

QUESTION 36

Envy

We next have to consider envy (*invidia*). And on this topic there are four questions: (1) What is envy? (2) Is envy a sin? (3) Is envy a mortal sin? (4) Is envy a capital vice, and what are its children?

Article 1

Is envy a type of sadness?

It seems that envy is not a type of sadness (*invidia non sit tristitia*):

Objection 1: The object of sadness is something bad. But the object of envy is something good; for in *Moralia* 5, in speaking of the envious man, Gregory says, “His mind, pining away, is wounded by its own pain and is tormented by the happiness of another.” Therefore, envy is not a type of sadness.

Objection 2: Similarity is a cause of delight rather than of sadness. But similarity is a cause of envy; for in *Rhetoric* 2 the Philosopher says, “Men will envy those who are similar to them in birth or in family connections or in stature or in disposition or in reputation.” Therefore, envy is not a type of sadness.

Objection 3: Sadness is caused by some need (*defectus*). Hence, as was explained above when we were talking about the passions (*ST* 1-2, q. 47, a. 3), those who are in great need are prone to sadness. But as is clear from the Philosopher in *Rhetoric* 2, the envious are those to whom little is lacking and who love honor and who are reputed to be wise. Therefore, envy is not a type of sadness.

Objection 4: Sadness is opposed to delight, and opposites cannot have the same cause. Therefore, since, as was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 32, a. 3), the memory of goods that have been possessed is a cause of delight, it will not be a cause of sadness. However, the memory of goods that have been possessed is a cause of envy; for in *Rhetoric* 2 the Philosopher says that a man envies those who possess or have possessed what was fitting for himself or what he himself possessed at one time. Therefore, envy is not a type of sadness.

But contrary to this: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 2 Damascene posits three species of sadness and claims that envy is sadness over the goods of others.

I respond: The object of sadness is what is bad for oneself (*malum proprium*). But it is possible for what is good for someone else (*alienum bonum*) to be apprehended as bad for oneself. And this is how one can be saddened by another’s good.

However, there are two ways in which this happens:

(a) in one way, when someone is saddened by another’s good insofar as the danger of some harm threatens him because of that good, as when a man is saddened by the elevation of his enemy, fearing that his enemy will do him harm. As the Philosopher points out in *Rhetoric* 2, this sort of sadness is not envy, but is instead an effect of fear;

(b) in a second way, the other’s good is thought of as bad for oneself insofar as it diminishes one’s own glory or excellence. And this is the way in which envy is saddened by another’s good. And so, as the Philosopher points out in *Rhetoric* 2, men are envious especially of those goods in which there is glory and in which men love to be honored and reputed (*amant honorari et in opinione esse*).

Reply to objection 1: Nothing prevents what is good for one individual from being apprehended as bad for another individual. It is in this way, as has been explained, that one can be saddened by something good.

Reply to objection 2: Since envy has to do with another’s glory insofar as it diminishes the glory that the envious man desires, it follows that envy is had only with respect to those whom the man wants to equal or surpass in glory. But this does not occur with respect to those who are far removed from him; for no one except a madman desires to equal or surpass in glory those who are far greater than he is. For

instance, an ordinary man does not envy a king; nor, for that matter, does a king envy an ordinary man, whom he far surpasses. And so a man does not envy those who are far removed from himself either in place or in time or in status, but instead he envies those who are close to him and whom he is trying to equal or surpass. For when such man surpass us in glory, this happens to our disadvantage, and sadness is thereby caused.

On the other hand, similarity causes delight insofar as it is agreeable to the will.

Reply to objection 3: No one strives for what he is highly deficient in. And so when someone exceeds him in some such thing, he does not envy him. But if he is just a little deficient, it seems that he is able to attain his goal, and so he strives for it. Hence, if his attempt is frustrated because of someone else's abundant glory, he is saddened. And so it is that those who love honor are more envious. Similarly, small-minded individuals are also envious, because they regard all things as great, and whenever any good accrues to someone else, they think that they themselves have been surpassed in greatness. Hence, Job 5:2 says, "Envy kills the little one." And in *Moralia* 5 Gregory says, "We can envy only those whom we deem better than us in some respect."

Reply to objection 4: The memory of past goods, insofar as they were actually possessed, causes delight, but insofar as they have been lost, causes sadness. And insofar as they are possessed by others, they cause envy, since this especially seems to detract from one's own glory. And so in *Rhetoric* 2 the Philosopher says, "The old envy the young, and those who have spent a lot to get something envy those who have obtained that same thing with little expense. For they sorrow over the loss of their own goods and over the fact that others have obtained the goods."

Article 2

Is envy a sin?

It seems that envy is not a sin:

Objection 1: In *Ad Laetam de Instructione Filiae* Jerome says, "Let her have friends with whom she might learn, whom she might envy, and who are such that she is stung when they are praised." But no one should be encouraged to sin. Therefore, envy is not a sin.

Objection 2: As Damascene says, envy is "sadness over the goods of others." But this sometimes happens in a praiseworthy way; for Proverbs 29:2 says, "When the wicked take power, the people groan." Therefore, envy is not always a sin.

Objection 3: Envy names a certain sort of zeal or jealousy (*zelum*). But some sorts of zeal are good—this according to Psalm 68:10 ("Zeal for your house consumed me"). Therefore, envy is not always a sin.

Objection 4: Punishment (*poena*) is divided off from sin (*culpa*). But envy is a certain sort of punishment; for in *Moralia* 5 Gregory says, "When the rottenness of the sore [of envy] corrupts the vanquished heart, the exterior signs indicate how gravely the madness stirs up the mind. One's color is affected by pallor, the eyes are weighed down, the mind is inflamed, the limbs freeze up, there is frenzy in the thoughts, the teeth are grating." Therefore, envy is not a sin.

But contrary to this: Galatians 5:26 says, "Let us not become desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another."

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), envy is sadness over the goods of others. But there are four ways in which this sort of sadness can occur:

(a) In one way, when someone is saddened by another's good because he fears some harm from it either to himself or to other goods. As was explained above (a. 1), this sort of sadness is not envy and it can exist without sin. Hence, in *Moralia* 22 Gregory says, "It very often happens that, without our losing

charity, the ruin of our enemy gladdens us, and, again, without any sin of envy, his glorification saddens us; for when he falls, we believe it to be good that certain others should rise up, and when he prospers, we fear that many will suffer unjustly.”

(b) In a second way, we can be saddened by another’s good not because he has the good, but because we lack the good that he has. And as the Philosopher explains in *Rhetoric* 2, this is, properly speaking, zeal or jealousy (*zelum*). If this zeal is had with respect to upright goods, then it is praiseworthy—this according to 1 Corinthians 14:1 (“Be zealous for spiritual goods”). On the other hand, if it has to do with temporal goods, then it can exist either with or without sin.

(c) In a third way, one is saddened by another’s good insofar as the one to whom the good accrues is undeserving of it. This sort of sadness cannot arise from the upright goods by which one becomes just. Rather, as the Philosopher points out in *Rhetoric* 2, it arises from riches and such goods that can come to both the deserving and the undeserving. And according to the Philosopher, this sort of sadness is called *nemesis* and belongs to good morals. However, he makes this claim because he is considering temporal goods in their own right, insofar as they can seem like great goods to those who do not take eternal goods into account. By contrast, according to the teaching of the Faith, temporal goods that accrue to the undeserving by God’s just ordination are disposed either toward their correction or toward their damnation, and goods of this sort are, as it were, nothing in comparison the future goods that are set aside for those who are good. And that is why sadness of this sort is forbidden in Sacred Scripture—this according to Psalm 36:1 (“Do not emulate evildoers or be jealous of the wicked”); and, again, according to Psalm 72:2-3 (“My steps had almost slipped, for I was jealous of the wicked when I saw the prosperity of sinners”).

(d) In a fourth way, someone is saddened by another’s goods insofar as the other exceeds him in those goods. And this is envy, properly speaking. And this is always wrong, as the Philosopher likewise explains in *Rhetoric* 2, since one is saddened by something that he should take joy in, viz., his neighbor’s good.

Reply to objection 1: ‘Envy’ is here being taken for the zeal or jealousy by which one ought to be motivated to make progress along with his betters.

Reply to objection 2: This argument goes through for the first mode of sadness over the goods of others.

Reply to objection 3: As has been explained, envy differs from jealousy or zeal. Hence, some kinds of jealousy can be good, whereas envy is always bad.

Reply to objection 4: As was explained above when sin was being discussed (*ST* 1-2, q. 87, a. 2) nothing prevents a sin from being a punishment by reason of something else added to it.

Article 3

Is envy a mortal sin?

It seems that envy is not a mortal sin:

Objection 1: Since envy is a type of sadness, it is a passion of the sentient appetite. But as is clear from Augustine in *De Trinitate* 12, there is mortal sin only in reason and not in the sentient appetite. Therefore, envy is not a mortal sin.

Objection 2: Mortal sin cannot exist in infants. But envy can exist in them; for in *Confessiones* 1 Augustine says, “I myself have seen and experienced a jealous child; he did not yet speak, but he was livid with anger when he saw another infant at the breast.” Therefore, envy is not a mortal sin.

Objection 3: Every mortal sin is contrary to some virtue. But envy is not contrary to any virtue; instead, as is clear from the Philosopher in *Rhetoric* 2, it is contrary to *nemesis*, which is a certain

passion. Therefore, envy is not a mortal sin.

But contrary to this: Job 5:2 says, “Envy kills the little one.” But nothing kills spiritually except a mortal sin. Therefore, envy is a mortal sin.

I respond: Envy is a mortal sin by its genus. For the genus of a sin is taken from its object. But by reason of its object, envy is contrary to charity, through which the soul’s spiritual life exists—this according to 1 John 3:14 (“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers”). For the object of both charity and envy is the good of our neighbor, but in accord with contrary movements, since, as is clear from what was said above (aa. 1-2), charity rejoices in our neighbor’s good, whereas envy is saddened by that same good. Hence, it is clear that envy is a mortal sin by its genus.

But as was explained above (q. 35, a. 3), in every genus of mortal sin one finds certain incomplete movements which exist in the sentient appetite and which are venial sins; for instance, in the genus *adultery* there is a first movement of disordered desire, and in the genus *homicide* there is a first movement of anger. So, too, in the genus *envy* one finds—sometimes even in perfected men—certain first movements that are venial sins.

Reply to objection 1: The movement of envy insofar as it is a passion of the sentient appetite is something incomplete in the genus of human acts, whose principle is reason. Hence, this sort of envy is not a mortal sin. And a similar line of reasoning holds for the envy that belongs to infants, in whom there is no use of reason.

Reply to objection 2: From this the reply to the second objection is clear.

Reply to objection 3: According to the Philosopher in *Rhetoric 2*, envy is opposed both to *nemesis* and to mercy, but in different ways.

Envy is *directly* opposed to mercy because of the contrariety of their principal objects, since the envious man is saddened by his neighbor’s good, whereas the merciful man is saddened by what is bad for his neighbor. Hence, as the Philosopher says in the same place, envious individuals are not merciful and merciful individuals are not envious.

By contrast, envy is opposed to *nemesis* by reference to the one whose good the envious man is saddened by; for someone with *nemesis* is saddened by the good of those who act unworthily—this according to Psalm 72:3 (“I was jealous of the wicked when I saw the prosperity of sinners”)—whereas an envious individual is saddened by the good of those who are deserving of that good.

Hence, it is clear that the first contrariety is more direct than the second. But mercy is a virtue and the proper effect of charity. Hence, envy is opposed to mercy and to charity.

Article 4

Is envy a capital vice?

It seems that envy is not a capital vice:

Objection 1: Capital vices are distinct from the children of capital sins. But envy is a child of vainglory; for in *Rhetoric 2* the Philosopher says that it is “lovers of honor and glory who are more envious.” Therefore, envy is not a capital sin.

Objection 2: The capital vices seem to be less serious sins than the other vices that arise from them; for in *Moralia 31* Gregory says, “The first vices enter into a deceived mind under some pretext, whereas those that come later, as they draw the mind to every type of insanity, confound the mind with their wild outcry.” But envy seems to be the most serious sin of all; for in *Moralia 5* Gregory says, “Even though the venom of our ancient enemy is infused into the human heart by every vice that is perpetrated, still, in the case of this particular type of wickedness the serpent stirs all his innards and

spews forth the venom of engraving malice.” Therefore, envy is not a capital vice.

Objection 3: It seems that Gregory incorrectly designates the children of envy in *Moralia* 31, when he says, “From envy there arise hatred (*odium*), gossip (*susurratio*), detraction (*detractio*), exultation over our neighbor’s misfortune (*exultatio in adversis proximii*), and sadness over our neighbor’s good fortune (*afflictio in prosperis*).” For as is clear from what has been said previously, exultation over our neighbor’s misfortunes and sadness over his good fortune seem to be the same thing as envy. Therefore, they should not be posited as children of envy.

But contrary to this is the authority of Gregory, *Moralia* 31, where he posits envy as a capital vice and assigns the children just mentioned to it.

I respond: Just as acedia is sadness over the divine spiritual good, so envy is sadness over our neighbor’s good. It was explained above (q. 35, a. 4) that acedia is a capital vice by reason of the fact that a man is impelled by acedia to do other things either in order to avoid the sadness or in order to make up for the sadness. Hence, for the same reason envy is posited as a capital vice.

Reply to objection 1: As Gregory says in *Moralia* 31, “The capital vices are conjoined by such a close connection that the one emerges from the other. For instance, the first offshoot of pride is vainglory, which, as it corrupts the oppressed mind, gives rise to envy; for as long as it craves the power of an empty name, it languishes with the fear that someone else will be able to acquire that power.” Therefore, it is not contrary to the character of a capital vice that it itself should arise from another capital vice; rather, what is contrary to its character is not having any standard way of producing from itself many kinds of sins.

Still, perhaps it is because envy clearly arises from vainglory that it is not listed as a capital vice by either Isidore in *De Summo Bono* or by Cassian in *De Institutis Coenobiorum*.

Reply to objection 2: From this passage it follows not that envy is the greatest of sins, but that when the devil suggests envy, he induces men to what he himself chiefly has in his own heart. For as it says in a passage cited later on in the same place by Gregory, “death came into the world because of the devil’s envy” (Wisdom 2:24).

Nonetheless, there is a certain sort of envy which is indeed counted among the most serious of sins, viz., envy of a brother’s grace, insofar as one is saddened not just by his neighbor’s good, but by the very increase of God’s grace. Hence, this sort of envy is posited as a sin against the Holy Spirit, since through this sort of envy a man in some sense envies the Holy Spirit, who is glorified in His works.

Reply to objection 3: The number of envy’s children can indeed be understood in the way laid out in the objection. For in the impulse of envy (*in conatu invidiae*) there is something at the beginning, something in the middle, and something at the end.

The beginning occurs when one belittles the glory of another, either (a) in secret, in which case there is *gossip*, or (b) in the open, in which case there is *detractio*.

The middle is that one who seeks to diminish the glory of the other either (a) is able to do it, in which case there is *exultation over our neighbor's misfortune*, or (b) is unable to do it, in which case there is *sadness over our neighbor's good fortune*.

The end consists in *hatred* itself, since, as was explained above (q. 34, a. 6), just as a good that gives delight is a cause of love, so sadness is a cause of hatred.

Now sadness over our neighbor’s good fortune can in one sense be envy itself, viz., when one is saddened by another’s good fortune insofar as that good fortune includes a sort of glory. But in another sense it is a child of envy, insofar as the neighbor’s good fortune happens contrary to the efforts of an envious individual who is trying to prevent that good fortune.

On the other hand, exultation over our neighbor’s misfortune is not directly the same thing as envy, but instead it follows from envy; for from sadness over our neighbor’s good there follows exultation over what is bad for that same individual.