

Envy and Desire for Destruction

First draft

Isabelle This Saint-Jean ¹

¹ Professor of Economics, University of Paris 13 - CEPN
E-mail : thissaintjean@univ-paris13.fr

Abstract :

Many economists have put the notion of envy at the heart of their theoretical reflections, especially in economic works devoted to the question of social justice. If different definitions of envy appear in economics, most economists give to this term “a precise technical sense” (P. J. Hammond, 1987) : individual i envies j if $U_i(x_j) > U_i(x_i)$, so that i prefers j 's allocation x_j to his own (Foley (1967)). There is no place in such a definition for the idea that the envious individual wants to “destroy the advantages of the other” and for a “desire for destruction” (M. Fleurbaey, 1996). This “technical” notion of envy is therefore very different of the one which appears in the main philosophical texts devoted to “envy”. In order to show that, we will first identify and confront the main definitions of envy that appear in philosophy (especially Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, D. Hume and A. Smith, and then J. Rawls) and show that in all these texts one finds the same six salient features of envy. Then we will try to explain the deep difference between this rather constant philosophical notion of envy and the economic one. We will try to demonstrate that this question is linked to the more general difficulty that our discipline seems to have to deal with “bad”, “ill-will” or “full of hatred” individuals, when it assumes interpersonal relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Many economists deal with the notion of envy and put at the center of their reflections. They assume an individual who estimates his situation (generally his endowment in goods, but sometimes also his income or his level of consumption) and his satisfaction, *via* a comparison with another's situation. An unfavorable comparison produces dissatisfaction and conversely, a favorable comparison produces satisfaction.² In particular since the beginning of the 1980's and the return of ‘interpersonal relationships’ in economic theories,³ envy has been appearing in different kinds of economic works.⁴ But we find this notion in

² In fact, such a symmetry does not appear in all economic analysis devoted to envy. Sometimes another terminology is used for the second situation. Rawls for example calls “jealousy” the symmetric behaviour of “envy” (Rawls, (1997), p. 576).

³ Concerning this ‘return’, see for example Manski (2000), B. Gui, and R. Sugden, (2005), P.Cahuc, H.Kempf and T.Verdier (2001), *Annals of Public and Co-operative Economics* (2000).

⁴ We can mention for example A. Banerjee (1990) who develops a model of equilibrium with envy in which a system of graduated income tax can be used in order to reduce consequences of envy. G. Kirchsteiger (1995) introduces envy in a bargaining model. H. Rapoport and A. Weiss (2001) show that sometimes cooperation inside a community can produce, not positive effects for its members, but negative ones; when cooperative behaviors are limited to a restricted group (social, ethnic or religious), cooperation generates envy for those who are not members of this group and hostile behaviors against cooperative individuals. B. Strom (1995) tries to show that the notion of envy is important in order to understand how the labor market really functions; he introduces “an internal comparison effect” in a model of wages negotiations, testing this model with econometric data on Norway. V. L. Mui (1995) tries to take into account the consequences of envy on innovation. In the line of studies devoted to “negative reciprocity” (Fehr and Gächter, 2000 ; Fehr et Schmidt, 1999)), various economic experimental works deal with this notion ; D. J. Zizzo and A. J. Oswald (2001) for example present an experiment where players can pay in order to reduce the income that another player arbitrarily got; they show that the majority of players were ready to pay in order to reduce others' income (more to reduce income of rich players than poor ones and more when this income seems “undeserved”).

economic works much earlier, especially in analysis of consumption (T. Veblen (1899) and J. Duesenberry (1949)). We can find it also in analysis devoted to criteria of social justice which will hold our attention here.

If different definitions of this notion exist in economics, most economists – and especially those dealing with social justice⁵ - use it in a “narrow technical sense” (P. J. Hammond, 1987, p. 164). They adopt the following definition. Considering x_i^g the endowment of each individual (i) in the n goods (g), each individual is supposed to have preferences represented by ordinal utility function U_i of x_i vector, $U_i(x_i)$. One says that i ‘envies’ j if $U_i(x_j) > U_i(x_i)$, that is i prefers j ’s endowment to his own. In these works envy usually does not generate a particular type of behaviour. Envy is only a valuation done by the envious individual of a situation he can’t change, a simple report of a given situation. And if a decision and a behaviour follow, they are not those of the envious individual but those of the “policy maker” (A. Feldman et A. Kirman 1974, p. 997-998), of the “benevolent dictator” (*Ibid.*, p. 1004) or the “enlightened ruler” (*Ibid.*, p. 1000) establishing a redistributing policy in order to “maximize equity” by reducing or deleting envy. However, in other works, envy generated by such an unfavourable comparison incites on the contrary the envious individual to undertake hostile actions against the other, in order to diminish his envy. Therefore the envious individual produces by his decision or his behaviour, either unhappiness of the other or degradation of his situation. In the same way, when the comparison is favourable to him, he tries by his decision and his behaviour to maintain the other in his inferior state. It is easy to understand that the representation of the individual drawn here is rather different and corresponds to a “darker” conception of the human being. However, according to M. Fleurbaey such a “desire for destruction” is “an extreme and repulsive form of envy” (1996, p. 224; our translation). Thus he claims that it is “surprising that many authors consider only this form” (*Ibid.*).

Therefore one can ask if it is necessary to assume that an envious individual desires to “destroy the advantages of the other” (*Ibid.*). We will try to find materials for an answer in philosophy where the notion of envy occupies a central place. More generally we will try to see if the “technical” notion of envy sketched in normative economic works corresponds to what we can find in the main philosophical texts devoted to this notion.

⁵ We must underline however that all the economists who define social justice as “absence of envy” do not use this definition of envy. Some define envy with ‘negative externalities’ (see *infra* page 21), other with inter-personal comparisons of utility (for example, Varian, 1987).

In order to answer these questions, we will first identify and compare the main philosophical definitions of the notion of envy (*I- Envy in philosophy: a dark passion*). For reasons we will explain later, we will first focus on Aristotle, Thomas of Aquinas, then on D. Hume and A. Smith and after on J. Rawls. We will show that in all these texts, six salient features of envy appear.

Then we will in a second part (*II- “Technical” envy or envy kept off?*) come back to the analysis of the normative economic works devoted to “no-envy”. We will underline the great differences which appear between the notion of envy sketched here and the one drawn in philosophy. Many admitted before us the specificity of the economic notion, but according to us, such a gap is not a simple semantic question, in fact rather secondary, but it much more fundamentally concerns the way economics usually represents the human being. According to us, economists seem to encounter some difficulties to take into account envy in another sense that the technical one and more generally to incorporate what we will call the “dark side” of human being. We will then try to suggest some explanations of these difficulties.

Before following such a way, we must underline that we will not answer in this article a completely different question: the necessity or not to take envy into account in ethics and to define social justice as “absence of envy”. (Even if it is clear that if the usual philosophical definition of envy is different to the one proposed by economists, then the answer to such a question will probably be different depending on whether we accept one definition or another.) We will not pretend here to evaluate the validity of ‘no-envy’ (whatever its definition is) as a criterion of social justice. Our problem is much more to question the representation of human being drawn by economics.

I- ENVY IN PHILOSOPHY: A DARK PASSION

To identify the notion of envy in philosophy is a very difficult task because this notion occupies a central position in a great number of philosophical works. So we had to do a choice and therefore to simplify all these works. We choose the following steps. First we will start with Aristotle who dedicates famous pages to this notion that inspires later, directly or indirectly, many philosophers. We identify in his work salient features of envy that, as we will show it, can be found again very precisely in the work of Thomas Aquinas (*I- Roots of envy*).

A few centuries later, we leave the Continent in order to see if authors who had a great influence on our discipline –D. Hume and A. Smith– adopt a similar definition of envy or if they move apart, explaining then the specificity of the economic “technical” notion of envy (2- *From an edge to the other*). Finally, we consider what J. Rawls –deeply influenced here by Kant – writes on envy. Because the name of Rawls is often mentioned in economic analysis of “no-envy”, it could be possible to think that the origins of the “technical” economic notion are located in his writings (3- *Closer to us: “one of the vices of hating mankind”*).

Before starting, we would like to do a few remarks. First, as we already said, such a choice can be criticized because it forgets this philosophical work or that other. However the choice of the period covered (from Aristotle to nowadays) permits in part to answer such a critic. Moreover, the reader could easily see that in other philosophical works where envy appears, the notion of envy is not radically different.⁶ Secondly, we stop with Rawls and do not consider more recent works devoted to emotions and especially those taking place in cognitive science. The justification of such a choice is that all those works are subsequent to the economic analysis we are interested in here. Thirdly we perfectly know that such a panorama could be criticized by some readers, especially philosophers, because for drawing it, we were obliged to renounce explaining how this notion take place in the thought of each author. Thus, probably in a very questionable way, we bring near works that almost everything separates in order to identify salient features of envy. However we hope that the great permanence of these features in all these works will convince the reader that such an undertaking was not as absurd as he could think and that there is in all these works some

⁶ So some could reproach us for example the absence of A. Tocqueville, others of B. Spinoza, Augustinus, F. Bacon, R. Descartes, S. Kierkegaard, A. Schopenhauer, F. Nietzsche, S. Freud or M. Scheler in the philosophical panorama we sketched here. However reading the book devoted to envy by H. Schoeck a few years ago, the reader could easily convince himself that, at least for the last five, we would have drawn the same conclusions (1989 (1966), trad. fr. 1995, chap. 11) Concerning Tocqueville, let us quote only these word: « La division des fortunes a diminué la distance qui séparait le pauvre du riche ; mais en se rapprochant, ils semblent avoir trouvé des raisons nouvelles de se haïr, et jetant l'un sur l'autre des regards pleins de terreur et d'envie, ils se repoussent mutuellement du pouvoir ; pour l'un comme pour l'autre, l'idée des droits n'existe point, et la force leur apparaît, à tous les deux, comme la seule raison du présent, et l'unique garantie de l'avenir. » (1840 (1981), p. 65 ; we underline). Concerning Augustinus, we just have to recall that Thomas Aquinas quotes these words: “Augustine says (Confess. i): "I myself have seen and known even a baby envious, it could not speak, yet it turned pale and looked bitterly on its foster-brother.”” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, question 36, art. 3, obj. 2). As to Bacon, he writes: « A man that hath no virtue in himself, ever envieth virtue in others. For men's minds, will either feed upon their own good, or upon others' evil; and who wanteth the one, will prey upon the other; and whoso is out of hope, to attain to another's virtue, will seek to come at even hand, by depressing another's fortune. » Or: « and where there is no comparison, no envy; and therefore kings are not envied, but by kings. » (F. Bacon, 1627, *Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral*, « On envy »). Finally, Spinoza defines this passion by these words: « envy, which, accordingly, is nothing else but hatred, in so far as it is regarded as disposing a man to rejoice in another's hurt, and to grieve at another's advantage. » (B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, 1677 (1965), part III, XXIV). (For an excellent presentation of hatred and other linked passions in

elements that justify their comparison. Moreover, we think that it is only in front of such a permanence that the specificity of the economic « technical » notion of envy we will present in our second part fully appears. Fourthly, the reader could think that we choose all these philosophical works in order to find the results we get at the end of this first part, that is the great permanence of this notion of envy in philosophy. But it is not true. On the one hand, we were the first surprised to find this result and we expected a much more important diversity. On the other hand, as we explained it before, the choice of Hume, Smith and Rawls was motivated, on the contrary, by the will of selecting philosophical works in which the notion of envy could be, if not absolutely identical, at least very similar to the one defined by economic works dealing with social justice as “absence of envy”. Far from trying to make our task easier by choosing authors likely to help our demonstration, we seek conversely to test our first intuition. At the price, we admit it and it is our fifth remark, of some repetitions in our first part.

In order to make things easier for the reader, let's present immediately –and it will be our last remark- the six salient features of envy that we will find in almost all the philosophical works we will examine after. First, envy is defined as a passion in which the *envious man suffers from others' prosperity and -in a symmetrical way- enjoys others' misfortunes*. Secondly, this passion *gives rise to an action* by which the envious man seeks to hurt the other - even if in order to accomplish this aim, he must act against his own personal interests. This passion is therefore associated with suffering by two different links. Thirdly, envy is a “*bad feeling felt by bad persons*” (Aristotle, see *infra*) and must be morally condemned. Therefore it must be distinguished from the fair sorrow we feel in front of undeserved good fortune of others (often called “indignation” after Aristotle). It must also be distinguished from the pain caused by seeing the possession by others of good things that are highly valued and are possible for ourselves to acquire (called “emulation” by Aristotle). And at least, it must be distinguished from the fear of seeing prosperity of others being harmful. Fourthly, envy can appear only if an *interpersonal comparison* is possible; therefore, a certain kind of social proximity is necessary (“potter against potter” and “kings against kings”). Moreover, such a comparison is often based on an oriented social scale, in other words, on a *social hierarchy*. Fifthly, this passion is, if not omnipresent in the social world, at least very widespread. Sixthly, envy is usually associated with other “dark” passions, as hatred, anger or ill-will.

Spinoza, see O. Le Cour Grandmaison (2002)). Concerning R. Descartes, see *infra* note 7. All the salient features of envy we will identify in the authors chosen are also present in all these philosophers.

1- *ROOTS OF ENVY*

A- “A Disturbing pain”

Let’s start with Aristotle. First, he gives the following definition of envy in *Rhetoric*: “envy is (...) *a disturbing pain excited by the prosperity of others* (...), of people who are like us or equal with us” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book II, 1387b, 1388a; we underline); “the man who is delighted by others’ misfortunes is identical with the man who envies others’ prosperity. For any one who is pained by the occurrence or existence of a given thing must be pleased by that thing’s non-existence or destruction” (*Ibid.*). In *Nicomachean Ethics*, he also writes: “the man who is characterized by righteous indignation is pained at undeserved good fortune, the envious man, going beyond him, is pained at all good fortune” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 7, 1108b).

Therefore envy is different from ‘*indignation*’, the passion in which we deplore undeserved good fortune of others. Envy doesn’t result from a sense of justice, even if it is often hidden beside this mask.

It also differs from ‘*emulation*’: “Emulation is pain caused by seeing the presence, in persons whose nature is like our own, of good things that are highly valued and are possible for ourselves to acquire; but it is felt not because others have these goods, but because we have not got them ourselves. It is therefore a good feeling felt by good persons, whereas *envy is a bad feeling felt by bad persons*. Emulation makes us take steps to secure the good things in question, envy makes us take steps to stop our neighbour having them. Emulation must therefore tend to be felt by persons who believe themselves to deserve certain good things that they have not got, it being understood that no one aspires to things which appear impossible.” (*Rhetoric*, II, 11, 1388a, b.; we underline).

We easily can see that for Aristotle envy gives rise to an action because envy “makes us take steps to stop our neighbour having [goods]” (see *supra*); envious man seeks to hurt the other. Envy is therefore associated with suffering and sorrow by two different ways: suffering and sorrow that the envious man feels in front of others’ prosperity and those he tries to create.

Aristotle also underlines that: “The two feelings [indignation and envy] have this in common, that they must be due not to some untoward thing being likely to befall ourselves,

but only to what is happening to our neighbour. The feeling ceases to be envy in the one case and indignation in the other, and becomes fear, *if the pain and disturbance are due to the prospect of something bad for ourselves as the result of the other man's good fortune.*" (*Ibid.*). Envy is not the *fear* of seeing prosperity of others being harmful or conversely their misfortune being helpful. In order to lessen suffering caused by others' prosperity (or symmetrically to increase the pleasure he takes from their sorrow) envious man can act again his own personal interests.

Moreover, a condition of envy appears clearly in the definition given by Aristotle: the possibility of an *interpersonal comparison*. In fact envy develops after a comparison which can be done only with "people who are like us or equal with us" (*supra*). As he explains: "We shall feel [envy] if we have, or think we have, equals; and by 'equals' I mean equals in birth, relationship, age, disposition, distinction, or wealth." (*Ibid.*). And he adds: "It is clear also what kind of people we envy; that was included in what has been said already: we envy those who are *near us* in time, place, age, or reputation. (...) Also our fellow-competitors, who are indeed the people just mentioned -we do not compete with men who lived a hundred centuries ago, or those not yet born, or the dead, or those who dwell near the Pillars of Hercules, or those whom, *in our opinion or that of others, we take to be far below us or far above us*. So too we compete with those who follow the same ends as ourselves: we compete with our rivals in sport or in love, and generally with those *who are after the same things*; and it is therefore these whom we are bound to envy beyond all others. Hence the saying:

Potter against potter.

We also envy those whose possession of or success in a thing is a reproach to us: these are *our neighbours and equals*; for it is clear that it is our own fault we have missed the good thing in question; this annoys us, and excites envy in us. We also envy those who have what we ought to have, or have got what we did have once. Hence old men envy younger men, and those who have spent much envy those who have spent little on the same thing. And men who have not got a thing, or not got it yet, envy those who have got it quickly." (*Ibid.*, we underline). We can see also here an idea of hierarchy, of an accepted social order, because Aristotle speaks of "those *whom, in our opinion or that of others, we take to be far below us or far above us*" (*supra*). Thus envy supposes not only a comparison, but also a comparison allowing a rating of people according to an order or to a social scale. Furthermore, envy is a passion which can go from top to bottom as from bottom to top through this social scale; we found envy at the bottom of this scale when a man suffers from prosperity of his 'superior', as well as at the top when this 'superior' takes pleasure from sorrow of his 'inferior'.

If Aristotle does not explicitly claim the omnipresence of envy in the social world such a claim can however easily be drawn. If envy results from social proximity, it is rather probable that this passion often appears; the diversity of situations of envy described by Aristotle in his work (see *supra*) gives evidence in favor of this claim.

Finally, Aristotle asserts that “*envy is a bad feeling felt by bad persons*” (*supra*); it must be morally condemned. He writes: “But not every action nor every passion admits of a mean; for some have names that already imply badness, e.g. spite, shamelessness, envy (...). For all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that *they are themselves bad*, and not the excesses or deficiencies of them. It is not possible, then, ever to be right with regard to them; one must always be wrong.” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 6, 1107a, 10, we underline).

B- “*Envy is always evil*”

We will find almost exactly all these features of envy in *The Summa Theologicae* of Thomas Aquinas (IIa-IIae, question 36 « Envy »). Indeed he claims that envy appears when “another's good may be reckoned as being one's own evil” (*Ibid.*, art. 1, Answer). It is easy to recognize here the first characteristic of envy defined by Aristotle.

Secondly, as for Aristotle the envious man is driven to hurt others. Starting with the words of S. Grégoire, “who says that from envy arise ‘hatred, tale-bearing, detraction, joy at our neighbor's misfortunes, and grief for his prosperity.’” (*Ibid.*, art.4, obj. 3), he claims: “The number of envy’s daughters may be understood for the reason that in the struggle aroused by envy there is something by way of beginning, something by way of middle, and something by way of term. The beginning is that a man strives to lower another's reputation, and this either secretly, and then we have "tale-bearing," or openly, and then we have "detraction." The middle consists in the fact that when a man aims at defaming another, he is either able to do so, and then we have " joy at another's misfortune," or he is unable, and then we have "grief at another's prosperity." The term is hatred itself, because just as good which delights causes love, so does sorrow cause hatred, as stated above (34, 6)” (*Ibid.*, art. 4, Reply to Objection 3). Sorrow and suffering are therefore here again associated with envy by two different ways; those of the envious man in front of the prosperity of the other and those he tries to give to the other.

Thomas Aquinas also follows Aristotle (to whom he explicitly refers) when he opposes envy with an other kind of ‘sorrow’: “when a man is sorry about another's good, in so

far as it threatens to be an occasion of harm to himself, as when a man grieves for his enemy's prosperity, for fear lest he may do him some harm: such like sorrow is not envy, but rather an effect of fear, as the Philosopher states (Rhet. ii, 9)." (*Ibid.*, art. 1, Answer).

As Aristotle, he opposes also envy to 'indignation' where one "grieves over another's good, because he who happens to have that good is unworthy of it." (*Ibid.*, art. 2, Answer).

As him also, he distinguishes between envy and situations where "we may grieve over another's good, not because he has it, but because the good which he has, we have not: and this, properly speaking, is zeal, as the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 9). And if this zeal be about virtuous goods, it is praiseworthy" (*Ibid.*, art. 2, reply to objection 2).

Thirdly, for him also envy is a "sin": "envy is always evil" (*Ibid.*, art. 2, reply to objection 3). Much more, envy is "a mortal sin, in respect of its genus" (*Ibid.* art. 3, Answer.) and "a capital sin" (*Ibid.*, art 4, answer).

Finally, last feature, envy is based on an interpersonal comparison; and it can develop itself only with people who are close to us. He writes: "But this does not apply to people who are far removed from one another: for no man, unless he be out of his mind, endeavors to rival or surpass in reputation those who are far above him. Thus a commoner does not envy the king, nor does the king envy a commoner whom he is far above. Wherefore a man envies not those who are far removed from him, whether in place, time, or station, but those who are near him, and whom he strives to rival or surpass." (*Ibid.*, art. 1, reply to objection 1) Here again, the idea of a hierarchy is present. And envy goes from top to bottom and from bottom to top.

2- FROM AN EDGE TO THE OTHER

A- Envy in the circle of passions

If all the salient features of envy identified by Aristotle are present in Thomas Aquinas, we could think that after, this notion got another meaning. Giving the influence

of Hume on our discipline, we will stop a moment on his two texts on passions: *A Dissertation on the Passions (DP)* and the book II of *A Treatise on Human Nature (THN)*.⁷

For Hume, hatred is one of the four central passions. Is it necessary to recall here that in Book II of the *Treatise*, hatred and love are two of the four sides – pride and humility the two others- of the central “square” of passions?⁸ Such a symmetry appears also in the definition he gives of these passions: “*Love or Friendship* is a complacency in another, on account of his accomplishments or services: *Hatred*, the contrary.” (*DP*, sec. II, 1). Thus, if the object of these two passions is identical, their cause is opposed: “The object of love and hatred is some other person: The causes, in like manner, are either excellencies or faults.” (*DP*, sec. II, 2).⁹

Let’s recall also that for Hume each of these two passions is associated with all kinds of other passions. He thus writes: “The passions of love and hatred are always followed by, or rather conjoined with, benevolence and anger. It is this conjunction, which chiefly distinguishes these affections from pride and humility. For pride and humility are pure emotions in the soul, unattended with any desire, and not immediately exciting us to action.

⁷ We find also most of the salient features of envy identified in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, centuries later, in Descartes, when the latter studies *Les passions de l’âme* (Descartes, (1953), art 182, p. 781-782). However, Descartes called envy what Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas preferred to distinguish as envy and ‘indignation’. Indeed, he writes : « ce qu'on nomme communément envie est un vice qui consiste en une perversité de nature qui fait que certaines gens se fâchent du bien qu'ils voient arriver aux autres hommes ; mais je me sers ici de ce mot pour signifier une passion qui n'est pas toujours vicieuse : *l'envie donc, en tant qu'elle est une passion, est une espèce de tristesse mêlée de haine qui vient de ce qu'on voit arriver du bien à ceux qu'on pense en être indigne.*” (*Ibid.*, p. 781 ; voir aussi, art. 62 p. 726). Therefore, envy is no more always “vicieuse” (*Ibid.*, art. 183, p. 782). However, if it is not always ‘vicious’, it always causes suffering for the envious man. Descartes writes: « *au reste, il n'y a aucun vice qui nuise tant à la félicité des hommes que celui de l'envie ; car outre que ceux qui en sont entachés s'affligent eux-mêmes, ils troublent aussi de tout leur pouvoir le plaisir des autres, et ils ont ordinairement le teint plombé, c'est-à-dire mêlé de jaune et de noir et comme de sang meurtri : d'où vient que l'envie est nommée livor en latin...*” (*Ibid.*, art. 184, p. 782-783). Descartes follows also Aristototele when he distinguishes envy from what he calls ‘jalousie’ which is « une espèce de crainte qui se rapporte au désir qu'on a de se conserver la possession de quelque bien » (*Ibid.*, art 167, p. 776). He always follows him when he opposes envy and ‘émulation’, this « espèce (...) (de courage qui) n'est autre chose qu'une chaleur qui dispose l'âme à entreprendre des choses qu'elle espère pouvoir réussir parce qu'elle les voit réussir à d'autres » (*Ibid.*, art 172, p. 778).

⁸ He writes: « ... let us suppose I am in company with a person, whom I formerly regarded without any sentiments either of friendship or enmity. Here I have the natural and ultimate object of all these four passions placed before me. Myself am the proper object of pride or humility; the other person of love or hatred. Regard now with attention the nature of these passions, and their situation with respect to each other. It is evident here are four affections, placed as it were in a square, or regular connexion with, and distance from, each other. The passions of pride and humility, as well as those of love and hatred, are connected together by the identity of their object, which to the first set of passions is self, to the second some other person. These two lines of communication or connexion form two opposite sides of the square. Again, pride and love are agreeable passions; hatred and humility uneasy. This similitude of sensation betwixt pride and love, and that betwixt humility and hatred, form a new connexion, and may be considered as the other two sides of the square. Upon the whole, pride is connected with humility, love with hatred, by their objects or ideas: pride with love, humility with hatred, by their sensations or impressions. » (*THN*, bk II, section II, (333)).

⁹ “With regard to all these passions, the causes are what excite the emotion; the object is what the mind directs its view to when the emotion is excited.” (*Ibid.*)

But love and hatred are not complete within themselves, nor rest in that emotion, which they produce; but carry the mind to something farther. Love is always followed by a desire of happiness to the person beloved, and an aversion to his misery: As hatred produces a desire of the misery, and an aversion to the happiness of the person hated. These opposite desires seem to be originally and primarily conjoined with the passions of love and hatred. It is a constitution of nature, of which we can give no farther explication.” (*DP*, sec. III, 3).¹⁰

Beside hatred and anger appear then two other passions: ‘envy’ and ‘malice’. They take place in the circle of passions: “All resembling impressions are connected together, and no sooner one arises than the rest immediately follows. Grief and disappointment give rise to anger, anger to envy, envy to malice, and malice to grief again, until the whole circle be completed.” (*Ibid*, section IV, 283). Hume writes: “Malice and envy also arise in the mind without any preceding hatred or injury; though their tendency is exactly the same with that of anger and ill-will. The *comparison* of ourselves with others seems to be the source of envy and malice. The more unhappy another is, the more happy do we ourselves appear in our own conception” (*DP*, sec. III, 4, we underline). We find again that in envy, our pleasure is linked to others’ pains and our sorrow to others’ pleasure.

Moreover, it is clear that envy arises –and requires- a *comparison* between envious man and others’ situation. This interpersonal comparison plays even a central role: “The direct survey of another's pleasure naturally gives us pleasure, and therefore produces pain when compared with our own. His pain, considered in itself, is painful to us, but augments the idea of our own happiness, and gives us pleasure.” (*THP*, bk.II, part. II, sec. VIII. 375). As Aristotle, Hume also remarks that this difference has to be not too important: “Envy arises from a superiority in others; but it is observable, that it is not the great disproportion between us, which excites that passion, but on the contrary, our proximity. A great disproportion cuts off the relation of the ideas, and either keeps us from comparing ourselves with what is remote from us, or diminishes the effects of the comparison.” (*DP*, sec. IV, 5).¹¹ Here again we meet the idea of a social hierarchy and Hume underlines that envy can cross it in both directions: “The enjoyment, which is the object of envy, is commonly superior to our own. A superiority naturally seems to overshadow us, and presents a disagreeable comparison. But even

¹⁰ This passage follows very precisely (with the exception of the last sentence) the *THN* (bk.II, part. II, section VI).

¹¹ He writes also: “A poet is not apt to envy a philosopher, or a poet of a different kind, of a different nation, or of a different age. All these differences prevent or weaken the comparison, and consequently the passion. This too is the reason why all objects appear great or little, merely by a comparison with those of the same species. A mountain neither magnifies nor diminishes a horse in our eyes; but when a Flemish and a Welsh horse are seen together, the one appears greater and the other less than when viewed apart.” (*Ibid.*, 377).

in the case of an inferiority, we still desire a greater distance, in order to augment still more the idea of ourself. When this distance diminishes, the comparison is less to our advantage, and consequently gives us less pleasure, and is even disagreeable. Hence arises that species of envy which men feel, when they perceive their inferiors approaching or overtaking them in the pursuit of glory or happiness.” (*THP*, bk.II, part. II, sec. VIII, 377).¹²

This passion shares with anger a central feature: “The similar tendency of (...) envy to anger, forms a very close relation between these two (...) passions (...). It is not a resemblance of feeling or sentiment, but a resemblance of tendency or direction. (...) (E)nvoy is naturally accompanied with anger or ill-will. (...) (T)o delight in another's misery almost unavoidably begets aversion towards him.” (*DP*, sec. III, 5) The difference between both passions is the following: “The only difference betwixt these passions [malice and envy] lies in this, that envy is excited by some present enjoyment of another, which, by comparison, diminishes our idea of our own: whereas malice is the unprovoked desire of producing evil to another, in order to reap a pleasure from the comparison.” (*THN*, bk.II, part. II, sec.VIII). We here again see that envy is associated with sorrow and pain by two different ways: sorrow and pain of the envious man and those he necessarily tries to provoke.

Moreover this comparison generating envy is omnipresent: “So little are men governed by reason in their sentiments and opinions, that they always judge more of objects by *comparison* than from their intrinsic worth and value.” (*THN*, bk.II, part. II, sec.VIII, 372).¹³ From here to think that envy is also omnipresent, there is only one step that we will take without hesitation.

However we must underline that for Hume – contrary to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas- envy is not a morally condemnable passion. This central feature of envy disappears. As J. P. Cléro writes: “It is one of Hume favorite pleasure to reduce what others explain by moral considerations to a simple game of psychological laws.” (1991, p. 14, our translation). We can probably see here the influence exerted by *Le Traité des passions* of Descartes, because, as J.P. Cléro claims, Hume borrows from Descartes “the will of carrying out, at least in a first time, studies of passions independently of all rhetoric, moral or religious considerations” (*Ibid.*) and for Descartes, envy is no more always ‘vicious’.¹⁴ In fact, Hume does not say that envy is not always vicious but only doesn’t analyze this passion through this

¹² He covers by this term what others distinguish as ‘envy’ and ‘jealousy’ (see supra note 2).

¹³ More generally, it is necessary to recall that Hume gives a fundamental role to passions. He writes for example: “It seems evident, that reason, in a strict sense, as meaning the judgment of truth and falsehood, can never, of itself, be any motive to the will, and can have no influence but so far as it touches some passion or affection.” (*DP*, sec. V, 1).

prism, what Descartes still did. It follows that the Aristotelian distinction between envy and indignation fades. However we find in his writings all the other salient features of envy.

B- “Malignant dislike”

In *The Theory of moral sentiments*, published for the first time few years after *A Dissertation on the Passions* of Hume, Smith also analyses this notion of envy. Let’s stop a moment on what this other central actor in the birth of our discipline says here.

Smith defines envy as “that passion which views with malignant dislike the superiority of those who are really entitled to all the superiority they possess.” (*TSM*, VI, section III, chapter I).

Such a passion is also for him painful in two ways. First, it hurts the envious man: Smith speaks of a “disagreeable sentiment” and claims that “we are always ashamed of our own envy” (*Ibid*, I, section III, chapter I); thus shame redoubles the pain generated by the ‘superiority’ of the other. Secondly, as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, he considers that envy is a passion which always leads the envious man to actions opposed to the welfare of the man he envies. Thus Smith explains that we must try to avoid incurring envy in others: “Prudence, indeed, would often advise us to bear our prosperity with more moderation; because prudence would teach us to avoid that envy which this very triumph is, more than any thing, apt to excite.” (*Ibid*, I, section III, chapter I). Latter, he even explains that envy “drive(s) men from one another, and (...) tend, as it were, to break the bands of human society” (*Ibid*, VI, section III, chapter I).

For him, envy can’t develop without an interpersonal comparison and even a comparison according to an oriented social scale – a hierarchy- because it is based on a report of ‘superiority’. And he claims that envy often appears when the social order is modified, as we can see it when Smith speaks of the “upstart”. He writes: “The man who, by some sudden revolution of fortune, is lifted up all at once into a condition of life, greatly above what he had formerly lived in, may be assured that the congratulations of his best friends are not all of them perfectly sincere. An upstart, though of the greatest merit, is generally disagreeable, and a sentiment of envy commonly prevents us from heartily sympathizing with his joy.” (*Ibid*. part I, section II, chapter V).

¹⁴ See *supra*, note 7.

However, Smith, contrary to Hume, accepts the Aristotelian distinction between ‘envy’ and ‘indignation’.¹⁵ He writes: “The disposition to the affections which drive men from one another, and which tend, as it were, to break the bands of human society; the disposition to anger, hatred, envy, malice, revenge; is (...) much more apt to offend by its excess than by its defect. The excess renders a man wretched and miserable in his own mind, and the object of hatred, and sometimes even of horror, to other people. The defect is very seldom complained of. It may, however, be defective. The want of proper *indignation* is a most essential defect in the manly character, and, upon many occasions, renders a man incapable of protecting either himself or his friends from insult and injustice. Even that principle, in the excess and improper direction of which consists the odious and detestable passion of envy, may be defective.” (*Ibid*, VI, section III, chapter I). Consequently envy is opposed to a just indignation and is a morally condemnable passion, an “odious and detestable passion” (*Ibid*, VI, section III, chapter I).

The question of the importance of this passion in human being is a difficult one. If one remembers what Smith writes concerning the “upstart” -“a sentiment of envy commonly prevents us from heartily sympathizing with his joy”-, and this other passage where he explains that if the other is happy “if there is any envy in the case, we never feel the least propensity towards [sympathy]; and if there is none, we give way to it without any reluctance” (*Ibid*, I, section III, chapter I; we underline) or this other -“It is agreeable to sympathize with joy; and wherever *envy does not oppose it*, our heart abandons itself with satisfaction to the highest transports of that delightful sentiment.” (*Ibid*; we underline)-, or “We readily, therefore, sympathize with it in others, whenever we are not prejudiced by envy. » (*Ibid*, I, section II, chapter V), then envy appears as being, if not “the contrary of sympathy” (J. P. Dupuy, 1992, p. 97), at least “a possible exception” (*Ibid*).¹⁶ Knowing the central place of sympathy in Smith’s works, this “follow-feeling” with others’ passions, it could be possible to think that the role played by envy is minor. However Smith admits that envy exists, as he admits that “There is, besides, a malice in mankind, which not only prevents all sympathy with little uneasiness, but renders them in some measure diverting.” (*Ibid*, I, section II, chapter V). Following here Hume, but also Hutcheson, he acknowledges the existence of a “dark” side of human being, even if he limits it.

¹⁵ We can also find the distinction between envy and emulation (*Ibid.*, part I, section III, chapter II).

¹⁶ Is it necessary to recall here the famous passage where Smith defines sympathy: « Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever.” (*Ibid*, I, section I, chapter I)?

Here again we find the six salient features of the Aristotelian envy. This passion is defined as: (1) the suffering and pain generated by others' prosperity and -in a symmetrical way- joy generated by others' misfortunes; (2) a passion leading us to hurt the other in turn; (3) morally condemnable and carefully distinguish from the fair sorrow we feel in front of others' undeserved good fortune ('indignation')¹⁷; (4) which can develop itself only if a comparison with the others is possible (more precisely in a hierarchical scale); (5) omnipresent in the social world; (6) and associated with other 'dark' passions.

In conclusion, it seems clear that it is not with Hume or Smith - these major actors in the birth of our discipline- that we can explain the specificity of this notion we will encounter later in economics.

3- CLOSER TO US: "ONE OF THE VICIES OF HATING MANKIND"

However could we not find the origin of the 'technical' notion of envy in later philosophical texts? In particular the name of J. Rawls is often mentioned in economic analysis devoted to 'no-envy'. So is it not possible to think that the origins of the economic notion could be found in his analysis of this notion? We will therefore rapidly recall what Rawls writes on envy in *A Theory of Justice*.¹⁸

He deals with this question at different moments of *The Theory of Justice*. He first introduces this notion at the paragraph 25, when he explains that in a first stage of his argumentation he will suppose 'mutually disinterested' persons (Rawls, *Ibid*, p. 174). More precisely he writes: "The assumption of mutually disinterested rationality, then, comes to this: the persons in the original position try to acknowledge principles which advance their system of ends as far as possible. They do this by attempting to win for themselves the highest index of primary social goods, since this enables them to promote their conception of the good most

¹⁷ On this point it is necessary to put Hume apart.

¹⁸ We can mention here the analysis of envy realized by E. Kant in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant, (1986), part. II, par. 36) because Rawls explicitly refers to this analyze and explicitly claims this intellectual filiation on this point (Rawls, (1997), p. 466, note 6; see *infra*). In order not to slacken too much our pace, we will just quote the following words of Kant: « L'envie (*livor*), comme propension à percevoir avec douleur le bien qui arrive aux autres quoique le sien n'en pâtisse pas et qui, si elle se traduit en acte (diminuer le bien d'autrui), s'appelle *envie qualifiée*, mais qui autrement n'est que *jalousie (invidentia)*, n'est cependant qu'une intention indirectement mauvaise, je veux dire le dépit de voir notre propre bien mis dans l'ombre par le bien d'autrui, parce que nous ne savons pas mesurer celui-là à sa valeur intrinsèque mais seulement par comparaison avec le bien d'autrui – seule manière que nous connaissions de nous en rendre sensible d'estimation. » (Kant, *Ibid*, pp. 753-754). After, he writes also: « Les élans d'envie sont donc inscrits dans la nature de l'homme, et c'est seulement leur enchaînement qui en fait ce vice hideux qu'est la passion hargneuse de se tourmenter soi-même, appliquée à détruire, du moins par l'espérance, le bonheur d'autrui –déchaînement qui est par conséquent opposé

effectively whatever it turns out to be. The parties do not seek to confer benefits or to impose injuries on one another; they are not moved by affection or rancor. Nor do they try to gain relative to each other; they are not envious or vain.” (*Ibid*, p. 125). In other terms, “the persons in the original position are assumed to take no interest in one another’s interests” (*Ibid*, p. 127). This means in particular that they are not envious; Rawls therefore writes: “The special assumption I make is that a rational individual does not suffer from envy” (*Ibid*, p. 124). We must underline here that the aim of such a ‘no-envy’ assumption is very different of the economists’ one; it is in fact an hypothetical proposition allowing Rawls to deduce principles of justice and not at all a criterion of justice.

However Rawls immediately recognizes that “certainly men are afflicted with these feelings” (*Ibid*, p. 124) and that it is necessary to take into account envy and other ‘feelings’ (as ‘shame’ and ‘humiliation’) (*Ibid* ; see also: *Ibid*, p. 465: “Nevertheless these inclinations do exist and in some way they must be reckoned with.”). It is thus clear that this assumption of ‘absence of envy’ is completely different from the idea that human beings are not envious in reality. He even claims: “As for particular envy, to a certain extent it is endemic to human life ; being associated with rivalry, it may exist in any society” (*Ibid.*, p. 580).¹⁹ In other terms, he claims the omnipresence of envy.

He justifies the fact that “in a first part [of his book], the principles are derived on the supposition that envy does not exist; while in the second, we consider whether the conception arrived at is feasible in view of the circumstances of human life.” (*Ibid*, p. 124) by these words: “envy tends to make everyone worse off. In this sense it is *collectively disadvantageous*. Presuming its absence amounts to supposing that in the choice of principles men should think of themselves as having their own plan of life which is sufficient for itself. They have a secure sense of their own worth so that they have no desire to *abandon any of their aims provided others have less means to further theirs.*” (*Ibid*, p. 124-125). He also writes that envy is “a *destructive feeling*” (*Ibid*, p. 125). And after: “envy is generally considered as something *to be avoided and feared*, at least when it becomes intense” (*Ibid.*, p. 465).²⁰ Here again we are in a familiar ground.

aussi bien au devoir de l’homme envers lui-même qu’au devoir envers les autres. » (*Ibid*, p. 754). It appears clearly that the main Aristotelian features of envy are kept here.

¹⁹ Even, as he underlines it himself, in societies ruled by the principle of justice of ‘equity’ (*Ibid.*)

²⁰ We can underline here that for him this assumption of absence of envy plays a central role because it allows the existence of “inequalities”: « Thus the parties would object to these differences only if they would be dejected by the bare knowledge or perception that others are better situated: but I suppose that they decide as if they are not moved by envy. Thus the basic structure should allow these inequalities so long as these improve everyone’s situation, including that of the least advantaged, provided that they are consistent with equal liberty and fair opportunity.” (*Ibid.*, §26, p. 131).

We also find in his book the idea that envy needs an interpersonal *comparison and even a social hierarchy* in order to spread out. Indeed, when, in the second stage of his demonstration (which corresponds to the paragraphs 80 and 81 of his book, the second moment where he deals with the notion of envy) he asks “whether the principles of justice [defined before] is likely to engender in practice too much destructive general envy” (*Ibid*, p. 466), he explains that “the *inequalities* sanctioned by the difference principle may be so great as to *arouse envy to a socially dangerous extent*” (*Ibid*; we underline). This point appears also when he distinguishes between ‘general and particular envy’: “The envy experienced by *the least advantaged* towards those better situated is normally general envy in the sense that they envy *the more favored* for the kinds of goods and not for the particular objects they possess. *The upper classes* say are envied for their greater wealth and opportunity; those envying them want similar advantages for themselves. By contrast, particular envy is typical of rivalry and *competition*. *Those who lose out in the quest* for office and honor, or for the affections of another, are liable to envy the success of their rivals and to covet the very same thing that they have won.” (*Ibid*, p. 466; we underline).

However it is much more explicit in the definition he gives of envy. He writes: “I now turn to the definition of envy that seems appropriate for this question. To fix ideas, suppose that the necessary interpersonal comparisons are made in terms of the objective primary goods, liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, which for simplicity I have normally used to define expectations in applying the difference principle. *Then we may think of envy as the propensity to view with hostility the greater good of others even though their being more fortunate than we are does not detract from our advantages*. We envy persons whose situation is *superior* to ours (estimated by some agreed index of goods as noted above) and *we are willing to deprive them of their greater benefits even if it is necessary to give up something ourselves*.” (*Ibid*, p. 466; we underline). And he continues: “When others are aware of our envy, they may become jealous of their better circumstances and anxious to take precautions against the *hostile acts to which our envy makes us prone*. So understood envy is *collectively disadvantageous*: the individual who envies another is *prepared to do things that make them both worse off*, if only the discrepancy between them is sufficiently reduced. Thus Kant, whose definition I have pretty much followed, quite properly discusses *envy as one of the vices of hating mankind*.” (*Ibid.*; we underline)²¹

²¹ In a note he refers here to *The Metaphysics of Morals*, but also to Aristotle who in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1107aII) “notes that envy and spite as passions did not admit of a mean ; their names already imply badness” (*Ibid*, p. 466, note 5).

We again find the salient features of envy identified before. In particular, Rawls claims that envy needs always an interpersonal comparison in order to develop itself. We note that he also considers that social proximity creates the highest envy: “we tend to compare our circumstances with others in the same or in a similar group as ourselves, or in positions that we regards as relevant to our aspirations.” (*Ibid*, p. 470). He also claims that envy is an harmful passion in which, not only the envious man, but also the envied one suffer because envy always generates an aggressive behaviour: “the individual who envies another is *prepared to do things that make them both worse off*” (see *supra*). He writes also: “envy proper (...) is a form of rancor that tends to harm both its object and its subject.” (*Ibid*, p. 467).

Here again envy is morally condemnable: it is a “vice”. So he distinguishes it carefully from what he calls ‘benign envy’ where “we are affirming the value of certain things that others have (...) (and) we are indicating that, although we possess no similar good of equal value, they are indeed worth striving for” ; “there is no ill will intended or expressed” (*Ibid* , p. 467). He also marks it off from “emulative envy” which “leads us to try to achieve what others have” and where “the sight of their greater good moves us to strive in socially beneficial ways for similar things for ourselves” (*Ibid.*) He distinguishes it also from “resentment” which is a “moral feeling” (*Ibid*, p. 467). Concerning this distinction, he writes: “No moral principle need to be cited in (the) explanation [of envy]. It is sufficient to say that the better situation of others catches our attention. We are downcast by their good fortune and no longer value as highly what we have; and this sense of hurt and loss arouses our rancor and hostility. Thus one must be careful not to conflate envy and resentment. For resentment is a moral feeling. If we resent our having less than the others, it must be because we think that their being better off is the result of unjust institutions, or wrongful conduct on their part. Those who express resentment must be prepare to show why certain institutions are unjust or how others have injured them. What marks off envy from the moral feelings is the different way in which it is accounted for, the sort of perspective from which the situation is viewed.” (*Ibid*, p. 467).

We can see easily that the landscape is very familiar and that all the features of envy identified in the Aristotle writings are present.

II- “TECHNICAL” ENVY OR ENVY KEPT OFF?

I- “ENVY” OR “BISMUTH OR ZANZIBAR”?

If we now come back to the economic literature devoted to the absence of envy, we can then easily measure the distance between envy defined here (that we recall in “Introduction”) and the notion identified in the philosophical writings in our first part.

It is true that in “technical” envy, the envious man does a “comparison” between his situation and the one of the other. It is also true that this comparison is unfavorable for him. But is this unfavorable comparison similar to the suffering generated by others’ prosperity? Where are the destructive behaviors provoked by envy? As we explained it before, technical envy is a valuation done by the envious man on a situation he can not change, a simple report of a given situation and the behaviours eventually provoked by such a valuation are not taken into account. In fact, if a decision and a behaviour follow, they are not those of the envious man but those of the “policy maker” (A. Feldman et A. Kirman, 1974, p. 997-998), the “benevolent dictator” (*Ibid.*, p. 1004) or the “enlightened ruler” (*Ibid.*, p. 1000) trying to establish a redistributing policy in order to “maximizing equity”. There is no idea of rating, or even of hierarchy, in this comparison.²² This envy is not morally condemnable or *a fortiori* vicious. The criterion of technical envy is so large that it is not even possible to distinguish envy and resentment.

Such a distance has been underline several times before, even by authors who belong to this theoretical field. Varian himself in 1974 used explicitly the Rawlsian distinction between envy and resentment and claimed that the technical envy was nearer from the first one than from the second one: “I believe that envy, as I have defined, is very similar to Rawls concept of resentment, for the existence of envy is clear-cut evidence that agents are being treated asymmetrically” (1974, p. 67). Van Parijs and C. Arnsperger (1994) in the Introduction of the special issue of *Recherches économiques de Louvain* devoted to this question speak of “this rather unhappy expression of absence en envy” (p. 4, our translation)

and C. Arnsperger admits later that the problem is probably more than a simple anecdotal terminological difficulty (C. Arnsperger, 1996, p. 218).²³ S.K. Kolm writes: “envy is one of the main social sentiments, heavily loaded with normative implications, and very important for both economic life and the quality of society. One cannot just use this name off-hand to mean something different, at least if one believes that economics and ethics are social sciences rather than pure (second rate) mathematics. This is all the more confusing because another field of economics studies envy and its consequences by modeling it as a negative externality (Duesenberry 1949, Mishan 1960, Kolm 1966, 1972, 1990, 1991 and 1995; Scott 1972, Brennan 1973, Hirschman 1973, Boskin and Sheshinski 1978; Goldman and Sussangkarn 1983, Villar 1988 Nieto 1991 and others). Now it is not the case that, as Arnsperger says, at some point I reacted to the name of ‘envy’ and wanted to replace it by something else.” (1996, p. 202). Kolm defends in fact another definition of envy based on externality, as he explains it clearly: “envy is a very important social sentiment which influences the working of society and of its economy and the quality of society. Its analysis is definitively an important study. Now, even though Equity as defined above cannot normally be called no-envy, this structure has indeed something to do with the absence of envy. In the most common use of the term, envy is a disagreeable sentiment resulting from a comparison between one’s endowment and that of some other person. If individual 1 envies, in this sense, individual 2’s allocation x_2 , as compared to his own allocation x_1 , this can be thus described, with the classical tools of economic analysis, as a consumption externality ; that is, individual 1’s utility function writes $U_1(x_1, x_2)$.” (p. 211) ²⁴ Lastly, J.P. Dupuy writes in a rather ironical way: “one names ‘envy’ such a mathematical being, it is his right, and he could as well call it Bismuth or Zanzibar.” (1992, p. 48; our translation).

²² Except if there is only one good in the economy.

²³ However for him the central question is different; it is to know whether determination of justice can be done by personal evaluation of actors themselves or if it follows from impartial judgment of an external observer.

²⁴ W. Thomson also claims that : « il est important de bien voir que ce qu’on entend par le terme « envie » recouvre dans le langage courant beaucoup plus de phénomènes que le concept qu’il désigne dans la théorie du bien-être, et il est probable que le choix d’un autre terme aurait été plus propice au développement de la théorie. » (1994, p.). In the same way, C. Gamel writes about « technical » envy : « on doit (...) constater que le comportement ainsi décrit n’a rien à voir avec l’envie, ce sentiment malsain de convoitise –l’un des sept péchés capitaux -, dont l’envieux souffre et qui peut le conduire aux pires extrémités ; pour le moins, le choix de ce terme a été malencontreux et, même si Varian a reconnu dès 1974 cette impropriété, le pli était déjà pris. En contraste avec la définition extensive de l’envie posée par Fleurbaey, la distinction de Rawls (1987, p. 575-576), reprise par Varian (1974, p. 67) entre envie et ressentiment nous semble féconde : le ressentiment, à la différence de l’envie, comporte en effet un aspect moral et légitime car l’existence d’un tel sentiment est la conséquence, dans l’esprit de ceux qui l’éprouvent, d’institutions sociales injustes et qui n’ont pas traité tous les individus de manière symétrique. Ainsi la théorie de la justice comme absence d’envie aurait-elle dû s’appeler théorie de la justice comme absence de ressentiment. » (1994, p.)

Thus the reader can ask us the following question: if everybody admits this gap between technical and philosophical notions of envy why to do a paper on this subject? We will first answer that if many admit this gap, however the precise nature of the philosophical notion is rather unknown and therefore the specificity of the economic technical notion does not appear clearly.

Secondly, the use of this expression continues and some persist in defending it. It is for example the position of M. Fleurbaey (1994, 1996)²⁵. Asking if the technical definition of envy “is really apt to represent the feeling of envy” (1996, p. 222; our translation) and answering to Goldman and Sussangkarn (1983) who propose another definition,²⁶ he writes that, conversely to what they claim, “a reference to externality is absolutely not a right way in order to specify correctly envy” (1994, p. 12; our translation). According to him, “the inequality $U_i(x_j) < U_i(x_i)$ seems in reality the more sound way to represent, if not the feeling of envy, at least *its immediate root*.” (1996, p. 223; our translation).²⁷ He continues, introducing the following distinction: “the feeling of envy possesses (...) multiples facets and degrees. At a first level, envy can take the benign form of aspiration to equality (I desire be at the same level than you are). [He refers here in note to Tocqueville “who did not ignore the dark facts of envy” and to the notion of ‘emulative’ envy of Rawls which “plays a positive social role”]. At the next level, envy is considered as undesirable and one wants redistribution (in order to be equal in an intermediate position). Lastly the level of jealousy²⁸ is when one wants to see others’ advantages be destroyed; such a desire for destruction is an extreme and repulsive form of envy” (1996, p. 224; our translation). Thus, as we mention it, he explains that it is “surprising that many authors consider only this form.” (*Ibid.*)²⁹

²⁵ In his *Stanford encyclopaedia of philosophy*’s article on the economic works on justice, he does not even mention these terminological difficulties (2006).

²⁶ See *supra* page 20, Kolm’s definition based on externality.

²⁷ However he does not precise what we must understand by this term ‘root’.

²⁸ He uses this term in a completely different way than Rawls (see *supra*, note 2).

²⁹ He quotes here J. Rawls (1971), R. Nozick (1974), S.C. Kolm (1995) and J. P. Dupuy (1992). In his 1994’s article, he writes also: “it is really doubtful whether the feeling of envy has necessarily a negative feature. And another advantage of [the technical definition] is that it does not prejudice of the influence of envy on well-being which can be rather various” (1994, p. 12; our translation).

2- A MORE GENERAL REPORT

Then how to explain such a gap between the ‘technical’ notion of envy and the philosophical one?

Is the evolution of language a first explanation? Is the current meaning of envy different from the older one and therefore explains this gap between the technical and the philosophical meaning³⁰? However “Envy” in the *Oxford Dictionary* is, as M. Fleurbaey recalls it himself, “a grudging contemplation (and grudge [is defined] as “feeling of resentment or ill will”)” (*Ibid.*, p. 224). Moreover we would have to explain why Rawls gives to this term nearly the same meaning as Aristotle did. Thus this explanation is not really convincing.

Another possible explanation is that - as P.J. Hamond (1987) underlines it - all these economic works on absence of envy find in fact *their origins, far away from philosophy, in mathematical analysis devoted to the question of “fair division”*.³¹ Thus, when he defined this notion, Foley (1967) pursued a line of analysis on the “fair division of a cake and with non-envy”, as those realized by H. Steinhaus (1948, 1949) and L.E. Dubins and E.H. Spaniers (1961). S.J. Brams and A. D. Taylor (1999, p. 2) underline that the use of the concept of absence of envy in mathematics appears also in (Gamow and Stern, 1958). We must here mention the work of Tinbergen (1946) on income distribution in which he introduces the term of envy. These analyses continue in particular with S.K Kolm (1971), then D. Schmeidler and K. Vind (1972) who generalize these works to the case of an economy of exchange with several goods, E. Pazner and D. Schmeidler (1974) and H.R. Varian (1974) who consider an economy of production, A. Feldman and A. Kirman (1974) who loosen the condition of “total absence of envy” and define three different measurements of the “degree of envy” of each allocation.

³⁰This is the track followed by Fleurbaey (1996, p. 224, n. 12).

³¹ It is also what recalls S.C. Kolm : « The history of the concept (...) has to be known in order to understand and appraise the field. One can certainly propose that men have always considered that they could prefer the situation of certain others to their own. The specific application we consider here can be said to have started in 1925, when a young student of physics asked his professor, the famous Dutch physicist Ehrenfest, how one could define a fair wage. After some reflection, the professor proposed the principle that each individual prefer his wage with his job to the wage-job pair of any other. Twenty years later, the student, whose name was Tinbergen, incorporated this idea in his book on income distribution (...) (1946). There the criterion is called the « principle of exchange ». Yet, Tinbergen also points out how nice a society without envy would be. A description in English of this part of Tinbergen’s book was presented by Jan Pen in his book *Income distribution* (1971, p.303 to 305). Foley (1967) just mentions the criterion for consumption bundles. The book *Justice and Equity* (Kolm, 1971) analyses the general properties of the principle with the name “equity” or “fairness”, while noting its particular relation to the absence of envy or jealousy. » (1996, p. 202). For more details and a presentation of the later analysis, see Thomson (1994), Arnsperger (1994) and Hammond (1987).

However we think that such an explanation is not sufficient for the following reason. According to us the observed gap, between the technical and philosophical notions of envy, can really be understood only if it is put together with *a more general report* –which corresponds precisely to a third reason for which we think it was necessary to take again the question of this gap. This report is the following. For the last few years, we have been seeing many works trying to take into account interpersonal relations in economic world and to put *Homo Oeconomicus* out of the loneliness in which he was shut up. But, by studying these works, we were struck by the fact that, in general, interpersonal relations are viewed as ‘positives’ for individuals; they not only give opportunities of material benefits for both parts, but they are also synonymous with sociability and friendship.³² Interactions also almost always seem to exert a ‘positive’ effect at a collective level: they produce ‘efficient’ situations and are therefore socially desirable. Moreover, and it is for us the most important point, individuals are usually benevolent or altruistic, at worst, indifferent and egoist. In fact, since nearly thirty years, we have been seeing a growing number of economic analysis assuming altruistic agents.³³ On the other hands, in economic models, we rarely met agents with ‘negative’ feelings toward the others. Usually they did not desire pains for the others. Usually they are not happy when the other is unhappy and happy when he is unhappy. They are rarely ill willed, full of hatred, motivated by anger. And when they are supposed to be envious, it is in the technical sense and not in the strong philosophical sense.

However, we are skeptical: Are really interpersonal relations always ‘positive’ for individuals? Do they always exert a ‘positive’ effect at a social level? And are people always either altruistic or egoist? Moreover, after studying – as we have done in (I. This Saint-Jean, 2006) - economic works trying to take into account this ‘dark side’ of human being –‘bad boys’ in economics –³⁴, we must underline two points. First these works are not very important in number compared with those dealing with altruistic agents. Secondly - and it is here the main point - it seems difficult for the authors to accept that an agent could take happiness from the pain of the others (or conversely suffer from others’ pleasure). Except if

³² On this subject, I. This Saint-Jean (2006) and B. Gazier and I. This Saint-Jean (2005).

³³ For a presentation of these works, see for example Zagmani (1995) and Gérard-Varet, Kolm and Mercier-Ythier (2000).

³⁴ One can mention here, besides analysis cited in the introduction and those presented page 20 on “non-technical envy”, all those on negative interdependencies or those dealing with “conflict” in the economic field, especially those taking place in game theory (in particular “ultimatum” or “dictator games”), “evolutionary games” and “experimental economics”. We can also mention works devoted to « negative reciprocity » (where an agent reacts hostilely upon a hostile action of an other agent) and works dealing with “punishments”, “retaliation” and “threat”. For more details, see I. This Saint-Jean (2006).

such a pain is necessary to increase his own situation in terms of material gains, present or future; or if such a pain is necessary to increase his own situation in term of 'social status'; or if such a situation is conform to his ideas of 'justice'. Nevertheless, at the same time, the idea that individuals could take pleasure from the pleasure of others, *without any other justification*, seems not to be a problematic one.

We can then ask if the gap existing between the technical and the philosophical notions of envy does not in reality follow from the difficulty that our economic discipline seems to have to accept and integer the 'dark side' of human being.

3- SOME ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN

So let's take seriously this question and try to find some explanations of this 'reticence' that economists seem to have to take into account the 'dark' dimension of human being and *in particular* to consider envy as usually defined by philosophers.

A first explanation could be that 'envious' (in the strong sense) - or 'ill willed' or 'full of hatred' or motivated by 'anger' - the individual can not be *rational* and therefore has no place in the current theoretical universe of economics. Concerning 'hatred', the French philosopher R. Ogien adopts very explicitly the opposite position. According to him it is possible to analyze 'hatred' in terms of rational behaviours and believes. He writes: "it is possible to deny that bad coincides with irrational or good with rational. In the case of hatred for example, I think it is not impossible to show that full of hatred behaviour is in no way irrational, even if it is possible to judge it as bad." (R. Ogien, 1993, p. 43; our translation). For him the question is important because he thinks that if a full of hatred man is irrational, then he is "immune to moral blame or indignation" (*Ibid*, p. 48; our translation). Concerning "envy" however, the situation seems more complex if we remember what Rawls writes: "the special assumption I make is that a rational individual does not suffer from envy" (*Ibid*, p. 124). In order to clarify this question, we must try before to specify what we mean by 'rational'. Could 'envy', 'hatred', 'ill-will' or 'anger' be 'rational' according to the different meanings of this term in current decision theory? If 'rational' means an individual whom choices result from a preference relation (defined on a set of choice) 'transitive' and 'complete', nothing forbids this rational individual to be envious (or 'ill willed', 'full of hatred' or motivated by 'anger'). Nothing in properties of 'transitivity' and 'completeness'

forbids it. And if by ‘rational’, we mean the property of ‘compatibility’ between choice and preferences, we can not see why the answer would be different.³⁵

So, how could we explain that economics sets bounds to the extension of the theoretical framework based on rationality, in front of ‘envious’, ‘ill willed’, ‘full of hatred’ or motivated by ‘anger’ individual?

A second explanation could be the following. If economic works suppose that individuals are not of this kind and if, conversely, they are supposed to be either altruistic or egoistic, it is only because such an assumption would be conform to ‘real’ behaviours in economic world. Some could admit that such an assumption is perhaps inexact but is, nevertheless, a “*good approximation*”. If they do that, they have to give the demonstration of such a claim. Probably some, rather optimistically, could think that this demonstration will come from experimental economics. However - independently of the general question of the validity of the ‘empirical proofs’ given by experimental economics – these works will never give us such a demonstration. They can only prove that, in *particular* situations in which the agents are put (particular choices they have to do), behaviours and decisions are not those of ‘envious’, ‘ill-willed’, ‘full of hatred’ individuals . However we could always think that in other situations - not yet conceived - the ‘dark’ side of human being will appear! Moreover the authority of all the philosophers presented in our first part and who claim the ‘omnipresence’ of envy in social world authorizes us to doubt of the validity of this ‘approximation’. But other could then answer that this kind of situations, in spite of their omnipresence in social world, is not important *in the economic field*. They could claim that, in economy, the only passion we have to consider is the passion of material gain and that an economic actor is motivated only by his self-interest, in the narrow sense of this term. However, if this assumption clearly played a fundamental role in the history of Political economy, the situation seems to have changed nowadays. Edgeworth, in his *Palgrave’s Dictionary of Political Economy’s* article, “Pleasure and Pain”, writes: “For the most abstract part of economics, the theory of exchange, it need not be postulated that each party acts from self-interest, but only that he is not actuated by regard for the interest of the other parties, those with whom he competes or bargains. The efforts and sacrifices which are required to supply market – including the labour market and the loan market – are often incurred for the

³⁵ Naturally it would be necessary to demonstrate those claims. For these definitions of ‘rationality’, see for example, Mas-Colell, Whinston et Green, 1995, pchapter 1, p.5-16. Concerning the complex links between rationality and envy, see (Elster, 1998, p. 68 et sq.).

sake of one's family rather than oneself. The action of the family affections 'has always been fully reckoned with by economists, especially in relation to the distribution of the family income between its various members, the expenses of preparing children for their future career, and the accumulation of wealth to be enjoyed after the death of him by whom it has been earned' (Marshall, 1890(1895), *Principles of Economics*, Bk, I, ch. V, §7, 3rd edn, London, Macmillan). The limits within which self-interested action must be postulated may be even narrower than those indicated in the last paragraph. What is postulated is that action should be regular and therefore calculable, rather than that it should be self-interested (*Principles of Economics*, Bk, I, ch. V). 'The range of economic measurement may gradually extend to much philanthropic action.'" (1987, p. 896). We can also quote what G. Becker in his Nobel conference explains: "Unlike Marxian analysis, the economic approach I refer to does not assume that individuals are motivated solely by selfishness or material gain. It is a method of analysis, not an assumption about particular motivations. Along with others, I have tried to pry economists away from narrow assumptions about self-interested. Behavior is driven by a much richer set of values and preferences." (1993, p. 385). And nothing forbids us *a priori* to think that the economic individual could be "envious" (in the strong sense), "ill willed" or "full of hatred" or motivated by "anger", if he can be altruistic or benevolent. And the work of T. Veblen for example is here to recall us the importance of "envy" in consumption behaviours.

We can then propose a third explanation. Taking account of envy and of other harmful passions, is it not opening again the door of our discipline to psychology? Duesenberry (1952), when he proposes to introduce "negative interdependencies" in the analysis of consumption, explains very clearly why some economists could be reticent to such a modification of our frontiers. Before presenting his new consumption choice theory, he writes: "The preference system analysis of consumer behavior is a somewhat remarkable tour de force. It seems to say something about consumer behavior *without saying anything about the motivations of the consumers* in question. In its present form it is a more or less deliberate attempt to sidestep the task of making any psychological assumptions. It has the advantage that it allows one to avoid getting out on a psychological limb which may collapse at any moment." (1952, p. 17, we underline). On the other hand, when we introduce 'interdependencies', economists must cope with the problem our discipline decided to avoid; "In short, we have to face up the problems of psychological bases of consumer choice." (*Ibid.*, p. 18). And he adds, not without humor: "But as soon as one considers that problem one sees

why economists have tried to avoid it.” (*Ibid.*). J. Elster (1998) develops rather similar ideas. He explains that economists, with a few exceptions (especially Frank, R.H., (1988)), eye emotions –such as “anger, hatred, guilt, shame, pride, pridefulness, admiration and liking”, but also “envy, malice, indignation and jealousy” (*Ibid.*, p. 48) – distrustfully. He then writes: “Although economists occasionally use emotions terms such as envy or guilt, the referents of these words usually have little to do with emotions as philosophers and psychologists from Aristotle onwards have understood them. And whereas a handful of economists have in fact appealed to emotions in this more traditional sense, it is always to address specific issues rather than to suggest *a general way in incorporating emotions into the tool kit of economists*” (p. 47, we underline). It should be observed here that the appearance, in current economics, of works trying to introduce a notion of envy more similar to the philosophical one (in particular experimental economic works)³⁶ is concomitant with the current multiplication of exchanges between our discipline and psychology. And most of the economic works dealing with the technical notion of ‘envy’ has been written, before such an evolution of frontiers of our discipline. However this explanation is not sufficient in order to understand why economics could have introduced more easily ‘psychological factors’ corresponding to ‘positive’ interpersonal relations, than to ‘negative’ ones. We must therefore pursue our way.

So, let’s try a new assumption. When we say that an individual is ‘envious’, ‘ill-willed’, ‘full of hatred’ or ‘motivated by anger’, in fact we always set a *normative* statement (as we show it at length for ‘envy’ in our first part.)³⁷ So it is perhaps the reason why economists - who are so anxious about keeping normative statements in the background and sure that they can do it - move those representations of individuals aside. But they forget then that “badness is not only a moral category, characteristic of normative judgment, but also a principle of explanation”, as recalls J.P. Dupuy (2002, p. 13). They forget one rule stated by Spinoza, who claims that we must consider « love, hatred, anger, envy, ambition, pity, and the other perturbations of the mind, not in the light of vices of human nature, but as properties, just as pertinent to it, as are heat, cold, storm, thunder, and the like to the nature of the atmosphere » (*Political Treatise*, I, 4.). But if we adopt such an explanation, how can we understand then

³⁶ See *supra* Introduction, note 2.

³⁷ R. Ogien in his book devoted to ‘hatred’ (1993) sees in this normative judgment a central element in the definition of ‘hatred’. Quoting Spinoza, who writes “hatred can never be good” (Spinoza, *Ethique*, part 4, prop XLV), he writes : “the term ‘hatred’ is not purely descriptive, but intrinsically evaluative and negative ; it cannot exist good hatred and being full of hatred cannot be good, by virtue of the moral properties of ‘hatred’” (R. Ogien, 1993, p. 7 ; our translation). So there is “an analytical, conceptual, *a priori*, link, between hatred and

that the economists had accepted “altruism”, that is a notion quite as much “intrinsically evaluative”?

We can suggest a new explanation. When we ask economists why envious, full of hatred, ill-willed or motivated by anger individuals are nearly absent of their theoretical framework, they answer sometimes that with such individuals there cannot be coordination. Does not Smith said that envy is one of those affections that “drive(s) men from one another, and (...) tend, as it were, to break the bands of human society” (*TMS*, VI, section III, chapter I)? If we assume envious, full of hatred, ill-willed or motivated by anger, don’t we take a tremendous risk? The risk of opening the door to the formidable question of the foundation of social order. A question that Political Economy thought, if not resolved, at least moved aside, with the assumption of “Homo Oeconomicus” and with the indifference this agent has for the others. If we assume envious, full of hatred, ill-will or motivated by anger individuals, we will find again the Hobbes’s question. And in order to solve this last question, would it not be necessary to introduce Politics again in our discipline? What seems here in question is not less than the autonomy of economics – a fundamental question, not an anecdotal one.

CONCLUSION

Whatever may be the reason why economists seem to have such a difficulty to consider ill-will, hatred, anger, or envy (in a strong sense), we understand that this difficulty is probably not anodyne. The reason why economics here sets bounds to the extension of their theoretical framework based on rationality refers probably to more or less implicit assumptions, in the heart of our discipline. Thus, even if our answer to the questions asked here is probably not definitive, we hope nevertheless that the reader is now convinced that these questions are in fact probably important.

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badness” because “hatred is constitutively bad, bad by definition or in other words, (...) the link between hatred and badness is (...) analytical, conceptual, *a priori* (I call it also logical by convenience).” (*Ibid.*, p. 17).

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