deadly sin that does not even offer some satisfaction in its early stages, in contrast to greed, lust, sloth, etc. Dreams of repressed envy sometimes express a cannibalistic theme; the envious dreamer wants to consume the envied one, rather than eating his own heart out.

Further study of envy might focus on the question of the nature of the envious character. Foster implies that anybody would feel envy in situations where he is confronted by the greater good fortune of others. Given that there is a normal human tendency toward envy, we also know people who are either extremely envious or practically without envy, just as some people are more or less greedy, destructive, or prideful. If we can speak of the envious person, then it should be possible to study the character types most prone to envy. Perhaps, one type of envious character is the necrophilic individual (Fromm 1964), who hates life and is attracted to rigid order and mechanization. Are such individuals secretly envious of those who love life? If so, this finding would be consistent with Foster's speculations concerning envy of life on the part of the old and its relationship to repressiveness and puritanism.

As some character types are more envious than others, there may also be differences in terms of social character. Do cultures or social classes tend to develop more or less envious people, or is it merely that some do better at control and encapsulation of envy-provoking stimuli? The question requires comparative study of emotional attitudes. In Mexican peasant society, although envy is culturally controlled, the character of many peasants tends to be hoarding, suspicious, and somewhat prone to envy (Fromm and McCoby 1970), although not necessarily more so than the character of ambi-

tious Americans. It would be interesting to study peasants in modern China, where the system has been constructed to minimize invidious comparison through equalization of income and cooperation, rather than merely symbolic arrangements. The kibbutz, communes, and other experimental communities might also be studied from this point of view. Foster concludes by commenting, "How envy can be controlled, or if it can be controlled, remains to be seen." To this we may add, can we discover the social principles necessary to develop a social character which is relatively free of envy?

by SIMON D. MESSING☆

New Haven, Conn., U.S.A. 6 ix 71

Foster has expanded his concept of the Image of Limited Good to include the problem of envy in social stability and individual equanimity—certainly a relevant and significant phenomenon. He is probably right that envy is a pan-human emotion, universally feared as a threat to society and to the individual psyche and requiring the development of symbolisms and strategies to reduce it.

Probably most anthropologists have encountered symbolic behavior based on envy or fear of envy, recognizing it more readily in cultures other than their own. Returning from Ethiopia, where precautions against the evil eye have long been developed into a complex art of human relations, I suddenly perceived an American event, the assassination of President Kennedy, with "Ethiopian eyes." To me, what stood out was the symbolism of envy of a handsome, intelligent man born into great wealth, riding in an open car at a very slow speed along a previously advertised route, with his beautiful, intelligent, fertile wife at his side, in order to campaign before multitudes of persons not blessed with such good fortune for the number-one position of scarcity in the country (the Presidency, as Foster points out), which he already held. At the very least, an Ethiopian advisor would have urged an unannounced route or a closed car. In the Ethiopian view, flaunting one's talents, wealth, and other scarce blessings before the evil eye is sure to arouse it.

Foster's concept of encapsulation, however, appears to pose more problems than it solves. This old device is real enough, and Foster is very likely right in arguing that while it has worked efficiently in the past, it will



work less well in the future. But he seems to agree with Schoeck (p. 185) that the "utopian desire for an egalitarian society cannot . . . 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." This certainly seems exaggerated. Surely one of the main reasons for the development of an egalitarian society was the desire to escape from the serfdom of feudalism.

One wishes that Foster's incisive analysis had concluded with some recommendations. How is an egalitarian society to cope with the problem of achieving social stability and individual equanimity posed by the human universal of envy, now that the "shield of caste" is no longer a working device? Two symbolic attitudes come to mind: (1) develop the custom of not flaunting one's blessings before those less fortunate, the "low profile," and (2) cultivate the model of the Ethiopian noble, who avoids any appearance of envious curiosity. This would involve a de-escalation of the advertising industry and public enlightenment as to substantial values (ecology, for example).

Perhaps the "anatomy of envy" presents only one-half of a human universal, the other half of which is more benign. As my grandmother expressed it in an old folk saying of unknown origin, "When you look up [in the social scale], your eyes hurt [due to envy]; when you look down, your heart hurts [out of compassion]."

by ISIDORO MORENO-NAVARRO☆

*Sevilla, Spain. 15 IX 71*

The cross-cultural study of envy behavior by Foster is interesting and suggestive, especially his treatment of the cultural control of the fear of envy. However, I find some of his interpretations too psychological. We do not need to return to Durkheim to know that social phenomena should be explained more in sociological than in psychological ways.

I disagree with Foster when he says (p. 175) that "people prefer, if at all possible, to conceal whatever properties they fear may be envied." Besides the fear of the possible envy of others, there is also the desire to increase one's own prestige, even at the risk of provoking envy. Each society attempts to reduce this contradiction by strictly specifying which occasions are suitable for gaining prestige and which are not. The competitive orientation of capitalist society seems to have developed to the point that any situation is ap-

propriate for the struggle for prestige. With this, the level of envy (unconfessed, of course) has reached a point scarcely approached in other societies, where the feeling of personal frustration is neither as strong nor as permanent as in ours.

I find excessively simplistic the statement (p. 170) that "every society designates those of its members who are deemed eligible to compete with each other for desired goals." Admitting that in contemporary Western society siblings are defined as equals in the competition for the love of their parents, who designates the equals to compete for professional success, for the favors of a woman, or for the attainment of a seat in the Senate? "The society" is not an adequate answer, since in a complex society there exist very few norms held by all of its members. Really, it is the social group that controls the competition that classifies people as equal or unequal with regard to that competition. Thus, for example, the fact that persons with certain ideologies are not permitted to participate in the competition for political power in many countries—whether they call themselves "democratic" or not—is due not to their being deemed nonequals by society, but to their being judged dangerous by the groups that monopolize the power. On the other hand, that two people are considered as equals in the attempt to reach a goal does not mean that they truly have the same opportunity of reaching it. The constitutions of practically all modern states declare all citizens equal before the law, but I doubt whether every citizen has the same possibility not only of getting justice, but even of requesting it.

Foster says that society protects the rights of the winner so that he need not be jealous of the prize. I think that basically this may be explained as follows: Given some specific "rules of the game," dictated precisely by those who are to award the prize, the winner, unless something unexpected happens, will be the one who has best understood how to use these rules. Thus, he will then be the one most interested in maintaining them and the clearest example for the rest that the best way to triumph is by adapting oneself to the established rules. But if it should be suspected that a competitor, an equal, if he should win, would try to modify the rules, his triumph would be prevented or not recognized, even though it would have been achieved in conformity with the rules in force. Hence, for the most important aspects of society, the only ones who are judged as equal are those who belong to the group that defines equality and nonequality.

On envy between nonequals, Foster's position is extremely conservative. To speak in a general way of "superiors" and "inferiors" seems too schematic: two people can be thought of as equals for one goal and nonequals for another, and even to obtain the same goal there may be different ways for different individuals, with the result that it is often difficult to establish whether they are considered equals with respect to that goal or not. And, above all, to explain social classes or castes as designed to minimize the effects of envy seems to me to put the cart before the horse. Classes are not social inventions intended to eliminate rivalry between those who occupy different social positions; it is the class system that gives people these different positions.

I also think that it is exaggerated to affirm that the attitudes and conduct among nonequals are "quite different" from those that prevail when competition is between equals. Gossip or any other form that tends to destroy someone's good reputation occurs as much between equals as between nonequals, and perhaps more commonly in the first case. Contrary to what the author says, I think that rivalry emerges between nonequals in many contexts. When, for example, during fiestas in an Andalusian town all the young women of whatever social class make an effort to wear pretty and expensive dresses, the basic idea for those who consider themselves equals is that of exhibition, centered on the attainment of admiration and the humiliation of the rest (Pitt-Rivers 1954:70), but for the girls of the lower class it constitutes principally an attempt to neutralize the true differences of class on a symbolic level where traditionally they have been expressed in a very visible way (Moreno-Navarro 1971: chap. 6).

Foster's conclusion that one does not "envy down" seems to me a sample of class ethnocentrism, for it demonstrates the acceptance of the capitalist quasi-dogma that the only important values are wealth and power. In this sense, it is clear that the "superior"—a board president or the chairman of a university department—cannot envy his "inferior"—an office employee or an assistant professor—because of his wealth or power, but he certainly can envy him his youth, athletic ability, honesty, intelligence, pretty wife, children—if he does not possess these—and many other things, material or intangible. Precisely to realize that not everything can be obtained with money and power can create stronger envy than if the envier were of the same or a lower social category than the one envied, since it is more difficult to utilize



such devices as attributing to luck the latter's success. I invite the author to substitute "superiors" and "inferiors" for "gods" and "mortals" in his sentence on the envy of the gods (p. 172)—"The gods envy those mortals who rise too high, who dare to approximate the gods, or who imply through their actions and words that they do not need the favor of the gods to ensure success in their undertakings"—and not to distinguish envy from resentment or moral indignation when envy of superiors toward inferiors may be suspected (since at no time does he make this distinction in the opposite case). Thus he will see, I think, that it is possible to envy inferiors, and this not only in "very general and atypical senses," as he not very willingly concedes. Just like the gods, superiors may envy inferiors for "excess in any direction, and particularly an excess of success," since the favor of the gods and wealth and power are defined as indispensable for the success of mortals and inferiors respectively. Hence envy, disguised as moral indignation or not, of superiors toward inferiors generally results in aggression, utilizing the mechanisms, seldom symbolic and almost always directly destructive, that wealth and power can put into play.

To say (p. 171) that "in contemporary American society, which is clearly revolutionary [!], it is quite correct to speak of the growing fear of the middle and upper classes of the consequences of the envy of the lower classes, of minority ethnic groups, and perhaps of youth itself" also, reflects, I think, a strongly conservative position. The struggle—there where it truly is—of the workers, the minorities, etc. against the middle and upper classes may be not a consequence of the desire to acquire the things that the individuals of these classes possess, but a rejection of them, in order to build a different society, without a class basis. Thus, the people of the middle and upper classes may feel jealous of their possessions, fearful of losing them, without anyone's being envious of them. This is jealousy without the counterpart of envy.

The protest of certain youth (not all, of course) surely can only be disguised envy of those who govern and decide, not so much for what these people can decide as for their very possession of the power. But we cannot call this generational dispute revolution, because it is not directed to subverting the social structure of the society. The revolution, contrary to what Foster says, is not based on envy, but on the possession of a different system of values from the established one, which makes envy impossible.

by JOHN PADDOCK☆

Mitla, Mexico. 13 IX 71

Pointing out any possible imperfection in Foster's article smacks of an overt display of envy, while "compliments but thinly veil sentiments of potential aggression" (p. 173). Silence would scarcely be flattering, and unless the article left one entirely unmoved it would be untruthful. Rarely has the CA commentator's role been trickier.

In his exposition of the idea of limited good in peasant societies (1965*b*), Foster gave us an explanatory concept of great utility and obvious validity in Mexico (let others rate it for other regions). Exploration of its possible extensions was plainly called for. But any broadening in the scope of a concept involves some weakening or dilution. Envy as a human universal cannot be as potent an idea as envy in peasant societies only. "El que mucho abarca, poco aprieta," in the Spanish saying (he who grasps too much can't hold it so firmly).

In the language of the logician, "if we augment the denotation of a concept, we diminish its connotation. That is, if a concept is applicable to a greater number of individuals, it must refer to a smaller number of characteristics" (Caso 1958:3). The broader scope of the envy article may make it more important, but I felt more envy of Foster on reading the earlier one on the idea of limited good.

On mentioning a Greek village in which the ill are envious of the well, Foster did not go further in one interesting direction: what happens when, as in highly developed societies with long average life-spans, a large part of the population is middle-aged and old and, inevitably, more or less sick? A generation gap caused in part, or at least exacerbated, by envy of the old and sick toward the young and healthy?

The social and cultural effects of *hubris* have been stimulatingly discussed by Flügel (1945:152), who points out how Foster himself is guilty: "... throughout history those who have sought to increase human power and understanding . . . are guilty of Hubris, and . . . if they had their way they would involve all mankind . . ."

The citation of Unamuno (p. 173) is unconvincing except in "showing the novelist as taking a cheap pessimistic I-told-you-so viewpoint; anyone who wants to pose as profound can predict that bad things will happen, and before long will be vindicated. Unamuno also commits the nothing-but fallacy, compounded: "You can be sure that no one eulogizes with good inten-

tions." What we may be sure of is that human behavior has multiple motivations, and simplistic explanations are for the simple. This passage is out of place in an otherwise sophisticated article.

In Mexico, not only children, but fathers too, get *chipil* when their wives are pregnant. The mother of 10 has relatively little love, or time at least, for the father; no matter how proud he may be, and how pleased at the prospect of future economic contributions of each expected child, he knows (almost consciously) that he will be sharing his wife with yet another rival.

Certain complications seem to have been glossed over. Every rite of passage, including the funeral, is the occasion of feasting in peasant Mexico. If sop behavior is called for because a new life is valuable, it seems unfair to propose that the same feasting on the occasion of a funeral has some other meaning entirely. And when the death is that of a recently born infant, what then? The feast may indeed be related to envy in every case, but when the feasting is so similar one suspects there must be more similarity of motivation than Foster has suggested. Sop behavior may be present not only at the baptismal feast, but at the funeral feast too; and envy of the dead toward the living as a factor in the funeral feast ought to have a parallel in the baptismal feast.

Some North Americans often feel compelled to bring home presents for those left behind on a trip; but rural Mexicans seem to feel more than often compelled. Perhaps the extreme peril they see in every trip is a factor (women often weep on bidding what would seem to be a fairly short and casual *au revoir* to relatives leaving on quite minor excursions). The person who returns from any fairly extended trip may therefore be guilty of *hubris*, as well as of having left others behind.

by HARRIET R. REYNOLDS☆

Dumaguete City, Philippines. 25 VII 71

Foster makes a good case for the breadth of application and depth of influence of envy as a phenomenon that has been largely ignored in social science research and writing. His definitions of envy in terms of social situations and cultural patterns fit so neatly that one is led to ask, "Are so many human relationships really permeated by this disagreeable trait or complex of traits?" If we must answer yes—and I am afraid we must—can't we also find more positive traits underlying hos-



pitality, tipping, compliments, ritual feasts, and desire for privacy? While I agree with his analysis for the most part, it seems there is need for the ideas he has presented to be exposed to much critical evaluation and further objective testing. Some areas for these are: (1) the range of patterns of expectation underlying relationships in various cultural settings, (2) the differences between individuals and groups at each level within each society, and (3) the relation of envy to the degree of security or insecurity.

1. Within a culture, the individual's own environment has given him a set of expectations that affect his relationships. If he is expected to own land to achieve status, or to hold a Ph.D., or to be an athlete, he will center his envy (in the form either of rivalry or fear of falling short) on such a matter. If his group, on the other hand, honors the astute businessman, counts bank deposits as criteria of success, or goes in for oratory rather than Olympics, the roots of envy will be different. Also, there will be differences between the expectations of individuals in ascribed-status societies and in societies in which position is based on election to office, qualification for job-holding is strictly observed, and marriage is by choice rather than by arrangement. Variation comes also in who does what to control the extent of envy. In the United States, when someone graduates with honor or wins some high distinction, his friends will wine and dine him. In the Philippines, on the other hand, when someone receives a prize, he is expected to share his good fortune by giving a "blow-out" for his relatives and friends, possibly spending more than the financial gain he has received. In both cases envy, and attempted control or dissipation of envy, may well be present, but I would look for other values as well.

2. Since envy is related to social status and is expressed "up" or between equals, two groups are largely outside such expression—those at the very bottom of the social scale and those at the top. The person or group that is barely able to keep alive seems to need to be taught and led before envy is felt or becomes noticeable. In trying to work in the area of applied anthropology in a seriously deprived community, especially in a remote area, it is often necessary to raise the level of the "felt needs," gradually leading the people to want something else, before it is possible to encourage them to exert effort in their own behalf. So many are seemingly contented to "keep their place," and it is only after they have learned that there may be an opportunity to increase their

possessions and privileges that they are found to espouse envy. Envy implies not only the desire for, but the possibility of getting, what one envies. Those who occupy a low position in a society permeated by the concept of "limited good" usually do not reach out, physically or emotionally, to grasp at what is beyond their immediate concern. This is especially true if fatalism prevails or if those at higher levels have convinced them that their present standing is "the will of God" (or of the gods) and that what they do not have on earth will be theirs in large measure after death.

Except for competitiveness between those of high status, as Foster has mentioned, those at the top are usually more aware of jealousy or guilt than envy. And, speaking of the top, where there is room for only a few, and there is more competition for each place—does the vast majority really want to reach the top? From one point of view, the struggle is intense; no matter how many public officials are assassinated or how many in high finance find it necessary to use dishonest means (for which they may be penalized) to retain their places, there is no lack of candidates for election or promotion. However, "many" seeking such positions is far from "all." So, even within a single society there are different values, and different reasons for carrying out cultural expectations.

3. Differences in expectations in different cultures and in different strata within a given society are related to whether the individual feels secure or insecure. Foster mentions the role of security briefly, but it needs further development. One who is relatively secure, and has "identity," is on the way to achieving what he wants to be and do; he will less need to conceal, to deny, or to share only symbolically. He can more easily participate in "true sharing."

What is the counterpart of envy? For hate there is love and affection; for selfishness there is willingness to give of one's self and one's possessions; for greed there is altruism; for fear there is courage. For envy, what? Possibly, what is required is the complex of emotional maturity, creativity, adaptability, gratefulness, sympathy, responsibility, and mutuality. There is the whole system of reciprocity, so evident in the country in which I live and work.

Foster's excellent presentation can be the basis for seeking further evidence both for his thesis and for the place of envy in the hierarchy of determiners of relationships and explanations of traditional patterns of behavior.

by JAMES E. RITCHIE☆

*Hamilton, New Zealand. 17 VIII 71*

Foster's analysis has his usual clarity, logic, and pertinent illustration and is a useful and natural extension of his now classic paper on the image of the limited good. I would take issue on one point, however, namely his view that "except in very general and atypical senses, it seems that one normally does not envy down." The hedging qualifications indicate that Foster is less sure of this point than he states in the concluding abstract. His caution is appropriate, for three possible examples, all of considerable practical and theoretical significance, come immediately to mind.

The youth of the contemporary counter-culture of most industrial societies display a rejection of envy and jealousy that is more than attitudinal posturing or self-deception. If they envy, they do indeed envy down, projecting onto peasants and tribesfolk unreal idealisations of a carefree, nature-responsive contemporaneity of life-style which isn't attainable (unless you want to give up stereotypes, automobiles, and many other products of the society they scorn), because it doesn't exist till created. Some, at least, of their elders envy down, too, for many aspects (but especially the freedom and libidinalising of relationships) in the counter-culture life-style can seem most attractive to the older observer. If Foster thinks such young people envy their upper- and middle-class elders, he had better get into an encounter with some of them sometime. They await their ethnographer.

The second case is contained in Dollard's idea of the "gains" of minority status. Once more, the freedom of action, the licence to enjoy non-economic satisfactions, in the minority life-style is envied, and very much, by the more affluent and so-called secure dominating culture.

The third case is the kind of troublesome behaviour one finds in urban conditions in most developing countries. Whilst a tribesman in the upper Sepik may be symbolically expressing envy of the goods and power of white men in cargo rituals, the surly and scornful rejection of all that by disaffected locals in Port Moresby expresses something else. This may be an inversion of the envy felt by those who see themselves as excluded from the limited good, but it is possible (and many would say probable) that such behaviour contains a renunciation of Western material standards and values. When that happens (and it is happening increasingly in Africa, Indo-China, and Asia generally), the apparent su-



perior is mentally and phenomenally put down, and I am not sure what then happens in terms of Foster's analysis of how envy operates.

Behind all three cases is the problem that while the image of the limited good applies very widely to the material and manipulative aspects of all societies (to goods and power), it applies less well if at all to non-limited satisfactions like enjoyment of social interaction, sensory pleasure, or (in more societies than we realise) sexual pleasure, more openly available and accessible than in our own repressive body-hating culture. When there is unlimited access to these, obviously envy is unlikely, though jealousy is another question.

If one is bold enough to label some behaviour pan-human, one needs to explain cases of apparent non-compliance (even if only in individuals). The problem isn't only why most people display envying behaviour, but also why some don't. Given a culture that supports contemplativeness, the exploration of inner being, renunciation, the riches of inner life, envy may well be transcended. Envying someone's freedom may be quite categorically unlike envying anything else. These "goods" are of unlimited access, there to be claimed, enjoyed, and appreciated. They lie beyond envy.

by VERA ST. ERLICH ☆

Zagreb, Yugoslavia. 26 VIII 71

I am most pleased by Professor Foster's article, and I agree on the universality of envy. It stems directly from the individualistic component of human nature, as each human has his own goals for personal happiness. I think, however, that the collective component of human nature is also very powerful, and the enjoyment of others' happiness can be as strong as envy; they may counterbalance each other in many cases.

The American way of life with its values seems to weaken considerably the emotions of envy. It is assumed that everyone has chances to achieve success, and that everyone profits from everyone's good luck. Many attitudes indicate the low level of envy, the high standard of living not being primarily responsible for it. The "thank you" for each compliment shows that it is understood as a sign of good will. Conspicuous consumption shows that fear of envy is not decisive. Malicious gossip is rarely heard. The conditioning of children and the general opinion viewing envy as not "nice" have beneficial results in morals and manners, overt as well as internalized.

Nevertheless it is still possible that there are hidden reserves of envy. It may be that many violent actions, many crimes without motives—especially arson—are signs of envy.

In contrast to the United States, in Balkan countries, especially those with "socialist" leanings, envy is frequently given the aura of righteousness; cultural traditions are in agreement with contemporary tendencies. The Limited Good attitude has been traditionally very strong, and there is a Serbian saying, "The sun has to set for someone so it can rise for someone else." Most conversations center on comparisons dealing with fees and salaries, and envy is expressed quite frankly but rationalized with egalitarianism. The common criticism of everyone successful is, "Do you know that he earns so much!" even when these earnings are perfectly legal. Malicious gossip is everyday praxis with serious danger for the object of that gossip.

The answers to compliments are typical (and true for the whole of Europe). Automatically people would react and answer defensively, with "Oh, the house makes so much work, and the kitchen does not have enough light," and similar derogatory remarks. There is certainly never a "thank you."

There are, however, also indications of contrary tendencies; for instance, the famous hospitality, which cannot be performed primarily for appeasing others; it is too excessive, compulsive, and includes real sacrifices. Guests are forced to come to one's house, to eat and drink more than they can stand—and more than the host can afford. The results of both tendencies—envy and sacrifices for guests—have the effects that goals and ambitions are frequently frustrated, while social life and visiting are delightful.

On the contrary, it seems to me that in the United States it is a great satisfaction to work, to build homes, to achieve goals, to do scholarly work. Social life may be, however, sometimes less colorful and enjoyable than in countries where envy is distributed differently. It could be that each community has approximately the same load of envy and only the outlets are different.

by JOEL S. SAVISHINSKY ☆

Garden City, N.Y., U.S.A. 31 VIII 71

Foster has provided us with a very useful analysis of envy as a social force, as well as a catalogue of techniques for coping with envy and the envious.

The sequence of responses to envy situations he spells out seems especially appropriate to those hunting-and-gathering societies whose precarious ecologies yield a paradoxical life-style of envious and enforced egalitarianism. In these cases, gross inequalities in hunting luck are ultimately redressed by redistribution mechanisms, but envy may be more often repressed or rechannelled than annihilated by these means.

My experience with one group of subarctic hunters in North America (the Hare) suggests a coping strategy that could be added to Foster's inventory (Savishinsky 1970). When a hunter kills a moose, which is a scarce, large, and much valued animal (both for its meat and its hide), he does not keep the animal for his own family, nor, in fact, does he himself divide and portion out the kill among band members. Rather, he gives the entire animal to another band member (usually a male kinsman) to divide and distribute. The successful hunter himself usually receives a sizable portion of the meat and hide, but since his bounty now comes to him as a gift, envy of him is less concentrated. The distributor, who also retains a good percentage of the animal, similarly comes off in a good light as a man who is generous with others' largesse.

This variation on redistribution, by deflecting envy, dilutes it. The egalitarian outcome maximizes band survival by guaranteeing people a minimum level of access to food. One can thus argue, as others have done for such negatively experienced psychological phenomena as anxiety and stress, that envy, when its manifestations are culturally institutionalized, can be made to serve important and unexpected social functions.

by J. D. SEDDON ☆

London, England. 1 IX 71

Foster's exploration of "the anatomy of envy" is an extremely useful and thought-provoking contribution to the analysis of social inequality as a "subjective" phenomenon.

Systematic social inequality, or social stratification, is a means of regulating access to scarce and valued goods, both material and non-material. Many sociologists have agreed to recognize three major dimensions, or aspects, of stratification: economic inequality, status inequality, and power inequality; but, as we have recently been reminded (Fitzhenry 1970:287),



these concepts are not used by social scientists alone. People in society have their own understanding of the class system, of the gradations of prestige, and of the way power is distributed. These "folk-models" are not merely cognitive—making *intellectual* sense of the stratification system—they also have a moral or normative element: people evaluate the system as good or bad. Even where individuals or groups operate with the same intellectual model, they may differ in their moral evaluation of the system according to their position in it: the poor may regard their own poverty as divinely-ordained; they may regard it as unjust.

Foster (p. 168, my emphasis) suggests that, "In considerable measure, envy exists only because man feels that there are insufficient quantities of the good things in life—*however he may define 'good' things*—for everyone to have *all he wishes*." "All he wishes" could, I think, be seen as meaning, in effect, "all to which he aspires in an essentially competitive system," and Foster encourages this interpretation by his suggestion that "Limited Good . . . therefore seems . . . to underlie a great deal of and possibly all envy" (p. 169) and his observation that "it is the *relative* difference that triggers the latent envy" (p. 169), envy behaviour being particularly apparent in those societies "in which some people are poor while others are not, in which the well-being and power of those with plenty is visible to, and resented by, those with little" (p. 168).

Envy, it might be suggested, is intimately, and inevitably, associated with competition, aspiration, and comparison, which, in turn, depend upon (1) the values held by the individual concerned and (2) the ability of the individual to conceive of alternative social situations in which "self" might be substituted for "other" (i.e., in which the present "distance" between "self" and "other" is not too great to prevent comparison or hope of substitution). Thus, in a society where the dominant ideology endorses systematic inequality and clearly defines the categories of "like" and "unlike" (or "equal" and "unequal"), empirical economic and political inequality throughout the system is unlikely to generate resentment or produce feelings of envy between defined "peer" groups, but may leave open the possibility of envy within "peer" groups. In a society where the dominant and pervasive ideology is egalitarian, but individual enterprise and competitiveness are highly valued and esteemed, the "peer" group and the total society may be seen to coincide and envy/jealousy relations between economically or politically unequal individuals or groups are likely to exist. The in-

consistency between "ideal" and "real" conditions in such circumstances is likely to be associated with feelings of envy, frustration, and resentment, on the one hand, and jealousy, fear, and guilt, on the other.

It is possible that envy, frustration, and resentment may be produced by other forms of inconsistency—status inconsistency, for instance. A recent discussion of this particular topic suggests (Runciman and Bagley 1969:362) that

an association between status inconsistency and social or political attitudes will be best explained not by reference to some highly generalized "theory" of "dissonance" but by reference to the psychological generalizations which, when brought to bear on the particular social context, will show how the results could be replicated by the test of further predictions. Often, indeed, the necessary psychological generalizations can be well enough put in the traditional language of jealousy, insecurity, conflict of loyalties and the rest without any recourse to the terms of experimental social psychology.

The authors themselves are sceptical of the value of any "theory of status congruence" as a general explanation for the existence of extreme anxiety states leading to resentment and prejudice in specific social groups and prefer to invoke such concepts as "relative deprivation" and "reference group comparison" (Runciman and Bagley 1969:363). Their research is concerned with the investigation of factors determining the degree of racial prejudice towards immigrants in the U.K. and provides a useful critique of some writings bearing on the main concern of Foster's paper: "the (largely) symbolic, and hence covert, behavior manifest in cultural institutions and normative forms that seem based upon fear" (p. 166). Indeed, it is clear that the field of "race relations" holds immensely important material for any full and detailed analysis of envy, in terms of both the "competitive axis" and the "fear axis."

Foster's conclusion that "one normally does not envy down" either is a tautology or else ignores the very real existence of competing scales of value. Where priorities in terms of "the good things of life" are consistent throughout society, the direction and possibly the degree of envy will be predictable; where consistently high value is placed upon wealth and power, a poor man will envy a rich man his wealth more than a rich man will envy a poor man his beautiful wife, all other things being equal. There is, however, a real possibility that a self-made millionaire will envy a member of the nobility or an eminent politician as much as either of these will envy him; in such cases,

what is to decide who is "up" and who is "down"? In a sense, feelings of envy *define*, for the individual, who is "above" him, while feelings of jealousy define who is "below" him. Foster appears to avoid any real exploration of competing or even conflicting values by his suggestion that, "granting possible exceptions, envy in general is of superiors, or between equals" (p. 171). Surely, to accept without further consideration the suggestion that members of the nobility, eminent politicians, and self-made millionaires are "equals" begs a large number of questions? The possibility that individuals placed high on one scale of value and low on another will be more liable to feel resentment and envy should be considered, and the tendency to average out their "overall status" should be avoided.

by FRANCIS LEE UTLEY☆

Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A. 15 ix 71

Though anthropology is notably a science which seeks the universal in a manifold of particulars, it has done little with the Seven Deadly Sins—perhaps because of its positivist tradition, its cultural relativism, and its field conflicts with some missionaries. Hence one is delighted to read Foster on so old but valid a universal as envy. Janet (1937:79) offered the medieval Seven Sins as a worthy bridge from the technical language of the psychologist to the ordinary language of his patient. One would welcome six or seven more articles, on pride (common to the country clubber, the potlatcher, and the labor baron), wrath (what, relativistically speaking, is murder?), sloth (contemporary apathy, cynicism, and despair; the banana and the mañana cultures), avarice (special interests and colonialism, the demands of the minorities), gluttony (drugs, drink, calorie-counting, and potlatch), and lechery (movies, incest and kinship systems, what one does after a potlatch). We might even have a disquisition on the Sin Against the Holy Ghost, with parallels from Catholic, evangelist, and icon-worshipping cultures.

To Foster's searching review of envy I can best add some illustrations from areas of my own competence, folklore and the Middle Ages—areas often ignored by the time-bound, space-free anthropologist.

In the hierarchical 14th century, a limited-wealth economy only beginning to respond to bourgeois ambitions, envy was the sin above all of the



lower classes as pride was of the higher. Chaucer's Parson (Robinson 1957:242) shows how passionately it was abhorred:

After Pride wol I speken of the foule synne of Envye, which that is, as by the word of the philosopre . . . sorwe of oother mannes prosperitee. . . . This foule synne is platly agayns the Hooly Goost. Al be it that every synne is agayns the hooly Goost, yet natheless, for as myche as bountee aperteneh properly to the Hooly Goost, and Envye comth proprely of malice, therefore it is proprely agayn the bountee of the Hooly Goost.

In *Piers Plowman*, envy is allegorized as palsied, pale as a pellet, with a friar's frock and a knife: "His body was to-bolle for wratthe that he bote his lippes," and his sorrow in confession consists of chagrin at other men's good (Skeat 1965:134). In the *De miseria humane conditionis*, Pope Innocent III attacks the "impatient poverty" of the beggar: "He claims God is unjust because He does not distribute things fairly; he accuses his neighbor of malice because he does not help him; and so he gets angry, grumbles, and curses. . . . Even to his neighbor shall the poor man be hateful" (Howard and Dietz 1969:17). But Innocent goes on to attack the boasting of the rich—something, as Foster shows, that Americans are very chary about. Chaucer's Man of Law, a special pleader by profession, uses the passage, attacking the impatient poor, and suppresses the attacks on the rich (Robinson 1957:63).

In folklore we find many dramatic revelations about envy: the Envious Sisters of Goldener (Thompson Type 707, an analogue of Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*), often found also in the Monstrous Bridegroom story (Thompson Type 425); the kind wife who prays for beauty that she might get back her husband—in a Filipino tale from St. Vincente Ferrer—and the unkind mistress who prays that the wife lose it again, and reaps ugliness herself (Thompson Types 403 and 480; Fansler 1921:323–26). In the tale of the Envious and the Covetous, Elijah (Jewish) or St. Martin (Christian) tells two travellers that if one makes a wish it will come true, but his companion will get a double portion; they fight over who is to make the wish, and the weaker, half-strangled by the stronger, cries that he wants to be blind in one eye (Thompson Type 1331; Schwarzbaum 1968:53–54). The commercially centered Jew was especially conscious of

the sin of envy: in hell Rabbi Haim found his coreligionists with spoons so long they couldn't eat with them, and when he urged them to feed their opposite numbers, they refused (Schwarzbaum 1968:178, 264, 166). In medieval exempla Dathan and Abiram envied Moses and Aaron and rebelled against them, and the earth swallowed them up (Tubach 1969:no. 1846; see Ginsberg 1912–38:101–2). But even rich men have envy, in large measure—Scipio was so accused before the Roman Senate (Tubach 1969:no. 4207). Two little girls in a convent learned to read together, and one, falling sick, tried to bribe the Prioress to hold the other back so that she would not be too far ahead of the invalid (Banks 1904–5:272). One could cite a hundred more, and discuss some of the contrasts between American and European tipping (I have had a Marchese restrain my hand when I wanted to tip for poor service). The major question I should ask Foster is where potlatch fits into the picture: boast, sop, or levelling to avoid envy? In any event, it is a notable parallel to the medieval feast, and to the largesse of the Germanic ring-giver and medieval aristocrat. The historical dimension might explain why Americans are so shy of compliments, so afraid of the envier.

by BEATRICE BLYTH WHITING\*

Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A. 23 IX 71

In choosing not to discuss "manipulative" envy, based on competitiveness, but only envy based on fear, Foster has, I think, ruled out all consideration of identification as a possible response to envy and thus weakened his analysis. For example, when there is envy between nonequals there are clearly more than the two courses of action described. Foster states (p. 171) that when a "have-not" envies a "have," "he may suppress, or renounce, his desire to take from the 'have,' or he may take such steps as he sees open to take from the 'have.'" I would suggest that the "have-not" can also identify with the "have" and in another setting assume his role. Such behavior is graphically described in Bettelheim's (1943) account of the behavior of prisoners in imitation of their tormentors, the guards in the Nazi concentration camps. Similarly there is evidence that in the process of growing up children envy nonequals—their older siblings and parents—and overtly or covertly practice the behavior of the "haves" (Whiting 1960). In many preindustrial

societies children are permitted to practice the behavior of the "haves" in interaction with younger siblings. There is also ample evidence of the envy of older for younger siblings and the regressive response of imitation of the behavior of the envied one. It seems too simplistic to classify all such behavior as renunciation or suppression. Nor does it seem that "encapsulation" into parent-child or older sibling-younger sibling statuses prevents status envy and identification.

I become acutely aware of the difficulty of testing one's interpretation of the defensive nature of customs when I read Foster's statement that the *couvade* serves to focus attention on the healthy father and thus protect the mother and infant from evil spirits. I find the Munroes' conclusion from their extensive research that the *couvade* is based on male envy of and identification with the childbearing woman a more convincing thesis (Munroe and Munroe 1971).

One wonders how much of the sharing behavior in peasant societies is motivated by fear of envy and how much is the result of tuition and practice in perceiving the needs of others and is motivated by the desire to be nurturant. In societies with subsistence economies, children from three or four years of age are expected to work for the welfare of the family, doing economic chores and caring for younger siblings. These children are observed to behave more nurturantly and less egoistically than children brought up in more complex societies (Whiting and Whiting n.d.).

The affinity of Americans for large uncurtained windows and no hedges might be interpreted as boasting rather than as fear that by concealing one incites envy. Since there is evidence that boasting is characteristic of children brought up in our complex, egoistically oriented society (Whiting and Whiting n.d.), I would tend to favor this hypothesis. I would, however, feel the need to devise methods for testing either hypothesis, or for that matter any hypothesis about why people favor or do not favor picture windows which expose the living area to the passerby. The absence of any mention of the need for testing the validity of his interpretations is a major failing of Foster's paper.

Clearly, however, Foster is presenting this material in the form of an essay rather than of a scientific treatise, and as such it contains many seminal insights and should stimulate fruitful research in the cross-cultural study of envy.



## Reply

by GEORGE M. FOSTER

"The Anatomy of Envy" is a serendipitous by-product of my ongoing research in Tzintzuntzan. One morning early in July, 1963, about a hundred children came for a school breakfast to the home of Doña Micaela González, with whom Mrs. Foster and I have lived during the past 12 years when in the village. At that time the Mexican government assisted rural communities to give young students a good breakfast and, in the absence of a school dining-room in Tzintzuntzan, housewives in turn undertook to serve the food. On this occasion I noted with astonishment that the children, jostling while waiting to be fed, became absolutely silent once they had their plates and cups filled: no whispering, no rib-poking, no joking. It was a striking contrast to a similar scene involving a hundred American school-children of the same age. I expressed my surprise to Doña Mica, who, equally astonished at my naïveté, said "Of course they're silent while they eat!" In reply to my prodding as to why, she said "Because they are taught to be silent when they eat." "How do you teach them?" I continued. "We tell them," explained Doña Mica, "'Be quiet, because the guardian angel is giving you your food,' or 'Be quiet, because the guardian angel is at the table.'"

This chance observation was like a trigger mechanism: it put wheels in motion in my head, and almost instantly a series of formal institutional and informal personal behavioral patterns flashed into my mind: the secrecy surrounding pregnancy and childbirth, the denial of compliments, the *remojo* offering, the baptismal *bolo*, evil-eye behavior, presents at wakes. I suppose it was the obvious envy underlying evil-eye precautions that gave me the clue to the relationship of these traits. Within an hour I had blocked out "Cultural Responses to Expressions of Envy in Tzintzuntzan" (Foster 1965a). I then went exploring, systematically asking myself about other points of social articulation where envy, and corresponding envy-reducing mechanisms, might exist. My nascent envy hypothesis had now acquired heuristic power, for my enquiry brought to light new behavior forms I had never seen, and it placed other common ones within a plausible framework: the bride-to-be's symbolic distribution of *atole* to the groom's friends, the host's inevitable apology for the poor quality of his food, the

uncertainty as to the number of fiesta guests, and, on the wider Mexican level, the *¿Gusta Usted comer?* and "It's yours" forms of courtesy.

Subsequent to publication of "Envy in Tzintzuntzan" I continued to gather related data. In 1964, while lecturing on community development, I quizzed Guatemalan village-level workers, who verified the silence-in-eating pattern in their country. "Mealtime is like Mass," i.e., silence at both times is appropriate, is the justification given by their parents. Wider reading revealed not only that peasants usually eat in silence, but also that they are uncomfortable when seen eating by others who are not eating.

Meanwhile, and totally independent of this exercise, I had been struck since college days by the fact that the word "tip" in each of the several languages I had studied had essentially the same meaning: money for drinking. Over the years I had quizzed native speakers of many languages, and found that if the language had a word for tip (many do not, of course), it always conformed to the same pattern. It was the cumulative evidence of tipping, eating in silence, and reluctance to be seen eating that convinced me the fear-of-envy framework first used in Tzintzuntzan was an explanatory device of much wider applicability. This conviction was strengthened when David Aberle, after reading the Tzintzuntzan article, called my attention to the literal and figurative identity of English "sop" and Spanish *remojo*, thereby providing me with the apt expression "sop behavior."

The fear-of-envy framework has produced, as Apthorpe and Whiting point out, not a scientifically testable model, but rather "an essay in conceptualization," an "essay rather than a scientific treatise." This was my intention—to let my imagination run freely (but always to base it on solid data), to play with hunches, to chuckle at new insights, to make outrageous suggestions, and to probe my colleagues' minds and experiences for new ideas and data. The approach has been successful. Some critics are outraged at all I have said (e.g., Faris and Moreno-Navarro). Others have raised valid questions about methodology and conceptualization, made constructive criticisms, and given me valuable new data. Kolenda assures me that the hunch about caste as an envy-reducing device is not hopelessly far out, Brown reports on the apparent failure to eliminate envy among children in Chinese villages and Israeli kibbutzim, and Messing has added pertinent Ethiopian illustrations. To all who have replied I am grateful for their interest,

even when I disagree with specific points. To speak in detail to each commentary would be tedious, so I will limit myself to discussing some of the critical points in the collective comments.

Brøgger warns us that an author, once possessed of a broad conceptual scheme, finds it tempting to cram every possible bit of data into that scheme. This is true; and now that I am aware of the ubiquity of envy, and of the extent to which we have gone in our society to repress it, almost automatically I examine every bit of symbolic behavior for its possible envy component. D'Andrade provides me with such an example: housewarming presents. At least at a covert level, housewarming presents plausibly can be explained as a device to assure the new householder that his friends bear him no ill will for his good fortune. But as Brøgger himself, and also Bock and Cappannari, remind us, symbolic expressions, like dream symbols, have more than one referent. They may also have more than one cause, as when protein deficiency following weaning underlies at least some *chipil*-type behavior, explained in many societies as due to sibling jealousy alone. In other words, the examples I have given can be interpreted or explained at several levels, and in a variety of ways not necessarily mutually exclusive. The purpose of an essay like "The Anatomy of Envy" is not to establish eternal scientific verities; it is to ask questions, to explore plausible lines of explanation, to afford new insight into old or forgotten problems.

Obviously, as Paddock aptly points out with a Spanish proverb, the more general an explanatory framework, the greater the degree of question with respect to any specific datum. At the same time, criticism of broad schema and their supporting data must be framed in equally comprehensive systems; they cannot simply be statements of alternate conviction. Brøgger, whose comments in general are most helpful, comes close to falling into this trap when he says that in rural Mediterranean areas widows dress in black "not because they fear the envy of the dead, but partly because they fear the gossip and criticism of the village, and partly . . . to express genuine grief." His proof? It is little more than a statement of the conventional anthropological wisdom. Can he fit this statement into a wider and more plausible framework than fear-of-envy? If he can, he still no more demolishes fear-of-envy than I demolish his hypothesis. Both could be valid at the same time, both representing different levels of interpretation. In the same



vein Bock is correct when he says that "understatement," e.g., modesty, may not only reflect concern with envy, but also represent a positive statement with respect to choice in style of life, a point Reynolds makes in slightly different fashion.

In the light of these comments, Whiting's note of my neglect of ways of testing the validity of the hypothesis, and Reynolds's request for "further objective testing," are beside the point. The hypothesis can't be scientifically tested any more than Freudian theory, or Redfield's folk-urban continuum, can be scientifically tested. Different individuals in different degrees find the arguments more or less plausible. Whiting, for example, in her commentary, and in other papers as well, offers as an alternate hypothesis to explain sharing in peasant societies the possibility that such sharing "is the result of tuition and practice in perceiving the needs of others and is motivated by the desire to be nurturant." She would also, presumably, interpret the distribution of moose meat described by Savishinsky as "nurturant" behavior. Personally I find his "deflection of envy" explanation to be more plausible, but neither he nor I can "prove" this hypothesis.

In different ways Cuisenier, D'Andrade, Kolenda, Maccoby, Ritchie, and Reynolds ask whether it is possible to measure varying degrees of envy among individuals in the same society, or whether there may in fact be societies and people essentially without envy. Certainly there are those who deny they are envious, and in whom, perhaps, others see little if any overt evidence of it. There are also people who are absolutely convinced that they do not dream, and until REM research demonstrated that *all* people dream we had to entertain the possibility that there were indeed nondreamers. With respect to the presence or absence of envy, we need an REM-type test. Until and unless such a test is devised, we will have to accept the most "plausible" answer to the question: some individuals appear to be less envious than others, and perhaps there is a lesser incidence of collective envy in some societies than in others. The overt evidence of the fear of envy in Egypt is greater than in the United States, but does this represent a real difference? How do we measure the incidence of envy? Because of the myriad forms it may take, this would be like adding grapes, apples, and watermelons. Can each form be "weighted" so that a meaningful sum will result? I doubt it.

On this theme, the differential evaluation of envy in the United States by two Europeans is highly interesting:

Apthorpe finds that, at least among women, it is common, and that there is no hesitation in admitting to it; St. Erlich, in contrast, feels that in the United States the emotion is much less marked than in the eastern European societies she has so well described. Envy, however, is a multifaceted phenomenon, and I suspect that for every society about which we have a really detailed account, we can find behavior forms most plausibly explained by it. The problem is to recognize, or interpret, the different symbolic forms this envy takes. I tend to agree with St. Erlich when she says that probably every community has the "same load of envy, and only the outlets are different." With respect to Cuisenier's criticism that I do not demonstrate the universality of envy because I do not provide examples from all cultures, let me turn the question around: can he provide a single example of a society without envy? If so, how can he prove it is without envy? Utley's meticulously documented commentary certainly demonstrates the widespread recognition of envy in medieval Europe, as well as its earlier presence as seen in folklore; his data appear to contradict Cuisenier's conclusion that neither learned nor popular literature gives a prominent place to envy.

Moreno-Navarro, Ritchie, and Seddon take issue with the statement that people in general do not "envy down." To Moreno-Navarro the argument is "a sample of class ethnocentrism" demonstrating "the acceptance of the capitalist quasi-dogma that the only important values are wealth and power." Wealth and power are, I suppose, envied by many people, but other things, such as fame, reputation, and status, may also be envied. Moreno-Navarro actually answers his question when he correctly points out that "two people can be thought of as equals for one goal and nonequals for another." Ritchie bases his disagreement with the proposition on the values of contemporary youth, which, if I interpret him correctly, he seems to feel I may not understand. A professor at Berkeley may indeed be baffled by much behavior of contemporary youth, but he certainly is not ignorant of it! Obviously the values of many (but by no means all) young people are vastly different from those of their parents. Perhaps the segment that Ritchie has in mind does not envy up. After all, why should it? Many of its members have achieved the freedom, the mobility, and the absence of worry that formerly marked only those with wealth and status. It makes me wonder

who is "up" and who is "down." The same question applies to Seddon, who seems to say that a self-made millionaire is "down" as compared to a member of the nobility or an eminent politician. Doubtless there are millionaires who envy the nobility their social position, but there must also be down-at-the-heels nobility who rather envy the millionaire's freedom from financial worry.

With respect to "up" and "down," Reynolds's statement that the person or the group that is barely able to keep alive does not envy requires qualification. Such people perhaps do not envy up because, as she points out, they perceive no possibility of obtaining what they might envy, and hence remain sunk in apathy. But this does not mean they are without envy, for realistically they can aspire to what their peers possess, as evidenced by the prevalence of witchcraft and theft at the lowest socioeconomic levels. Reynolds's comments on diminishing envy at higher and higher levels seem to contradict her earlier statement. I partially agree with her here, because at least as far as overt cultural manifestations are concerned, the poorer societies are the ones that exhibit the greatest number of behavior forms amenable to fear-of-envy interpretations, and most of these forms prevail among people who are more or less at a common socioeconomic level.

Cuisenier, Faris, and Freeman comment adversely on my Limited Good model, and consequently on its extension to the field of envy. St. Erlich, Messing, and Ritchie regard the extension as logical, and Paddock, while approving the original model, feels the case is weakened by extension. Many of the criticisms against Limited Good are based on misreading or misinterpretation of my argument. Freeman, for example, overlooks the difference between peasantry as an open system (which is the key concept in my structural interpretation of peasant society) and *the peasant's perception of his system as closed*, which is the nub of my case for Limited Good. She is not, unfortunately, alone in this error. But this is not the place to debate Limited Good; I expect to do this in another place in the near future. In view of the confusion that the injection of the issue has caused some readers, I perhaps would play down, or omit entirely, reference to Limited Good were I rewriting the article. Fear of envy can be discussed without it, although not without the data from Limited Good societies unless we are willing to settle for a much more limited statement. In reply to



Cuisenier's and Freeman's criticism that I draw excessively on peasant society, it must be noted that these are precisely the societies in which the cultural forms, the behavior that is critical to the argument, are most prevalent. A less comprehensive hypothesis, as I have just said, could be worked out solely on the basis of evidence from industrial societies. But would this strengthen the argument? I doubt it. Quite to the contrary, I think it is the old-fashioned anthropological comparative approach, which links behavior in societies at all levels of complexity, that lends greatest credence to the argument.

I am astonished at Freeman's comment that

Foster draws the vast bulk of exemplary data from societies where he hopes to find his hypothesis best supported and where many authors' treatment of their field data has been at least partly conditioned by the literature on "peasants," "gossip and envy," etc., some of the notions dating from Foster's own essay on interpersonal relations in peasant societies.

Are anthropologists today so uncritical that they accept without question? Not if I can judge by the reaction to Limited Good. Yet Freeman implies, if I understand her correctly, that in "Interpersonal Relations in Peasant Society" I created an erroneous but persuasive picture of how peasants behave, and that since that time many anthropologists obligingly have returned from the field with unconsciously biased data that I now use in extending my cultural interpretations. Let the Blums, Cancian, Fernea, Lutfiyya, Moerman, the Reichel-Dolmatoffs, Margery Wolf, and Yalman speak for themselves, for these are the ones to

whom she must be referring. Obviously I have drawn much data from peasant societies. Since peasants acknowledge envy to a degree not common in more complex societies, it is reasonable to expect more cultural devices to cope with the fear of envy. Freeman misses what to me is perhaps the most remarkable thing in the whole argument: the extent to which data from nonpeasant societies also fit into the hypothesis.

A few final and specific points may be mentioned. Whiting is helpful in pointing out that in some situations, such as the child's envy of its parent, identification is one reaction to envy; this is an important omission from the paper. Cappannari and Savishinsky are correct in arguing that under certain circumstances envy has positive social functions, the former showing its role in the reaffirmation of group values and the latter its function in promoting band survival by guaranteeing (through distribution of meat) a minimum level of nourishment for all. Bernard's suggestion that "shifting the locus of responsibility" may be a conscious or unconscious stratagem to avoid responsibility for past or future actions is amply documented in Tzintzuntzan, where it is felt that individual character is a "given" over which one has little control (Foster 1967:119-20). I am puzzled, however, as to why he is reluctant to assign spitting to counter fear of the evil eye to the category of conscious acts in which one engages to reassure a mother that admiration of her child is not ill-intentioned. When considered in the whole context of evil-eye behavior, it seems to me that this is one of the most obvious and least questionable symbolic forms I have cited.

I find it difficult to comment on the remarks of Faris and Moreno-Navarro, since in ideological outlook and general tone they are so very different from the other commentators. In presenting their arguments within a Marxist framework, they essentially deny the validity of any psychological explanation, which of course is what the paper is all about. How am I to reply when Moreno-Navarro says "I find some of his [Foster's] interpretations too psychological. We do not need to return to Durkheim to know that social phenomena should be explained more in sociological than in psychological ways"? Or when Faris says that "For sufficient explanations [of social phenomena] social scientists must rely on *social processes*"? Both miss—or better, completely reject—the whole point of the argument, namely that psychological interpretation of symbolic behavior tells us a great deal about society and culture without in any way negating the importance of sociological analysis. To slight either approach is to settle for a less than complete picture. But I have noticed that belief in religion and symbolic interpretation have much in common: whether accepted or rejected by the individual, the questions are not debatable. In writing this paper I recognized that some critics would doubtless find it "insipid" (to quote Faris), but I hadn't anticipated that it would be found "dangerous." Yet, apparently, my paper is a spirited defense of the worst aspects of exploitive capitalism. Or is Faris saying with tongue in cheek that my talents as an applied anthropologist go beyond the normally accepted limits of this field? I prefer to think the latter, and so fearlessly acknowledge the compliment.

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## Notes on New Books

■ *The Ghost Dance*, by Weston La Barre (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970) was, for a valued colleague of mine in the History of Religions to whom I had recommended it, an exasperating work. My colleague argued that the theoretical perspective taken by La Barre—the perspective of analytic psychology, with its view that religion is a delusional system, a nonadaptive psychic defense mechanism against crisis put forth largely by vatic personages of neurotic or psychotic disposition—is itself scarcely free of mythological mental personages (the three-part morality play of id, ego, and superego) and itself depends upon a certain charisma, if not shamanistic performance, for its effects upon men. But debating "world hypothesis" misses the point. This book is no simple tract in which a tough proponent of a modern religion of very recent prophecy confronts an older, soft-headed and soft-hearted persuasion fallen into the hands of indulgent and narrow-minded priests and pastors. This is no work, such as we have sometimes seen, written by an analytic psychologist dabbling in anthropology and finding its bizarre materials resonant with what he obtains from his own patients. This is, in my view, an exceptionally learned book on the anthropology of religion written by an anthropologist with wide field experience and, perhaps, the widest scholarly frame of reference we have today in our field. La Barre is convinced that the outstanding feature of human life is its irrationality and that the brain, as we

have seen it at work, is not primarily an organ for "grinding out rational truths, but the major homeostatic organ in the body." He feels that analytic psychology best explains such irrationalities and offers a more realistic and adaptive, if less pleasurable, understanding of the human situation.

In the process of presenting this perspective—over 600 pages—La Barre brings to bear anthropological learning from the entire discipline. We get one of the most concise summaries of the history of thinking on the problem of religion that I know. Every chapter offers fine flights of intellect and insight and some chapters learned "detours de force" through adjacent topics—glabrousness, neoteny and brow-ridge development in religious propensity, the pharmacopoeia of psychoreactive plants, cultism in the social sciences, the influence of romantic theology on anthropology, the religious contexts of Paleolithic art, the shamanism of Plato, and much more. The book is often so rich and intriguing that one is tempted to give it bedside status and recommend it for repeated consultation. La Barre has proved himself once again to be a master of the human animal.

I am not convinced, insofar as our anthropology is applied, that at the present stage of evolution most men will find satisfaction in analyzing their ultimate circumstances "amidst the heartless winds that sweep the universe" with the tools that La Barre provides. They will continue to need that mythopoeic dance which periodically intensifies and returns to the whole. The problem is to escape a narrow meanness in such dances. It seems to me that the wisdom in this

book can only help students of religion to do just that.

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■ *Evolution der Sprache und Vernunft*, by Gerhard Höpp (Berlin-Heidelberg-New York: Springer, 1970), presents a theory of language evolution on the basis of the imperative. Out of imperative one-word sentences have evolved, according to Höpp, two-word sentences, proper names, reference sentences, and all other grammatical forms, through a process of continuous "dualization." This idea of dualization or fission is not new; it is advocated, I suppose, by the majority of modern psycholinguists engaged in investigating the language development of children. Likewise, prominent language researchers, among them Arnold Gehlen, have already pointed to the original unity of language and reason and the development of language out of action. However, in contrast to Gehlen, who recognizes at least five different roots of language, Höpp restricts himself to one, the imperative, in this way repeating the mistake of several older authors of attempting to derive all developments from a single principle. Consequently, Höpp's theory, although, or because, it is carried through strictly, seems overloaded. His book may convey theoretical stimulation to an old problem, but it scarcely represents a real basic design that accommodates all possible points of view.

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