

Envy and Self-worth: Amending Aquinas' Definition of Envy Timothy Perrine

Abstract. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas offers an adept account of the vice of envy. Despite the virtues of his account, he nevertheless fails to provide an adequate definition of the vice. Instead, he offers two different definitions each of which fails to identify what is common to all cases of envy. Here I supplement Aquinas' account by providing what I take to be common to all cases of envy. I argue that what is common is a "perception of inferiority"—when a person perceives his her own self-worth to be inferior to another and thereby feels his own self-worth diminish. By incorporating perceptions of inferiority into the definition of envy, we obtain a definition that retains the spirit of Aquinas' thought, while improving upon its letter.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas offers an adept account of the capital vice of envy as "sorrow over another's good."¹ His account has the virtues of explaining envy's status as a vice, relating it to other vices, and distinguishing it from other similar but distinct states of sorrowing over another's good. Yet, despite these strengths of his account, Aquinas fails to provide an adequate definition of envy.

For Aquinas, an adequate definition of a vice would include what he calls the "genus" and "*differentia*" (or, species) of that vice. But in the *Summa* Aquinas offers two distinct definitions of envy, and although each has an adequate genus—sorrow over another's good—neither has an adequate *differentia*. For, among other things, each *differentia* merely identifies a type of envy, and because neither type includes all cases of envy, neither definition is adequate as a definition of envy proper.

I will amend Aquinas' definitions by providing an adequate *differentia* for envy. A key element of this *differentia* will be what I call a "perception of inferiority." A perception of inferiority is when one perceives one's own good to be inferior to that of another's and thereby feels one's self-worth diminish. Such perceptions arise from a comparative notion of self-worth—where positive self-worth requires a superior comparison to others and an unfavorable comparison results in negative self-worth. I will thus define envy as sorrowing over another's good because of a perception of inferiority regarding that good.

In section I, I explain Aquinas' account of envy, beginning with the general features of envy before moving to his definitions of envy. In section II, I argue that Aquinas' definitions are inadequate for two reasons; they lack an appropriate *differentia* and fail to include all clear cases of envy. I consider one possible amendment to Aquinas' definition, but argue it fails. In section III, I argue for an amendment which I believe does not fail. I first explain the key ideas in my amendment—perceptions of inferiority and a comparative notion of self worth. Using them, I provide an adequate definition of envy and conclude by showing how this definition includes obvious cases of envy while excluding cases which are obviously not cases of envy.

I.

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Providence (New York: Benziger Bros, 1948; Reprinted by Christian Classics, 1981) IIaIIae.36.1. I will abbreviate *Summa Theologiae* as *ST*.

Aquinas' Account of Envy. In this section, I explain Aquinas' account of envy.² I first explain the general features of envy, particularly why he considers envy to be sorrow over another's good. I then show how Aquinas distinguishes envy from other instances of sorrow over another's good which are not cases of envy. Finally, I present Aquinas' definitions of envy. As I will argue, Aquinas actually provides two different definitions of envy in the *Summa Theologicae*.

In the *Summa*, Aquinas treats envy as a vice opposed to charity.³ According to Aquinas, envy is a "capital vice"—a vice that is a "principle or director of others."⁴ Envy is thus a vice which directs a person towards an end (or, something perceived as an end) and encourages the development of other vices in a person to achieve that end.⁵ Envy is opposed to charity because it is opposed to an effect of charity—rejoicing over another's good. Envy does not rejoice over another's good, but rather "sorrow[s] over another's good."⁶

For Aquinas, the vice of envy belongs to the appetitive power of the soul. The appetitive power of the soul is oriented towards some particular thing considered as a good in itself.⁷ (It contrasts with the intellectual powers of the soul, which are oriented towards knowing something as true.) Because the object of envy is another's good, the vice of envy belongs to the appetitive power of the soul. Every act of the appetitive power is either a movement toward an object (an act of desire) or away from it (an act of aversion).⁸ In the case of another's good, since another's good is actually a good thing, the appropriate movement of the appetitive power is towards that thing, i.e., an act of desire. But envy occurs when a person sees the other person's good as an evil, and consequently moves away from that good—an act of aversion.⁹ Aquinas calls this aversion "sorrowing over another's good" and considers it to be the genus of envy.¹⁰

Aquinas notes that there are many different ways to sorrow over another's good, and not all of these ways are envy properly speaking.¹¹ That is, not everything belonging to the genus "sorrowing over another's good" is envy. Aquinas discusses three different ways that one can sorrow over another's good and yet fail to be envious.¹² They are fear, zeal, and righteous indignation. Each of these belongs to the same genus as envy but does not belong to the species¹³ of envy; we'll consider each.

First, a person can sorrow over another's good "through fear that it may cause harm either to himself, or to some other goods."¹⁴ For example, a citizen of a city may sorrow over the

² Aquinas discusses envy in the *ST* and another treatise, *On Evil*. The discussions are very similar and, for simplicity, I will focus on the account in the *ST*.

³ *ST* IIaIIae.36. Although I am speaking of the vice of envy, for the duration of the paper, I will simply refer to the vice of envy as "envy." I will not be discussing the passion of envy.

⁴ *ST* IaeIIa.84.3. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, trans. John Oesterle and Jean Oesterle, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 8.1. I will abbreviate *On Evil* as *OE*.

⁵ Some vices, e.g. gluttony, do not simply encourage the development of other vices, but produce other vices as effects of achieving their desired ends.

⁶ *ST* IIaIIae.36.1; see also, *OE*, 6.2 R.

⁷ *ST* IaIIae.22.2, 22.3

⁸ *ST* IaIIae.22.2

⁹ *OE*, 10.1.

¹⁰ *St. IIaIIae* 36.1

¹¹ Here, as throughout, I will ignore instances of acts which are simultaneously an act of envy and something which is not envy, e.g., fear. Such acts are clearly possible; but for present purposes I am simply focusing on cases of envy.

¹² *ST* IIaIIae.36.2

¹³ I will use "species" and "differentia" interchangeably throughout.

¹⁴ *ST* IIaIIae.36.2

ability of an invading commander to command and deploy his troops effectively, for the citizen is fearful that the commander's abilities might bring about the destruction of his family, business, and general well-being. This sorrowing, however, is clearly not envy but fear. For in this case, one is averse to another's good because one sees that good as harmful to oneself.

Second, one may grieve over another's good "not because he has it, but because the good which he has, we have not."¹⁵ For example, upon noticing the great piety of her friend Cathy, Christine desires to become more pious—all the while, not being adverse to Cathy's piety. This form of sorrow over another's good is not envy either, but zeal. Here, one does not become adverse to the other's good, but desires one's own good all the more.¹⁶

Third, one may sorrow over another's good because that person is undeserving of that good.¹⁷ For example, a student may sorrow over another student's superior test score, not because the latter was more knowledgeable on the topic, but because she cheated. For Aquinas, this too is not envy properly speaking. Instead, citing Aristotle, he calls it a form of "indignation" and claims that it can belong to "good morals."

These three different ways one can sorrow over another's good—fear, zeal, and indignation—are not cases of envy, but states distinct from envy. Consequently, Aquinas endeavors to provide a definition of envy which excludes them as cases of envy. Aquinas offers two definitions of envy, in two separate passages, meant to distinguish envy from these other ways in which one can sorrow over another's good.¹⁸ And, since envy and these other ways share the same genus, the difference between them must be in their species.

Aquinas' first definition of envy occurs in the following passage:

Another's good may be reckoned as being one's own evil, in so far as it conduces to the lessening of one's own good name or excellence. It is in this way that envy grieves for another's good: and consequently men are envious of those goods in which a good name consists, and about which men like to be honored and esteemed.¹⁹

And later on in the same article, Aquinas states that "envy is about another's good name in so far as it diminishes the good name a man desires to have." Aquinas' first definition of envy is thus: sorrow over another's good in so far as that good diminishes one's own good name.²⁰

This definition connects envy with the vice of vainglory. Vainglory is the immoderate desire for glory.²¹ Glory is the display of some (perceived) excellence—a "manifestation of someone's goodness."²² When a person desires glory for something other than an appropriate end, that person has an immoderate desire for glory.²³ This definition of envy connects envy and vainglory by making the object of the latter—glory—an essential part of the definition of the

¹⁵ *ST IIaIIae.36.2*

¹⁶ It seems dubious to me that zeal is included in the genus "sorrowing over another's good." It seems that zeal is more akin to sorrowing over one's own lack of a good, occasioned by seeing another's good.

¹⁷ *ST IIaIIae.36.2*

¹⁸ Although it is clear to me that Aquinas meant to give a definition of envy which excludes these other cases, it is unclear to me whether he meant to give two different definitions of envy.

¹⁹ *ST IIaIIae.36.1*

²⁰ The astute reader will notice that, in the first quote, Aquinas says "Another's good may be reckoned as being one's own evil, in so far as it conduces to the lessening of one's own good name *or excellence*." I'll address this in the next section.

²¹ *ST IIaIIae.132.2*

²² *OE 9.1*; cf. *ST 132.1*

²³ *ST IIaIIae.132.1-2*

former. Here a person envies when *another* person's excellence keeps people from acknowledging her *own* excellence. The other's "good name" lessens her own "good name."

For example, take Caleb, the star basketball player at a Division III school. When Dean, a new basketball player from a Division I school transfers to Caleb's school, Caleb becomes envious. For as Caleb plainly sees, Dean has a "greater name"—he has scored more points than Caleb; he has routinely been on ESPN; he has done well against more difficult opponents, etc. Caleb's good name is diminished—his achievements, though they were better than anyone else on his team, simply cannot compare with Dean's, and consequently he is no longer the talk of the campus. Here we have a case of envy according to Aquinas' first definition.

In the next question, *ST IIaIIae* 36.2, Aquinas provides a second definition of envy that is notably different from the first. He writes, "we grieve over a man's good in so far as his good surpasses ours; this is envy properly speaking and is always sinful."²⁴ This second definition of envy is thus sorrow over another's good when one is sorrowful because the other's good surpasses one's own, that is, when another is more excellent.

Whereas the first definition connected envy to vainglory, this one connects envy to pride. For Aquinas, a person is proud when she "aims higher" than what she really is.²⁵ In *On Evil*, Aquinas writes, "for to be proud is nothing else but to exceed the proper measure in the desire for excellence."²⁶ In these cases of envy, a person desires to hold a higher position than she actually holds; this higher position is meant to be a rival to the person to which she compares herself.

For example, over a holiday, suppose that famous celebrity chef Emeril visits his recently married sister for a week. During his visit, Emeril discovers that his sister's husband is a superior cook—even though no one has ever heard of him. The husband provides a phenomenal meal—one better, Emeril knows, than he could prepare himself. In fact, the husband has even improved upon many of Emeril's *own* recipes. (And his selection of wine is impeccable!) In this scenario, one can imagine Emeril sorrowing over his brother-in-law's superiority to Emeril (even though Emeril's good name is not lessened).

Thus, what is noteworthy about this second definition of envy is its divergence from the first. The first incorporates one's "good name" into the definition of envy; the second incorporates one's "excellence." But clearly one's good name and one's excellence need not be the same thing. Indeed, it seems obvious that the two do not even imply one another—one can have a good name, but lack an excellence, or conversely one can have an excellence, but lack a good name. They are thus not coextensive. Since these two definitions are neither identical, nor imply each other, I will treat them as two different definitions of envy. With Aquinas' definitions in hand, we can turn to evaluating them in the next section.

II.

Problems with Aquinas' Definitions. The problem with Aquinas' definitions is that they fail to provide an adequate definition of envy. An adequate definition of envy would provide its formal cause. The formal cause would distinguish envy from all other types of acts, in particular, those sharing the same genus. The final cause does this by providing the genus and *differentia*, or species, of envy. In this section, I argue that neither of Aquinas' definitions is adequate because neither provides an adequate *differentia* of envy, and that they could not do so, even disjunctively.

²⁴ *ST IIaIIae*. 36.2

²⁵ *ST IIaIIae*.162.1

²⁶ *OE* 8.2; cf. *OE* 8.2 rep.17

Before seeing why Aquinas' definitions are inadequate, we must first more fully consider what an adequate definition would consist of. Aquinas attempts to offer definitions which provide all four Aristotelian causes. One of the Aristotelian causes—relevant to our present concerns—is the formal cause. The formal cause states “that which a thing is.” For Aquinas, the formal cause in a definition should provide the genus and species of a thing. An example from Aquinas will be instructive in illustrating a formal cause in a definition.

Consider his definition of virtue. In Question 55, “Of the Virtues, as to Their Essence,”²⁷ Aquinas uses as his own definition that of Augustine's: “virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us”²⁸ But note Aquinas' gloss on this definition:

This definition comprises perfectly the whole essential notion of virtue. For the perfect essential notion of anything is gathered from all its causes. Now the above definition comprises all the causes of virtue. For the formal cause of virtue, as of everything, is gathered from its genus and difference, when it is defined as *a good quality*: for *quality* is the genus of virtue, and the difference, *good*...²⁹

Here Aquinas takes himself to be providing a formal cause of virtue. The formal cause is composed of two elements: the genus and species—here, “quality” and “good” respectively. The genus and species, together, distinguish a thing from others. Thus, for virtue, “good quality” is the formal cause, and it distinguishes virtue from other things, e.g. vice.

(Note, however, that the formal cause of a thing does not exclude the possibility of that thing being divided into different “sub-species.” In the case of virtue, “good qualities” is its formal cause, but there are many different types, or sub-species, of virtue—e.g. faith, hope, and charity. A formal cause of a thing distinguishes *that very thing* from others; it doesn't distinguish different sub-species of that thing from each other. The formal cause of virtue states that all of those sub-species are good qualities.)

Having seen what an adequate definition would consist of, we can now see two problems that each definition suffers from. There is a categorical problem and a content problem. First, the categorical problem is that the definitions fail as *definitions* because they only provide a sub-species of envy, and sub-species are, categorically, the wrong sorts of things for a definition. Second, the content problem is that the definitions—when we consider their content—seem to exclude some clear cases of envy.

First, Aquinas' definitions are unsuccessful as definitions because they do not provide a formal cause—a genus and species—of envy. Both definitions have a suitable genus—sorrowing over another's good. But they lack a species because they provide, instead, something categorically distinct from a species—a sub-species, or type, of envy. The first definition incorporates a type of envy connected to vainglory; the latter incorporates a type connected to pride. But clearly these are types, or sub-species, of envy, and not a species, i.e. the common element to all cases of envy.

Trying to provide a definition of envy which used as its species a type of envy would be like trying to provide a definition of virtue which used as its species the virtue of charity. Clearly, a definition of virtue should not exclude charity as a virtue. But as a definition of virtue that definition would be unsuccessful, failing to provide a species and thus a formal cause.

²⁷ *ST IaIIae.55*

²⁸ *ST IaIIae.55.4*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Similarly, Aquinas' definitions of envy are unsuccessful because they lack the formal cause of envy. An adequate definition of envy would provide the formal cause; these do not, so they are not adequate definitions.

Second, neither definition includes all cases of envy. This is clear since the first definition picks out a particular type of envy and the second definition a different type, and these types are not coextensive—a person can exemplify one but not the other. Thus, some cases of the first type of envy will fail to be cases of envy according to the second definition; similarly, some cases of the second type of envy will fail to be cases of envy according to the first definition. Using our earlier example, Caleb, who envied Dean's great name, would fail to satisfy the second definition of envy, which essentially connects envy to pride. Emeril who envied his brother-in-law's cooking skills would fail to satisfy the first definition of envy, which essentially connects envy to vainglory. Thus, *neither* definition can cover *all* cases of envy.

Seeing that the two definitions fail individually, perhaps a definition could succeed that combined them. That is, perhaps a "disjunctive" definition combining Aquinas' two definitions is best. Indeed, such a disjunctive definition may be closer to Aquinas' original thought; recall this definition from the *Summa*: "another's good may be reckoned as being one's own evil, in so far as it conduces to the lessening of one's *own good name or excellence*."³⁰ Perhaps Aquinas intends to define envy disjunctively by stating that acts of envy are *either* of the first type of envy *or* of the second type of envy.

In response, it is first of all, expositionally speaking, unclear that in the *Summa* Aquinas *is* distinguishing these two different definitions, as I have, and then offering a disjunctive definition. Indeed, as I noted earlier, he offers two different definitions of envy in two articles in the same question.³¹ It is simply unclear that Aquinas is attempting to offer this disjunctive definition. Nevertheless, perhaps it could be suggested on his behalf.

Second, this disjunctive definition is an amendment in light of my objection that the two definitions, individually, do not cover all cases of envy. But this disjunctive definition will cover all cases of envy only if there are only two types of envy. But if there is a third type of envy—one which is not connected with either vainglory or pride—then this definition will also be inadequate. Are there simply two types of envy?

It seems implausible to think so. Often people are envious, not of other's good name or excellence, but of other's relationships. A classic case is the Biblical case of Joseph and his brothers. The brothers were envious of the love their father had for Joseph.³² His father's love was not an excellence or good name of Joseph's. So they were envious of something other than a good name or excellence. Or, consider a king whose subjects are less loyal and respectful than a neighboring king's. Again, the first king is envious, but not of a good name or excellence. So there are not just two types of envy; there is a least one more type of envy.³³

Finally, this disjunctive definition also fails to provide the formal cause of envy. The original categorical problem remains. This definition does not provide the common element of envy that distinguishes it from other acts. It fails to provide a species, but merely lists two different types or sub-species. Returning to our earlier analogy, this would be like defining virtue

³⁰ *ST* IIaIIae.36.1 emphasis mine. One might even think this is the third definition of envy that Aquinas provides.

³¹ Namely *ST* IIaIIae.36

³² This example was suggested to me by Rebecca Konyndyk De Young.

³³ Kevin Timpe has also suggested that envying over another's material goods—e.g. the neighbor's new car—would be another instance of envy that is neither an excellence nor good name. I think this is probably correct, but will partially depend upon how Aquinas understands another's "excellence."

using only particular virtues like charity or justice. This does not tell us what is common to all cases of envy. This disjunctive definition has the same problem that plagued so many of Socrates' dialogue partners. One simply cannot define something by listing examples of it. Even if Euthyphro, for example, can list all the different types of piety, it still doesn't define what piety is; Socrates still requires "that form itself that makes all pious actions pious."³⁴

III.

Envy and Perceptions of Inferiority. In this section, I argue that the formal cause of envy requires the notion of a perception of inferiority. Since perceptions of inferiority are the result of a comparative notion of self-worth, I begin by explaining the latter. Although the connection between envy and comparative self-worth has been noted before, its role in helping provide a definition of envy—and thereby distinguishing it from other ways of sorrowing—has not. I will thus first describe a comparative notion of self-worth before turning to how it can amend Aquinas' definition of envy. I will conclude by showing how my amended definition includes obvious cases of envy, and excludes cases that are obviously not cases of envy.

What distinguishes envy from other types of sorrowing is that envy originates with a comparative notion of self-worth. Comparative self-worth is a way of evaluating one's own worth by comparing oneself to others. In order to have self-worth one must compare oneself to others.³⁵ Comparison is essentially a two-term relation—it requires another thing, with which to be compared. Consequently, one cannot ask the question of worth in isolation; it must be asked when there are others to be measured against.³⁶

Recalling our earlier example, the star basketball player Caleb illustrates this comparative notion of self-worth. For his own positive appraisal of himself, it is not enough that he make a positive contribution to his team. He must be recognized at his school as the best player on his team. When another player is recognized as the best player on the team, even if Caleb is making the same positive contribution to his team as before, he no longer appraises his own worth positively.³⁷

Here a counterfactual test is useful. Namely: if a person were to come to believe that they were surpassed by another, would that person's self-worth diminish? If so, then that person has a comparative notion of self-worth. If not, then that person most likely does not. This counterfactual test is useful, for one can have a positive estimation of oneself while having a comparative notion of self-worth. For example, a person utilizing a comparative notion of self-worth may still evaluate herself positively if she does not believe anyone else surpasses her. (For example, our basketball star Caleb thought quite well of himself before his rival emerged on the scene. Nevertheless, at that time, he still was implicitly utilizing a comparative notion of self-worth.)

A comparative notion of self-worth can give rise to what I call a perception of inferiority. A perception of inferiority is when one conceives of oneself as inferior to another. A perception of inferiority requires three things. It requires (i) an evaluation of another's good, (ii) an evaluation of one's own good, and (iii)(a) a comparison between the two evaluations, (b) in

³⁴ *Euthyphro*, in *Plato, Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper, (Hackett Publishing Company, Cambridge; 1997) 6d.

³⁵ Self-worth may be compartmentalized. One may use a comparative notion of self-worth in one area, but not another. I won't explore this possibility here, though.

³⁶ The "others" here need not be actual different individuals. Rather it could even be conceptions of people, e.g. fictitious characters, or even previous "versions" of one's own self—though these cases would seem rarer.

³⁷ But note that a comparative notion of self-worth doesn't also require one to be the best. A person may appraise herself positively if she is not "the worst" or is "better than most."

which one perceives one's worth to be inferior. Here we should distinguish two types of inferiority. One type is simply noticing that another person has surpassed one. This is not the type of inferiority in a perception of inferiority. Rather, the inferiority is an *evaluative* judgment. One does not simply notice that another person has surpassed one's self; one feels as if one's own self-worth is thereby diminished. The difference between these two types of inferiority can be indicated in another way. Other people may be able to see that you are inferior—in this first sense—to another. But only you can feel your own perceived inferiority to that other person.³⁸

As noted earlier, the role of comparative self-worth in envy has not been unnoticed.³⁹ For example, in his article “Envy and Inequality,” Aaron Ben-Ze'ev writes that the natural candidate for [the central concern of envy] is inferiority. The importance of the inferiority concern in envy conveys the weight we attach to our comparative stand. People compare themselves with others to reduce uncertainty about themselves and maintain or enhance self-esteem. An unfavorable comparison often leads to envy.⁴⁰

Similarly, Gabriele Taylor writes that “the person feeling envy... thinks of herself as being deprived in comparison with another who is, in the relevant respect, better off than she is.”⁴¹ And Rebecca De Young, in her book *Glittering Vices* notes the important role that a comparative notion of self-worth plays in the vice of envy.⁴²

What does seem to be unnoticed is how this notion of comparative self-worth can amend Aquinas' definition of envy. What distinguishes cases of envy from other kinds of sorrowing are perceptions of inferiority. When a person perceives that she is inferior to another *and* that perception gives rise to sorrowing over the other's good, then that person is envious. Thus, we may define envy as: sorrow over another's good because of a perception of inferiority regarding the other's good. Using Aquinas' terminology, the genus of envy is “sorrow over another's good,” and the species of envy is “because of a perception of inferiority regarding the other's good.”

Note that an envious person sorrows over another's good, not simply when that person's good actually surpasses the envier's good, but *because* the envious person perceives the other's good to surpass his own (even when it may not). The exact relationship between a perception of inferiority and sorrowing is complex. Nevertheless, it seems there is at the very least some sort of causal connection between one's perception and one's sorrow. One's sorrow follows from one's perception of inferiority; if one lacked a perception of inferiority, then one would not envy.⁴³

³⁸ Gabriele Taylor, in her article “Envy and Jealousy: Emotions and Vices,” distinguishes between two types of envy: the “type of envy where the person concerned focuses on the other as somehow *crucially involved* in her finding herself in an inferior position” (emphasis mine) and the type of envy where “comparison with another is merely the occasion for realizing” one's shortcomings. (*Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, ed. Peter French, Theodore Uehling, and Howard Wettstein, XIII (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) 234.) The latter seems to be zeal, and would thus fall outside my definition of envy. The former seems more akin to the notion of envy I am examining, though Taylor does not elaborate on “crucial involvement.”

³⁹ Indeed, Aquinas seems to hint at something like this in the *On Evil*, where he writes “he who is surpassed by someone in glory or happiness, and is grieved about this is properly said to envy” (10.2.R1).

⁴⁰ *Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 89 (1992): 551–581, at 554.

⁴¹ “Envy and Jealousy: Emotions and Vices,” 234.

⁴² Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 41–57, esp. 44–49.

⁴³ Note that it is not true that: if one lacked a perception of inferiority, then one would not sorrow. For it could be that one sorrows over another's good for some other reason—e.g. out of fear. Here we should say that if one lacked a perception of inferiority, even if one were to sorrow over another's good, that sorrowing would not be a case of envy.

And one would lack a perception of inferiority only if one did not have a comparative notion of self-worth.

This definition is clearly in the same vein of thought as Aquinas'. In fact, we can see it best as amending and supplementing his account, not replacing it. This definition adds to Aquinas' account the notion of comparative self-worth and incorporates that notion into the definition of envy through the term 'perception of inferiority.' This definition has the advantage of retaining the connections between envy and vainglory, and envy and pride, that Aquinas saw. For one can have a perception of inferiority regarding another's excellence (pride) or another's good name (vainglory). This definition simply does not incorporate those connections into the definition of envy itself.

An intuitive test of a definition is if it both includes and excludes those cases we think it ought. First, let us consider how this definition excludes as cases of envy those three cases of sorrowing over another's good that Aquinas gave earlier— fear, zeal, and indignation. On this definition of envy, all three fail to be cases of envy. As we will see, the reason is because in each case, the reason for sorrowing over another's good is *not* simply because the other person's good surpasses one's own. Put simply, none of these cases involve perceptions of inferiority.

In the case of fear, one sorrows over another's good because the other's good is a threat to one's own well-being. One's sorrow is not because of a perception of inferiority, given rise by a comparative notion of self-worth. It thus is not a case of envy. Second, in the case of indignation, one sorrows over another's good because that person is undeserving of that good. What gives rise to the sorrow is not a perception of inferiority but rather something more akin to a sense of justice. This definition of envy will exclude cases of indignation as cases of envy as well.

Finally, this definition excludes cases of zeal as cases of envy. At first, it may appear that, on this definition, cases of zeal count as cases of envy. This definition of envy is sorrow over another's good because of a perception of inferiority regarding another's good. Is not this just what happens in a case of zeal? Recall the example of Christine and Cathy. Christine sees Cathy's piety. Christine notices her own piety, and then sees that Cathy's surpasses her own. Christine, desiring to be as pious as possible, sorrows over not achieving a certain level of piety. Is this not a case of sorrowing over another's good because of a perception of inferiority regarding another's good?

It isn't; cases of zeal lack perceptions of inferiority. Perceptions of inferiority require three things: (i) an evaluation of another's good, (ii) an evaluation of one's own good, and (iii)(a) a comparison between the two evaluations, (b) in which one perceives one's worth to be inferior. To see that cases of zeal lacks perceptions of inferiority, consider the two types of inferiority distinguished earlier. The first is simply noticing that another's good surpasses one's own. Clearly cases of zeal are instances of this type of inferiority. But they are not instance of the second type of inferiority—the type required in a perception of inferiority. That kind of inferiority is when, due to a comparative notion of self-worth, one's own self-worth is diminished, and one feels inferior. But the zealous person does not have a comparative notion of self-worth; she does not feel her own self-worth diminish. So the zealous person is not a case of inferiority of the second type, and so zeal fails to satisfy condition (iii)(b). Thus, since cases of zeal do not include perceptions of inferiority, they are not case of envy. This definition has correctly excluded three cases of sorrowing over another's good that are obviously not cases of envy.

Does this definition also include cases which seem to be instance of envy? Let us consider a case I gave earlier—that of Caleb the basketball star. Here we find Caleb with a perception of inferiority. He sees the fame and good name of his competition, Dean, sees his own fame, and feels inferior to Dean because Dean’s fame surpasses his own. On the basis of this perception of inferiority, Caleb sorrows over Dean’s good name. This definition of envy seems to provide the correct response that Caleb envies Dean’s good name, which agrees with the intuition that this is in fact a case of envy. Furthermore, this definition will include cases of envy that Aquinas’s definitions excluded. For example, Joseph’s brothers can be seen to sorrow over his relationship with their father because of a perception of inferiority regarding that relationship.

Finally, this account of envy may also help respond to an objection to the moral status of envy. (Here I will only sketch the objection and response—a fuller exposition and defense must wait for another time.) The objection is that, in the majority of cases, envy is excusable because comparison to others is the only way we have to evaluate ourselves. For example, Robert Nozick writes that “...we evaluate how *well* we do something by comparing our performance to others, to what other can do... There is no standard of doing something well, independent of how it is or can be done by others.”⁴⁴ Thus, to determine how well we do something, it is essential that we compare ourselves to another. And if we are comparatively worse off, then we envy. So for those who are comparatively worse off, envy is inevitable if they attempt to determine how well they are doing. Given this inevitable, envy is thus excusable.

In response, it is not clear that it is true that the only way we have to evaluate ourselves is comparison with others. But, even granting that, it still does not follow that envy is excusable. For, in the majority of cases, envy is *not* inevitable. Envy is only produced by a comparative notion of self-worth; and that is by no means an inevitable feature of human person. For example, a person may evaluate how adept he is at a given task by comparison to another, and if the other surpasses him, instead of envying, that person may display zeal and be encouraged to work harder at that task. As this account shows, there is nothing essential to comparison that leads to envy. It is only comparison with a certain view of oneself that leads to envy.

IV.

Conclusion. I have briefly argued for a definition of envy which builds upon Aquinas’ account. I first showed how Aquinas’ two definitions of envy fail to provide the formal cause of envy. I noted two problems—a categorical one, where neither definition included a species, but only a sub-species, and a content one, where both definitions exclude cases which were intuitively cases of envy. I then provided my own definition of envy, which incorporates the notion of comparative self-worth by adding to Aquinas’ genus “sorrowing over another’s good” the species “because of a perception of inferiority regarding the other’s good.” This provides a formal cause for the definition of envy and satisfactorily distinguishes it from other sorrowing—fear, zeal, and indignation.⁴⁵

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⁴⁴ *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, (New York: Basic Books, 1974) 240 and 241 respectively. Although it is clear in this passage that Nozick believes the only way to evaluate ourselves is by comparison to others, it is not clear to me that Nozick is endorsing this objection to envy.

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