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RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE TYPES OF ENVY

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Abstract. This article explores religious perspectives on envy, highlighting its spiritual interpretations across different belief systems. Furthermore, it presents the views of prominent philosophers regarding the nature and psychological impact of envy. The analysis emphasizes how envy manifests in emotional reactions, interpersonal dynamics, and social structures.
Keywords: Envy, desire, emotional reactions, hostility, motivation, socialization, family, narcissism.

Introduction. The concepts of desire and envy have been referenced since ancient times in both written and oral traditions. The essence of envy, from a religious and philosophical perspective, was first elaborated in the *Avesta*, the sacred Zoroastrian texts. Additionally, philosophical interpretations of envy can be found in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhist teachings. This theme also attracted the attention of ancient Greek philosophers such as Xenophon, Democritus, Athenian thinkers, Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus.

During the Middle Ages, the subject of envy was revisited by influential Christian theologians including Saint Basil the Great (*V. Velikiy*), John the Theologian (*G. Bogoslov*), and Augustine of Hippo (*A. Augustinus*). In the modern era, prominent European philosophers have also analyzed the emotion of envy in their works. According to E. Stridonian (Jerome of Stridon), envy is not only rooted in social or material inequality but may also stem from genetic differences, as some individuals are born with exceptional abilities [5].

The ancient Greeks believed that Zelos—the god of envy and rivalry—was the sister of Nike, the goddess of victory. These two divine figures were inseparable; wherever victory appeared, envy inevitably followed. In this belief system, the two could not exist without one another.

In several chapters of *Shahnameh* by Abulqosim Ferdowsi, particularly in the epic of Gushtasp, there are extensive reflections on the pre-Islamic religion of the peoples of Central Asia and Iran—Zoroastrianism—and its founder, Zoroaster (Zarathustra). In these passages, Zoroaster is portrayed as the high priest of high priests, a sage among sages, and a prophet. His foundational text, the encyclopedic *Avesta*, is frequently cited.

Indeed, Zoroaster is widely regarded as the first philosopher, orator, poet, and sage of the East, a revered spiritual leader of his people. *Avesta* is not only the sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism but also a monumental and ancient source of comprehensive knowledge in science, philosophy, and all spheres of life. The text contains detailed information on the history of the peoples of Central Asia and Iran from the first millennium BCE to the sixth century CE, particularly those living along the banks of the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers.

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Moreover, the *Avesta* provides valuable historical and cultural insights into the societies of Central Asia and Iran from the first millennium BCE to the sixth century CE. It contains records of the social life of peoples living along the banks of the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers, documenting their professions, trade relations, and interactions with neighboring communities. Farmers and herders are portrayed as the primary creators of material wealth, reflecting their central role in the socio-economic fabric of ancient society.

"A pure thought is one that reflects the spirit of divine law: kindness toward one's close ones, readiness to help those in need or danger, a willingness to actively fight against evil for the happiness and well-being of others, and a desire to live in harmony with everyone—in friendship and unity with like-minded individuals. A person must not harbor envy in their thoughts; one with good intentions does not fall into anger or ignorance, because such states corrupt one's purity of intent, lead to forgetfulness of duty and justice, and result in inappropriate actions" [9].

These ideas are expressed in the *Avesta*, where the destructive consequences of envy are discussed. Modern psychologists also affirm these insights. Indeed, a person's psychological well-being is closely connected to the purity of their thoughts and intentions. A person with sincere intentions tends to act positively. Conversely, when an individual is overwhelmed by envy, the negative emotions that follow can lead to harmful consequences—not only for themselves but also for their surrounding environment.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE), in his counsel to Alexander the Great, wrote the following reflections: "If someone possesses what you desire, do not envy them, and do not wish upon others what you yourself dislike. Restrain your soul from fleeting desires, do not indulge your lusts, and rid your heart of envy. Let your passions and ambitions have boundaries. For if you grant your desires unrestricted freedom, your heart will harden, you will grow cruel, and it will prevent you from contemplating the afterlife" [9].

In this reflection, Aristotle highlights *envy and desire* as detrimental tendencies. He repeatedly emphasized that limitless desires and needs hinder the individual's socialization within society. He stated:

"Do not allow your soul to become accustomed to chasing petty desires, for your heart will grow greedy. The same applies even if your ambitions are lofty. Never become indifferent after making a small mistake, because every mistake carries harm. If you allow yourself to repeatedly make small errors, you will eventually be pushed toward greater ones" [9].

Here again, Aristotle stresses the dangerous nature of greed, regardless of its scale—underscoring that no act of avarice is insignificant.

This notion is further affirmed in the *Holy Qur'an*, where envy and discord are addressed in several verses:

"Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam. Those who were given the Scripture did not differ except after knowledge had come to them—out of mutual envy and rivalry. And whoever disbelieves in the signs of Allah, then indeed, Allah is swift in taking account." (*Surah Al-Imran, 3:19*) [8].

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The verses of the Qur'an emphasize that envy and covetous behavior among believers are considered morally and spiritually detrimental in Islam. In *Surah An-Nisa (4:32)*, the following guidance is given:

"Do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others. For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned. And ask Allah of His bounty. Indeed, Allah is ever, of all things, Knowing." [8]

This verse highlights the unique roles and capacities of both men and women in their respective fields of endeavor. It discourages envy based on occupational or social roles, advocating instead for contentment and supplication for divine favor. Islam, through such guidance, encourages believers to seek self-growth rather than comparison or rivalry.

Further, *Surah Al-Hashr (59:9)* discusses how righteous believers in Medina welcomed emigrants (Muhajirun) from Mecca with generosity and sincerity:

"And those who, before them, had homes (in Medina) and had adopted the faith, love those who emigrate to them and find not any desire in their hearts for what the emigrants were given but give them preference over themselves, even though they are in need. And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul—it is those who will be the successful." [8]

This verse speaks to the spiritual strength required to suppress jealousy and practice altruism. It illustrates the high moral standard expected from believers—to support others selflessly without harboring envy, even in times of personal hardship.

Additionally, in *Surah Al-Falaq (113:5)*, believers are taught to seek refuge in God from various evils, especially the destructive force of envy:

"And from the evil of the envier when he envies." [8]

This final verse shows the potentially harmful consequences of envy—not only for the envier but also for the environment and individuals around them. It reflects the Islamic emphasis on inner purification and psychological well-being.

In the aforementioned verses of the Qur'an, envy (*hasad*) is clearly portrayed as a negative trait. It is emphasized that when a believer harbors envy in their heart, it inevitably manifests in harmful behaviors and negative emotional states. Overall, the Qur'an—the holy book of Islam—presents envy among believers as a spiritual flaw. However, it also acknowledges the existence of positive competition (*musabaqah*) among the faithful, which can serve as a motivating force for self-improvement and communal benefit.

In addition to the Qur'an, valuable insights on envy and aspiration (*havas*) can also be found in *hadith* literature, which is considered the second most important source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'an. One such hadith highlights two categories of people toward whom envy—or more accurately, admiration and aspiration—is considered permissible and even encouraged:

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"There is no envy except in two cases: A person whom Allah has given wealth and he spends it righteously; and a person whom Allah has given wisdom (i.e., knowledge of the Qur'an) and he acts according to it and teaches it to others." [1]

This hadith clarifies that in Islam, it is not only acceptable but commendable to aspire to emulate individuals who are spiritually and morally upright—those who use their wealth for good and those with deep religious knowledge. Unlike destructive envy, this kind of *positive aspiration* is seen as a source of motivation that aligns with ethical and spiritual growth.

From a psychological standpoint, such differentiation mirrors the concepts of *malicious envy* and *benign envy* described in modern psychology. While the former leads to resentment and hostility, the latter can serve as a constructive force that inspires individuals to improve themselves.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized the destructive power of envy in several hadiths, stating: *"Envy consumes the good deeds of the envious just as fire consumes firewood,"* and *"Just as bitter aloe spoils honey, envy spoils faith."* [10].

These hadiths highlight that envy not only results in sin but also leads to the erasure of previously accumulated good deeds. From an Islamic spiritual perspective, envy corrupts not just actions but also the very essence of one's faith (*iman*).

From the mid-18th century onward, theoretical interpretations of envy began to emerge in Western philosophy. Enlightenment thinkers and modern philosophers sought to understand envy not merely as a moral failing, but as a phenomenon inherent to human nature.

René Descartes, for instance, distinguished between *just* and *unjust envy*. Just envy, in his view, is morally excusable—it arises when one witnesses another obtaining something they may not rightfully deserve. Even though such envy is silent and passive, it reflects a moral discomfort with perceived injustice [4].

Max Scheler, on the other hand, described what he called *weak envy*—a form of envy he regarded as the most insidious. This type of envy does not manifest in outward aggression but is covert and psychologically damaging. It may be directed toward the life or personal circumstances of others, and is often driven by deep-seated feelings of inferiority and helplessness [11].

These philosophical distinctions align with modern psychological frameworks that classify envy into categories such as *malicious* and *benign*, or *active* and *passive*. What is consistent across traditions—religious or philosophical—is the view of envy as a corrosive emotion that can deteriorate personal well-being, social relationships, and moral integrity.

Friedrich Nietzsche introduced the concept of *existential envy*, which he divided into two temporal forms:

-Short-term envy, which arises as an emotional reaction to a specific situation. This type of envy is often transient and linked to immediate emotional experiences. For instance, in the context of a competitive game, an individual might feel a brief surge of negative emotions toward the winner due to their own loss.

-Long-term envy, which manifests as a persistent emotional state resembling resentment. An example would be a single woman consistently harboring envy toward a married woman. This

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type of envy becomes embedded in one's worldview and can persist over time as chronic dissatisfaction.

Francis Bacon categorized envy into two distinct types: **public envy** and **private (insincere) envy**. Public envy is openly expressed and grows within a collective consciousness. It is not masked and is often normalized within societal discourse. In contrast, private envy is internalized and concealed from others. Individuals experiencing this form of envy suppress it, allowing it to exist silently within their inner world [2].

Immanuel Kant was among the first to introduce the concept of *black envy* (*"der schwarze Neid"*), which he also classified into **personal** and **collective** forms. Personal black envy is secretive and typically directed toward matters considered shameful or socially unacceptable, and thus is rarely spoken about. Collective black envy, on the other hand, is tied to societal stereotypes and is often projected toward individuals who defy conventional norms—for instance, envy toward someone whose wealth contradicts cultural beliefs such as "money changes character."

In his work *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant interpreted envy as a fundamental human flaw. He described the inability to accept the fortune of others with contentment as a veiled form of hatred. Furthermore, Kant differentiated between two forms of envy:

-Black envy, which involves begrudging others their success or blessings without wishing them well—a destructive, zero-sum mindset.

-White envy, which manifests as admiration or aspiration. Rather than desiring harm for others, the individual is motivated to improve themselves by engaging in healthy competition inspired by another's success [6].

These philosophical views provide a nuanced understanding of envy not merely as a moral or religious fault, but as a complex, multifaceted emotion shaped by social, existential, and psychological dynamics.

In addition, Francis Bacon identified further classifications of envy:

-Mild envy (*"muloyim hasad"*), which refers to feelings of envy that do not involve wishing harm upon others. It is a passive form, more akin to admiration than hostility.

-Hostile envy, which manifests in two forms: "You do not deserve what you have achieved," or "I want to have what you have attained." Both forms reflect deeper emotional conflict rooted in perceived injustice or inferiority.

-Depressive envy, where the individual becomes emotionally distressed and falls into a state of despair due to their perceived incompleteness or inadequacy compared to others.

Thomas Hobbes argued that humans are naturally equal in their capabilities, and thus share an equal hope of attaining their goals. According to Hobbes, when multiple individuals pursue the same goal, their inherent animalistic instincts emerge. This competition drives them either to eliminate each other or to strive to surpass one another in their pursuits [3].

Other scholars have echoed similar views. Due to the negative connotation of envy in religious and societal frameworks, people often suppress or mask this emotion in social interactions. According to G. Schek, individuals express destructive envy in a socially acceptable manner, disguising it in what he refers to as the *"official version"* of communication.

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Harboring envy—particularly *black envy*—can be detrimental to one's self-concept (*"Ich-Selbst"* or *"I"*). German psychologist Max Scheler was among the first to explore this phenomenon in depth. He noted that:

"If one feels slight disappointment for not achieving something that another has, this is not yet envy—it may even serve as motivation for future efforts. However, when the inability to succeed leads to deep frustration, hopelessness, and self-inflicted suffering, true envy begins to form" [11].

These conceptualizations suggest that envy is not simply an emotional response but a dynamic interplay between societal expectations, self-perception, and moral values.

Arthur Schopenhauer defined envy as an innate human quality that is simultaneously a flaw and a profound source of misery. He stated:

"Envy is a characteristic inherent to human beings; it is a defect and, at the same time, a deep misfortune. The moment a person experiences envy, they become acutely aware of their own unhappiness" [13].

François de La Rochefoucauld drew a clear distinction between **jealousy** and **envy**. He suggested that jealousy stems from the fear of losing something we cherish, often in a conscious and protective manner. Envy, in contrast, arises unconsciously and resembles jealousy that lacks direct awareness—it is a silent inner struggle with another's success [7].

Conclusion. The psychological phenomena of envy (***hasad***) and admiration (***havas***) have existed since the earliest days of human civilization. References to these emotions can be found in ancient texts, myths, and folk narratives. These sources allow us to draw several essential conclusions:The hereditary nature of envy and admiration is supported by historical and philosophical perspectives. Major world religions strongly condemn envy. In Christianity, it is listed among the seven deadly sins that lead to moral decline. In Islam, the Qur'an and Hadith contain numerous verses and teachings that address the dangers of envy. One hadith explicitly identifies the envious person as among those who will not enter Paradise.

Great Eastern thinkers, particularly those from the Islamic Golden Age and classical Persian literature, offered deep theoretical insights into these emotions. Their scholarly works have become an invaluable spiritual and intellectual legacy, which remains relevant in the contemporary scientific discourse.

These philosophical insights serve as the methodological foundation of this study. They emphasize that envy and admiration are not merely individual emotional experiences but are also shaped by the social context, interpersonal relationships, and comparative social dynamics. In this way, admiration can foster self-improvement, while envy—especially in its destructive forms—can lead to psychological harm and social alienation.

Western philosophers, on the other hand, often frame envy as a fundamental mode of human existence and cognition, viewing it as a social-psychological phenomenon that may lead to negative personal transformation if left unacknowledged or unchecked.

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