Envy Rising

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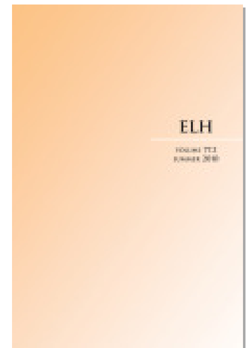

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ENVY RISING

BY FRANCES FERGUSON

When scholars canvas the history of the emotions, they are regularly able to produce convincing examples of a full range of emotions that is more or less equivalent to the spectrum that we recognize today. Yet even while we haven't altogether retired avarice, pride, and grief, the claim I want to explore revolves around the simple observation that the emotions have recently been conspicuously consolidated, so that two—envy and humiliation—have come to assume featured roles in the work of psychoanalysts, political scientists, and philosophers. Increasingly, they have been seen as the emotions that accompany democracy and identify the possibilities and the limits of political justice. As the emotions that register the injustices of social regard and the inequalities in the distribution of public endorsement of individuals, envy and humiliation are almost by definition the emotions that would interest political theorists who debate the advantages and disadvantages of democracy, because they are emotions that are resolutely extraindividual emotions.

By talking about the extraindividual quality of the emotions of envy and humiliation, I don't mean to suggest that there is no individual aspect to them. Nor do I mean to say that some persons will be not be more susceptible to these emotions than others, and that this susceptibility will come to be so bound up with everything that we think of as their characters that we virtually identify their characters as individuals with their capacity for having such feelings. We retain personification not by having persons represent avarice on a stage but by thinking of John or Jane as envious. Indeed, the interesting feature of the emotions of envy and humiliation is that they are detached from objects that would enable us to explain them if we couldn't point to individuals who obviously felt them. Envy and humiliation, by contrast with gluttony or avarice or lust, do not have objects that are in any way independent of a social relation. In that, perhaps surprisingly, envy and humiliation are similar to the aesthetic judgment as Hume described it, in that the explanations of the emotions tend to center less on the availability of an objective description that everyone will recognize than on the sense that there

are some people who have a kind of expertise in making their objects—be they paintings or enviable persons—seem particularly available. As the tasteful or the envious, they are walking embodiments of the deviation from an otherwise unarticulated norm. Thus, while we might suggest a new dietary regimen for the glutton or send a miser to a financial planner, it is difficult to establish a standard by which we might gauge what we thought of as a proper degree of envy or humiliation. (The person who could observe an acquaintance win the lottery without experiencing a pang would, on the basis of such insensibility, probably strike us all as remarkably generous; the person who never felt humiliated would have to be either a saint or a monster because they would be, properly speaking, incorrigible. But past such extreme examples, it is difficult to give advice.)

Indeed, it is because envy centers less on objects than on the nature of social relationship in general that it has seemed to present a particular challenge for modern governmental regimes. Thus, Helmut Schoeck advances a two-pronged view—that societies will be able to achieve the greatest progress by proceeding as if envy were not a consideration, and that societies err when they attempt to achieve equality by appeasing envy. He affirms that “the more both private individuals and the custodians of political power in a given society are able to act as though there were no such thing as envy, the greater will be the rate of economic growth and the number of innovations in general,” and laments that “many well-meant proposals for the ‘good society’ or the completely ‘just society’ are doomed because they are based on the false premise that this must be a society in which there is nothing left for anyone to envy.” Because, in his view, envy is both ineradicable and ingenious, it will always outstrip any conceivable efforts at redistribution: “man inevitably discovers something new to envy.”[1]

Yet if this account of envy conforms to a fairly recognizable conservative political argument, Schoeck makes one claim that is far less familiar—that envy, far from being a disruptive force, actually promotes social cohesion. Man, he writes, “is capable of associating in lasting groups and societies . . . primarily due to his being subject to a constant, frequently subliminal urge to be envious of all those deviating from a norm.”[2] And he thus manages to chalk up envy to two different accounts at once. Envy, as the instantaneous recognition that someone else is more fortunate than you, registers inequality in such a way as to threaten fellow feeling; envy, as the recognition

of deviation from a norm, registers disparities between one person's situation and another's in such a way as to insist upon social cohesion.

In making this latter claim that envy both expresses and promotes social cohesion, Schoeck makes envy a conspicuously political term. It is a political term, moreover, because it imagines that the various members of a society recognize themselves as of the same general political species, and that membership in the political species is strong enough to override a host of other differences. Thus, Schoeck rehearses stories from American newspapers—stories of relatively poor boys who had murdered their affluent friends not in spite of the friendship but because of it—to make a point that had emerged in less lurid fashion in David Hume's analysis in *A Treatise of Human Nature*: namely, that with envy that "arises from a superiority in others," the activating cause of the emotion is not so much "the great disproportion betwixt ourself and another" but rather "our proximity." Envy, he writes, is "excited by some present enjoyment of another, which by comparison diminishes our idea of our own," but this comparison quickly reaches its limit. One might think that envy would increase to exactly the degree that the disproportion increased, Hume explained, but "the great disproportion cuts off the relation, and either keeps us from comparing ourselves with what is remote from us, or diminishes the effects of the comparison." With that, he sought to explain a familiar sort of observation—that a "common soldier bears no such envy to his general as to his sergeant or corporal," "that an eminent writer" encounters more jealousy from authors that more nearly approach him than from "common hackney scriblers," and that travellers "are commonly . . . lavish of their Praises to the *Chinese* and *Persians*" while depreciating "those neighbouring nations, which may stand upon a foot of rivalship with their native country."[3]

What both Schoeck and Hume put us in the position to see is that envy functions to identify its protagonists—the envious and the envied—as *members of the same species*. Envy, that is, functions to *classify* its central figures as similar enough for a comparison to be meaningful, and as similar enough for an invidious comparison to seem objectionable. Hume simply observes the workings of the emotion and describes them; Schoeck goes farther, to insist not merely that envy exists as a species-marking emotion, but also to argue that its effects are positive. And the force of this species-marking logic becomes most clearly visible in the moment in which it is deployed most wittily and exactly—when John Keats cleverly

insists of the nightingale that he doesn't envy him his happy lot. Being able to be too happy in the bird's happiness revolves around an identification that continually acknowledges that the person and the bird can only fancifully be compared; it is an identification that relies on an essential estrangement to disarm it of any potentially competitive edge.

Yet if it might seem from Keats's description that envy was a term on everyone's lips in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, any reading of the transcripts of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare from 1811–1812 would quickly disabuse us of that assumption. There Coleridge continually describes Iago in terms of a regular comparison between himself and others and seizes upon the moment in which Roderigo "elicits a true feeling of Iago's—the dread of contempt habitual to those who encourage in themselves and have their keenest pleasure in the feeling and expression of contempt for others." To that observation, Coleridge adds three other elements: the sense that Iago proceeds with "the coolness of a preconceiving *experimenter*" in his dealings first with Roderigo and then with Othello; the observation that it is both "exquisite and Shakespearian" for Iago to describe Cassio as Florentine to a "young Venetian," to excite the contempt that follows national rivalry"; and, finally, the famous characterization of Iago's "motive-hunting of motiveless malignity."[4]

What Coleridge means by "motiveless malignity," of course, is that Iago's character is what he calls "passionless," that all his "*will*" is in his intellect. And what the location of Iago's will in his intellect means is that he is continually experimenting with relationships so as to make people question the compacts that they make and acknowledge as emotional attachments. The alacrity with which Coleridge dispatches Iago's suggestion that he is jealous (because, he says, he suspects Othello of having "leap'd" into his seat) makes it clear that he sees a distinct separation between jealousy and envy.[5] Othello, while not jealous by nature, is, when jealous, at least motivated by the sense of attachment to Desdemona. Iago, on the other hand, envies Othello (along with other characters in the play) in a more general way. He envies them their satisfaction in their lives. Indeed, he can be said to envy Othello his very jealousy—the ability to identify an object of his affections, to say whose love and loss makes him susceptible to jealousy.

Although Coleridge never mentions the word "envy" in his account of *Othello*, what seems clear is that his description of Iago identifies envy in all but name. Moreover, his interest in the play

constitutes a key moment in what I think of as a pivotal Romantic contribution to the discourse of the emotions—namely, the disambiguation of jealousy from envy. Jealousy, if we were to translate Coleridge's account loosely, represents the world of naive emotion, in which a character like Othello can wear his heart on his sleeve and have his love for Desdemona be so readily apparent that it counts as a perceptible object available for Iago's manipulation. It is a motive that can be observed and treated as part of a reasonable world of emotion. Iago's motiveless malignity, by contrast, is envy to just the extent to which it detaches itself from any object-oriented motive and decides that its only goal is to work on those motives. And the fact that Iago's intentions don't appear to other people—so that Othello can sincerely call him "honest" Iago in the midst of his plotting—is not a result of his disguising motives that he actually has, but of his operating only in the world of what a psychoanalytic account would call desire, of emotions that, in being parasitic on emotions with objects, are systemic rather than localized. They seek to work not by valuing an object but by reacting to—and seeking to affect—the terms in which it is valued.

What I am arguing is that the rise of envy as a distinctive and regularly identifiable emotion accompanies the rise of the perspicuousness of the evaluations of the social field. By the time that Dickens is writing *Our Mutual Friend* some half-century later (in 1864 and 1865), the possibility of distinguishing between jealousy and envy will be so thoroughly available that Dickens can build one entire section of his complex plot around it. There, you will recall, Bradley Headstone, "master in a school," and Eugene Wraybum, "A briefless barrister, of a gloomy, indolent, unambitious nature," are rivals for the affections of Lizzie Hexam, Gaffer Hexam's poor, "brave, devoted daughter."[6] When Headstone stalks Wrayburn and finally inflicts mortal wounds upon him, it would be easy enough to imagine him as acting in a jealous rage. And this impression would only be strengthened if we remembered that Wrayburn had just earlier resolved to seduce Lizzie, in full consciousness of the fact that she had left London so as to avoid becoming the victim of her own partiality to him. The jealousy that we might expect Headstone to feel because he and Wrayburn were both attached to the same person would be magnified by Headstone's sense that Wrayburn was both successful in securing Lizzie's affections and unworthy of them.

Yet the plausibility of jealousy here serves only to highlight a remarkable feature of the novel—that jealousy seems scarcely to

enter. Even Headstone, that is, seems to believe implicitly that Lizzie is entirely truthful when she says that she wouldn't love Headstone even if Wrayburn didn't exist, and when she insists that she knows that she and Wrayburn come from different worlds, different classes. And when Lizzie turns Wrayburn away, having insisted she and he can never be on "equal terms" with one another (718), Dickens prepares the groundwork for noting the irony of the situation: Headstone's murderous attack, far from eliminating his rival, produces the only set of conditions that can disrupt the consciousness of inequality between Lizzie and Wrayburn and constitutes Wrayburn as a more serious object of Lizzie's affections than he otherwise could have been.

Yet if we were to say that Dickens does not emphasize this aspect of the situation, we would be understating matters radically. For insofar as Bradley Headstone experiences jealousy that Eugene Wrayburn can command Lizzie Hexam's affections as he cannot, his is a jealousy that is a simple by-product of envy—as becomes clear when Headstone continually asks for news of Wrayburn's condition and specifically asks that it be news of Wrayburn's death. What Headstone has against Wrayburn is everything that is summed up by Rogue Riderhood's name for Wrayburn, "T'otherest governor," frequently shortened to the mere epithet "T'otherest." It involves Wrayburn's willingness to express his contempt for people like Headstone and Riderhood (to provoke what will seem to Headstone like "'[s]pites, affronts, offences giv' and took, deadly aggrawations," in Riderhood's terminology [654]). But in this novel of emulation (Mortimer Lightwood's emulation of Eugene Wrayburn) and imitation (Headstone's imitation of Riderhood's dress when he's stalking Wrayburn), the major significance of that epithet "t'otherest" is that it marks Wrayburn as the windfall beneficiary of social class. Thus, he may be spied on and stalked, and may even run his stalker Headstone all over London and lead him into lanes without issue ("abstruse No Thoroughfares") so that he can excite him to "grinding torments" (562, 563). But the crucial point is that Wrayburn can play this game of cat and mouse in the full knowledge that what Bradley Headstone holds against him is what can never be caught—namely, the symbolic benefit of Wrayburn's being a gentleman who counts as such for other gentlemen, someone who enjoys respect without effort and accomplishment in indolence.

This is as much as to say that the structure of envy reveals itself in such a way as to explain why the jealousy plot (and Dickens does use

the word "jealousy," for instance on 567) involves an object that appears in a supraindividual fashion to Bradley Headstone. Even Headstone's "love at first sight" for Lizzie Hexam is treated less as an attachment to her in particular than as a sudden manifestation of Headstone's readiness to go mad, in "some form of tribute to Somebody for something that never was done, or, if ever done, that was done by Somebody Else" (355). And when Dickens describes "love at first sight" as "a trite expression quite sufficiently discussed," the importance of the phrase's triteness is that it suggests how much Lizzie Hexam operates as an accidental key, a magic word that releases a host of otherwise indiscernible emotions.

Thus, when Headstone dies, he becomes one of the first literary martyrs to envy. In taking himself down along with Rogue Riderhood, he enables Dickens's plot to demonstrate the proverbial wisdom about envy—that an envious man can only murder in the process of committing suicide.[7] This observation is captured in both folk wisdom and in the philosophical analysis from Hume through John Rawls and Ronald de Sousa.[8] Envy is a "negative" emotion, not simply in the sense of being ungenerous and generally unhelpful, but also in the sense of being distinctly counterproductive for the person who is its hapless agent. It is, indeed, an emotion that, in registering an individual's frustration at having lost out to someone else in his own mental comparisons, is an emotion that one would distinctly like not to have. Moreover, whether one would choose to have it or not, envy is regularly described as both an unhappy and a shameful emotion. Betraying one's envy exposes a sense of insecurity to public view and creates a staging ground on which self-doubt can inspire doubt in others. In Dickens's plot we can read off all these strands of the rational commentary on envy. Envy doesn't simply express hatred, it draws it down. Envy doesn't simply seek equity with a rivalrous and vengeful inflection. It also makes its author ingeniously self-punishing, so that Bradley's attempted murder, unpacked, comes to look like only a pretext for suicide.

Yet if it might appear that we are uncovering a structure of envy that is essentially timeless, Bradley Headstone enables us to see that the problem of envy has developed a new intensity by the time of Dickens's writing. For Headstone might seem, on the face of it, an improbable candidate for serial murderer. He is not a highway robber, a thug, or a brigand of any sort. He is a "schoolmaster," as Dickens continually reminds us, speaking of Headstone by his professional epithet, "the schoolmaster," as often as Chaucer associ-

ated his pilgrims with their work.[9] He is, moreover, a schoolmaster of a particularly modem sort—a schoolmaster trained up and operating entirely in the orbit of the modem monitorial techniques that Andrew Bell and Joseph Lancaster laid out in writings from 1798 on and that Jeremy Bentham applauded and elaborated in the *Chrestomathia* that he published in 1816.

The chief aim of those educational techniques was to extend opportunities for learning to the masses, and particularly to the children of the laboring poor whose ranks in the city of London had swelled with the growth of urban manufactures. Moreover, while it is obviously true that the monitorial system was designed to train up its students so that they might contribute to the work force, one striking feature of the "Chrestomathic Instruction Tables" that Bentham drew up as a kind of map to his overall scheme is its emphasis on the benefits of the learning to their possessor. In this approach, a willingness to learn was not treated as a virtue, as it had been in much eighteenth-century conduct book literature. Rather, Bentham's analysis began, in classic utilitarian fashion, by asking whether "Learning, or Intellectual Instruction" really was a universal good, whether its benefits were confined to gentlemen and aristocrats or whether they could also be extended to the children of the laboring classes as well.

In the absence of the kind of economic data that enables our contemporaries to write essays analyzing the costs and benefits of, say, a university education in relation to projected future earnings, Bentham was in the position of recommending mass education as having comparative advantages simply when considered against then current practices. Mass education of the kind that Lancaster, Bell, and Bentham proposed might have disadvantages, he admitted. Yet any comparison with prevailing conditions demonstrated its desirability. It could not be worse than having working parents simply leave their children unattended during the work day, or than having children given relatively little attention in the "some day-school, however incompetent to the purpose of instruction, more for the assurance of keeping them under inspection, and then out of harm, than for the hope of enabling them to make any considerable acquisition of useful knowledge."[10]

Bentham was, of course, forced into this rather vague contrast between present disarray and future improvement by the fact that the new educational schemes began by disconnecting education from very distinctly identifiable ends. One feature of the new systems was that they minimized the predictions that educators made about the

long-range prospects of their pupils. They taught to the test as opposed to teaching to the life. The contrast with previous practice could scarcely have been greater. Education for the ruling classes had, after all, been shaped by a relatively clear sense of the future role of the pupil. Thomas Elyot was educating a governor; John Locke, Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant were tutors to governors—gentlemen, aristocrats, princes. And though Locke, Rousseau, and Kant saw themselves as educating princes and gentlemen to be men rather than mere products of their social roles, Rousseau was the only one of the three who tried to imagine a world in which his pupil's future was subject to drastic alteration in the way that the monitorial systems left open. Moreover, education for the trades had had an even more restricted set of aims: although it had frequently stressed something like moral hygiene as a necessary part of being able to work, its intellectual aspirations were circumscribed by the commitment to producing carpenters or printers.

In making this observation, I mean to stress the fact that education had theretofore been *driven by demand*, in which knowledge was continually justified by reference to a goal and in which knowing what you were going to be identified what you needed to know. And I mean to emphasize the fact that Lancaster, Bell, and Bentham were performing a radical alteration of that traditional understanding of education when they designed it to address the question of supply. The crucial insight that linked Lancaster's and Bentham's work in London with Bell's work in Madras was the basic recognition that the numerousness of children in cities must inevitably alter the educational process itself. The centralization of England that made London more than the seat of government meant that one could see children in abundance, and this abundant supply of children made the old dame schools of the countryside, with their assortments of students of widely divergent ages and abilities, look like remarkably primitive and ineffective institutions. For while education would never take place without the conviction that the students had a potential for learning, the development of mass education depended on a rather more dispassionate form of that confidence than parents or even tutors were in a position to achieve within the context of a home.

City children were children numerous rather than children distinctive. Lancaster's frequent assertion was that he could obtain great value from what was essentially refuse (so that cast-off slate roofing tiles became slates on which the students could display their abilities to write letters, prizes could be made by cutting illustrations out of

books, and straw from Leghorn could be plaited and sewn into hats that could be sold at substantial prices). Yet nowhere was that Rumpelstiltskin-like claim to spin straw into gold truer than with the students themselves. For what the monitorial schools of Lancaster, Bell, and Bentham offered was an opportunity to tap into the value of an accumulation of people, to create an *economy of acknowledgment*, so that the first of all the advantages that Bentham listed was that learning involved "[s]ecuring to the possessor a proportionable share of *general respect*."[11] What the monitorial system promised, then, was not so much the financial success that might enable the middle class to come to make its benefits hereditary, and that might cause its children to be well regarded out of the kind of association that Hume analyzed in talking about the regard we have for "men of birth" even when we are thinking well of them for their connection with persons who, being dead, are unlikely to do us any immediate good.[12] Rather, the monitorial system aimed to create an artificial association—among persons previously unknown to one another and contemporary with one another. Sociability was being replaced with an association that included all comers, and hereditary connection was superseded by constant relationship to one's age mates.

Hume's discussion of association and sympathy in *A Treatise of Human Nature* provided a certain authorization for this approach, but Bell, Lancaster, and Bentham ended up differing rather considerably from Hume in their commitment to tracking the association of persons rather than the association of ideas. Hume's analysis had appended sympathy to utility in the effort to explain why we admired things that were useful even when they were useful *to someone else* rather than to us. Thus, he had asserted that anyone who was showing off "any house or building" of his would "point out the convenience of the apartments, the advantages of their situation, and the little room lost in the stairs, antechamber and passages" and would be right to do so, because "the chief part of the beauty consists in these particulars."[13] He had, as well, fully explored the way in which possessions might represent the power to act, and in which sympathy would sustain that connection by leading us to identify with persons whose power was more potential than actual—the miser who, in not spending, does not exercise his power, and the ancestors who, in being dead, are clearly never going to decide to act for our advantage or anyone else's. And if Hume had shown Bentham the way to understanding that utility was the cornerstone of human experience, what Bell and Lancaster enabled him to see was the extent to which

association itself could become useful without ever having been routed through a representation in property and objects of possession.

The monitorial schools were, that is, especially important for their effort to represent values that had previously been unrepresentable—the value of society to an individual. In this they developed an insight that had theretofore operated as a kind of philosophical limit; they no longer rested content with naming society and sociability as a good but also insisted upon identifying techniques for demonstrating how that good might be allocated. Thus, when Bentham described his Chrestomathic scheme as providing its pupils a "proportionable share of *general respect*," he imagined, among other things, that it could introduce an entirely new arena for justice. In the monitorial scheme, one might establish what degree of respect someone was due.

The importance of the claim for a justice of recognition can easily be minimized or obscured. If we focus on crimes like blasphemy that had long been crimes insofar as they attacked a king or bishop in their role as symbolic persons, a justice of recognition may seem to have existed from time immemorial. Yet the mechanisms for that judgment were extremely crude. A certain small number of persons were seen as having recognition as their due, and there were only two possible evaluations of recognition—proper and improper. Thus, although Lancaster expatiated upon his system of awarding prizes to his pupils as continuous with the basic motives of aristocracy, what Bentham particularly seized upon was a monitorial technique that would occupy a key role in utilitarianism—ranking. By turning the schoolroom into a classroom, and making it a whole that ranked each and every pupil in each and every moment, the monitorial system did not simply evaluate them. It made value a commodity. Ranking, which Bentham identified as the "place-capturing principle," insisted upon identifying hierarchy by making the cooperation of the mutually instructing scholars accompany their competition.[14] If the monitorial system was able to achieve fabulous economies by using students to teach students so that only one schoolmaster might supervise a thousand, that was largely because the schoolmaster was merely a personification of the invisible hand of the classroom. He needed no charisma, because the value of his example was not particularly important. He needed no particular psychological insight or judgment, because he did not need to evaluate the students himself. He needed simply to exist to close off the evaluative process and thus to guarantee the evaluative mechanisms of the mutual instruction

method. At the summit of the hierarchy, he instantiated a management model of education by showing exactly how far the educational process could minimize content in the process of maximizing ranking and ordering themselves.

In making that observation, I do not mean to make a familiar criticism of normal schools and teacher education courses and to deplore them for evacuating curricula of their content. Indeed, I mean to suggest the limitations of that common-sense view of the importance of a focus on the basics of learning. For it is a crucial fact about the monitorial system of education that it offered more substantial learning than had previously been available to all but the most affluent. Although Bell and Lancaster, taking working class and destitute children as their principal clientele, stopped with rather rudimentary skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic, Bentham insisted that the mutual instruction system could easily be adapted to the teaching of architecture, classical languages, and abstract mathematics. Thus, when I point out that the monitorial plans were not deeply committed to their curricula, I do not mean to say that they were indifferent to serious intellectual endeavor. Instead, I want to focus on the concern with method before content to highlight the exact place of the process of hierarchization in the scheme.

For the rank ordering that the "place-capturing principle" represented aimed to provide credentials to the previously unwashed and a stake for the theretofore unaccomplished by making them always distinguishable one from another. "Boy number three" and "girl number seventeen" might be as comparatively nameless as Dickens suggested in *Hard Times* when he had Gradgrind call his scholars by their numbers. But the point of the numbering was not really to deprive children of the names that might be tokens of ties of affection. Rather, it was to make it possible for students to establish their comparative value at every point. The system was geared towards working through apparent similarities between students until those similarities yielded to distinction. What the monitorial system promised, that is, was the possibility of being always able to make a choice, to see who and what ought to be preferred. Thus, every moment in which a scholar might arrive at an answer that indicated a mastery of common knowledge was both essential and, at the same time, only temporarily satisfactory. For agreement—in spelling a word, in producing a solution to a problem of addition or geometry—enabled one to continue to participate in the ongoing process of ranking and ordering, but that process would continue implacably

until the identity of indiscernibles had been resolved into discernible distinctions.

The ability to make and display the distinctions that justified choices—or, rather, made them inevitable—was a chief attraction of the system. On the one hand, the monitorial system provided students credentials without needing to rely on the old status hierarchy. It offered them a way of gaining access to the value of society without the necessity of kinship relations and affectionate ties to friends and family. Indeed, it revalued friends and enemies alike and could render both friendship and enmity in terms of the relatively unemotional and pacific ordering process, in which where one sat—in seat number one, or nine, or seventeen—was more important than the personal relationships that one might have with the actual persons who held these positions. The visibility of this process, as seating in the classroom and order in line were rigidly determined by one's relative success at the tasks of learning, was a key feature of the plan, because it aimed to demonstrate value in a thoroughly *objective manner*. Even so modest an enterprise as taking a seat in a classroom involved individuals in participating in the evaluative system, because one continually found one's place in relation to the abilities and performances of other people.

The *monitorial* system, that is, had figured out not only how to display facts—in recitation in public—but also how to display value. Yet if its proponents were particularly proud of this aspect of the plan, it was exactly this feature that caused the greatest anxiety for its detractors. Thus, Bradley Headstone is a schoolmaster in Dickens's novel so that he can be depicted as someone who is murderous not on the grounds of an imprecise emotion—the kind of jealousy that Othello mistakenly feels—but on the grounds of a very precise and demonstrable emotion—the kind of envy he feels when he and everyone else can instantaneously and accurately assess where he stands in comparison to Eugene Wrayburn. Although Dickens regularly enough criticizes Bentham and Benthamism, the remarkable feature of his portrayal of Headstone is that it treats envy just as Bentham does. It becomes, for Dickens as for Bentham, the first fully *rationalized and rational emotion*. Envy, that is, comes to look indubitable.

De Sousa, in his extremely interesting book *The Rationality of the Emotions*, has unpacked emotions into their various kinds and provided a strong argument for the interconnection between the emotions and statements of belief and fact. In doing so he has

obviously countered an entire line of thought that imagines that emotion escapes rational categorization and analysis. Yet the one reservation I have about his project is that his analytic catalogue, in providing the rational logic of the emotions, continues Hume's earlier work without noting how much of an alteration envy produces in the field of rationality. For envy does not protest against an hypothesis but against a state of affairs; it does not object to Eugene on the grounds that he is not really as worthy as Lizzie takes him to be, but on the grounds that he is.

If the classrooms of Bell, Lancaster, and Bentham were designed to rank individuals so as to demonstrate the actual value of the efforts of individuals who might previously been neglected, one of the reasons why all these reformers felt themselves to be on extraordinarily strong ground was that they could demonstrate the inevitability that one would assess one's relative position accurately. While modem disciplinary techniques attempted to override a reasonable emotion like fear with the capacity to continue marching and fighting even in the face of danger, envy never involved such a collision because it was itself nothing but a product of the rationalization of the classroom, in the first instance, and of society, in the second. Indeed, it was this sense of the indubitability of envy's message that led Bentham to focus principally on envy when he laid out his preemptive attack on his potential adversaries.

Thus, he argued that a "plan which promises a mass of instruction, so much exceeding in quantity and value anything which has ever yet been exemplified" cannot avoid being "an object of jealousy and envy" to many. This was, he thought, entirely explicable:

> To no person by whom any considerable value is set upon his own intellectual acquirements, can a continually increasing influx of young men, all of them in possession of acquirements in the same class superior to his own, be reasonably expected to be a spectacle of inward satisfaction. The greater the superiority thus manifested, and consequently the greater his relative inferiority, the more intense is the feeling of dissatisfaction that will naturally be produced.

No one would willingly choose to increase the number of competitors for the rewards that he enjoyed. But Bentham was not simply advocating a more open market by contrast with a near monopoly on privilege. Indeed, by the time he had concluded this line of argument, he had dispatched all objections to his proposal as the product of bad faith. Since "envy and jealousy" are "passions by which the

persons that harbour them are rendered the objects of aversion and contempt," those people seek to conceal them "with proportionable solicitude." They must, thus, be disguised. "By the disguise with which it will be necessary for [an opponent of the plan] to endeavour to conceal the nature of the motives by which he is actuated, and, if it were possible, the object which he has in view, the intensity of his aversion from its being in any degree repressed, will be perpetually increased."[15]

Here Bentham is doing something rather more than discovering the evil that lurks in the hearts of our opponents. He is accusing the opponents of his plan—who are merely potential rather than actual and thus relatively characterless—of being dishonest if they do anything other than accept the justice and rationality of increasing the pool of persons whose abilities are to be compared and ranked. Thus, in this context, a resistance to a situation in which one cannot control the number and talents of persons with whom one will be ranked is not simply associated with an envious disposition. Instead, Bentham has made that resistance be the very definition of envy. Envy, that is, becomes an attitude towards the structures of the monitorial school rather than an attitude towards a specific person.

By insisting that the monitorial scheme's detractors were envious and thus exposing them as already having identified themselves as prospective failures in its competitive game, Bentham might seem to be merely doctrinaire about his plan—a victim of fanaticism without benefit of religious belief. Yet it would be wrong, I think, to leave his belief looking as if it were groundless rather than justified. For the crucial move in Bentham's system was to derive evaluations from the elements of the system itself by the process of ranking that I've described, and its major insistence was that its commitment to numerical ordering tapped into a unique feature of any numbered series—that the ordering of the relationship among the numbers used to count is as uncontroversial as any connection we can make. And, in being uncontroversial, numerical ordering made intellectual accomplishment look as though it had achieved a universalization that genuinely could operate without reference to a larger doctrinal system.

But if Bentham insisted upon the primacy of numbers because no one would argue that "five" came before "three" in any forwards count, we can already begin to see why Benthamite utilitarianism has regularly been seen as less effective than it meant to be. For his early version of game theory was every bit as cruel and considerably more

effective than the Kantian categorical imperative in leading individuals to choose against themselves. The Kantian cruelty is to suggest that we loath ourselves when we fail to honor our implicit promise to ourselves to act with respect towards other people. The Benthamite cruelty, by virtue of its detachment from individual judgment and self-commitment, is to suggest that the losers in its rankings ought to accept their inferior standing without protest, as if knowing one were lowest on the totem pole and last in the listings ought to be satisfaction enough. The Benthamite cruelty is to argue for the good of the game rather than the good of those players who regularly fail to win more than the meagerest "proportionable share of *general respect*."

Bentham's solution to this particular problem is virtually to ignore it, and to relate an anecdote that solves the problem of the envious protest against being a loser in the game by appealing to a special relationship—that of parents and children. Comparing the situations of a *puis ne* judge and the Lord Chancellor, he insists that the *puis ne* judge is the more enviable of the two—if he happens to be the father of the Lord Chancellor. Happy the parents, he says, who can be bested and outshone by their children.

This recourse to the parental relation obviously doesn't solve the problem of envy as a constant source of potential defectors from the hierarchizing games in which they are involved. And it fails to do so for two reasons. The first, more obviously Benthamite objection would be that it seems nonsensical to use affectionate family ties as the way of shoring up a system that has, continually, tried to minimize the role that sympathy and affection must play in its operation and has tried to show how even strangers might effectively contribute to one another's value. Indeed, if parenthood were to be the only solution to the problem of envy, then parenthood would have to become mandatory for any society whose structures regularly created envy as a byproduct of their valuations of individuals. The second less Benthamite but more familiar objection is the Freudian one—that the family does not escape envy but is the natural version of Bentham's artificial systems of mutual competitors. And it is with Freud and Freudianism that the rise of the notion of envy is complete. For the basic structure of the Oedipus complex, the Electra complex, and penis envy alike is to insist on the comparative indifference of the mother, the father, and the penis as objects of jealousy. Rather, these objects are mere occasions for registering the triumph of a modem utilitarianism which cannot imagine what it

would mean to desire if one didn't see one's desire already marked in comparison with someone else's and already marked as deficient in that comparison.

The Johns Hopkins University

NOTES

[1] Helmut Schoeck, *Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1966), 15.

[2] Schoeck, 6.

[3] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 377 ("arises"; "the great disproportion betwixt"; "our proximity"; "excited"), 377–78 ("the great disproportion cuts"), 377 ("common"; "that an eminent"; "common"), 379 ("are commonly"; "those neighbouring").

[4] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor, 2 vols. (New York: Dutton, 1960), 1:41 ("elicits"), 1:40 ("coolness"), 1:41 ("exquisite"; "young"), 1:44 ("motive-hunting").

[5] Coleridge, 1:44 ("Passionless"; "*will*"), 1:47 ("leap'd").

[6] I quote these characterizations from the table of descriptions with which Charles Dickens prefaced the novel. Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (New York: The Modern Library, 1960), xvii. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

[7] See Schoeck, 28.

[8] See Hume, 323; John Rawles, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), 534; and Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 315.

[9] See also Adrew Bell, "An Experiement in Education Made at the Male Asylum of Madras" (London, 1797); and Joseph Lancaster, *Improvements in Education* (London, 1798).

[10] Jeremy Bentham, *Chrestomathia: Being a Collection of Papers Explanatory of the Design of an Institution Proposed to be Set on Foot Under the Name of the Chrestomathia Day School or Chrestomathia School*, ed. M. T. Smith and W. H. Burton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 31.

[11] Bentham, table 1 in the *Chrestomathia*.

[12] Hume discusses the power of association in leading us to respect an individual "descended from a long succession of rich and powerful ancestors, and who acquires our esteem but his relation to persons whom, we esteem." Hume's concern in this portion of the *Treatise* is with tracking the effects of usefulness and success even past the period in which they continue to have an immediate impact, and he goes on to comment that the ancestors of the "man of birth," "tho' dead, are respected, in some measure, on account of their riches, and consequently without any kind of expectations" (361). See also Hume, 357–65.

[13] Hume, 364.

[14] Bentham, 106.

[15] Bentham, 49 ("plan"; "an object"; "To no person"; "envy"; "with proportionable"), 50 ("By the disguise").