CAPACITY GAP IN ELITISM, GROUP, AND POWER FRAMEWORKS: THE PHENOMENON OF ENVY AS FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Sampson I. Ekwonna, Ph. D
Department Of Political Science, Imo State University, Owerri

Abstract
This paper makes an unorthodox examination of the theories of elitism, group, and power to understand their incapacity to explain why (absolute) power may never corrupt absolutely in the absoluteness of time and space in a society. The answer is in the phenomenon of envy, which the three frameworks, along with the rest of the social sciences, have ignored; and, the ingredients of which phenomenon are strongly implicated in the logic and operation of those theories as envy is the common link among them.

Keywords: Envy, Elitism, Group, Power, Social control, Absolute power.

OPENING PROPOSITION

The human society is a society of groups, classes and power. These phenomena constitute the dynamics of the society; and the individual locates himself through these in the dimensions of time and space. This (location) gives meaning and direction to life in the continuum of history. The meaning and direction of life is expressed and identified in emotions and utility that give value to some things, and no value to the others, in the universality or particularity of time, space and need. Man’s behaviour is explained as he seeks power in his individuality, group and class; for itself and what it can do for him, the group and the class or society.

Why might power – even absolute power – not corrupt itself absolutely, or the apex power player, or the entire power class (elite), or any group thereof, to the absolute detriment of the entire society? Where does the society find the mechanism of deflection or short circuit to the absoluteness of corruption of power in time and space? The answer to the foregoing calls into service the resources of the trio framework of elitism, group and power.

The choice of these frameworks is necessitated by the logical convergence of their operation. Besides, it is in their convergence that they make sense both collectively and individually (Varma 1985:144), and which convergence we see in a fourth other namely social phenomenon of envy. An overview of the theories will enable us understand this convergence, and highlight the handiness and theoretical potentials of the concept of envy.
The main objective of this paper is to expose the capacity gap in the frameworks of contemporary social sciences as to be demonstrated in the elitism, group and power theories as tools to the understanding of human behaviour in politics; and to seek to close that gap by bringing to the table the ever present but not acknowledged phenomenon of the emotion of envy. To that effect, our task is cut out as: to reiterate the gaps or shortcomings in the theories of elitism, group and power as tools for resolving the issues raised; introduce the phenomenon of envy into our discussion; explain the likely cause of inattention of the social sciences to the phenomenon (of envy); show the interaction/integration of envy with elitism, group and power; and to highlight the social significance of the phenomenon of envy in the operations of the frameworks in the resolution of our original question.

THE ELITE, GROUP, POWER PARADIGM

An overview of the theories will enable us understand this convergence, and highlight the handiness and theoretical potentials of the concept of envy.

**Elitism:** The philosophical foundation of elitism is that men are inherently unequally endowed with capacities and thus only a few possess the ability and thus right to rule over the others. The main plank of elitist theory are: (1) Every society - primitive or modern—consists of two broad categories: (a) the vast masses of people possessed of the mass mind of indolence, apathy and political neutrality, who are to be ruled and lead; and (b) the ruling class who are a minority possessed of the capability and, therefore, favoured and have the right to rule and lead the vast masses. (2) The ruling class is, itself, broadly categorized into two: (a) the ruling elite, currently holding or controlling the levers of power over the whole society; and (b) the non-ruling or alternate elite, waiting for and seeking to overthrow the ruling elite to take over the reins of power (Johari, 1983:533-47, Varma, 1985:179). Politics - precisely, democratic politics — is therefore reduced to merely a participation of the masses through the peripheral activities of compliance, voting and cheering; and, the struggle between the ruling elite seeking to remain in power and non ruling elite seeking to replace them.

The theory of elite sought to repudiate the liberal conception of democracy, with its popular participation and sovereignty, and the Marxist conception of a class war and prophecy of classless society of equality, as both a misperception and a utopia. However, its almost contemptuous disregard of the gravity of popular support — or the lack of it — and its complete miss of the element of motivation or motive in the ruler-ruled/leader-led relationship, soon eroded the support and enthusiasm that once greeted this theory; and, liberalism began to return to contention by adapting itself to the matter of residence of political power in the society in the pluralist model of power diffusion in a plurality of groups instead of being concentrated in the hands of a class or group.

**Group:** The group theory modified the perception of elitism as not necessarily being a cohesive group but rather consisting of a large number of social groups representing various interests and which are continuously engaged in “a perpetual struggle for power and domination over each other” (Varma 1985:144). By this struggle, various and often otherwise divergent interests are balanced out and harmonized through various methods of articulation and aggregation. The group theorists view group as a process not an institution, so it is dynamic and not static. The central ideas of this theory consist in the following:

1. The society is “a single universe of groups which combine, break, federate, and form coalitions and constellations of power in a flux of restless alterations”, and is kept going by “the push and resistance between groups” (Varma, 1985:163).

2. Activity of the group is more important than its structural composition because an individual can belong to many groups at the same time, as he has many interests to address.
3. Interest determines the emergence of groups, and existing groups can adopt emerging interests in order to retain or increase their relevance in the society.

4. Interest is defined as shared attitude concerning a claim or claims to be made by one group upon other groups in the social system (Varma, 1985:163).

   The group (theory) broadens the choice of elites for the masses by compelling the elites not to ignore but rather compete for the support of the masses to be chosen to be the ruling elite. This way, elites espousing and representing common interests are very likely to find themselves forming one group and would remain one as long as the common interest is sustained and, under this group, they seek the support of the masses which would enable them get into power or sustain their hold on power.

   As different groups of men look for different ways of obtaining support from the masses, different political parties are formed and enter into a competition with each other. This leads to a plurality of elites and a kind of system of checks and balances in the democratic societies... (Varma, 1985:154)

The group theory suffers an identity problem. It is not quite clear whether it is a full-fledged theory or just an approach. Perhaps, some of that stems from its flaw of conceptual unclarity. Much of the key terms in its kitty like group, relationship, interest, etc., lack clear definition and definite application. It has been rejected as being culture bound and an outgrowth of the American political processes (Varma, 1985:173).

   An inherent design flaw of the group theory lies in its reliance on the unseen hand of the competition of the groups to maintain social equilibrium. This negates the role of power and its coercive and regulatory abilities and their necessity in the possibilities of clash of interests between groups who perceive a zero-sum competition and have each enough power to threaten the rest of the society. Even in the sphere of the economy, of the so-called free market variety, where the unseen hand of competition is touted to be able to take care of every eventuality and sustain equilibrium, the reality is that the whip hand of the state is often called in to enforce rules of the game and prevent a competition from turning into war of annihilation and the end of all competitions. This lacunae, therefore, would make a group theory not-quite-finished one, or anarchy masked in logic.

   This theory practically denies reason, intelligence and motive in humans and sets up politics as merely clash of force, pressure and tension, and policy as merely a product thereof. The society of this theory is bereft of capacity for direction and goals, and its politics is merely knee-jerk reactions to pressures and tensions (Ekwonna, 2014:165).

   Power: For the reason that the individuals have different orientations and socializations to values and which manifest in their behaviours as members of the group, the individual, therefore, is the centre of attention of power theory.

   The power theory covers the blind spot of pluralism by insisting on and supplying the element of compulsion and coercion, for an environment of order in which all the groups would be able to thrive and pursue their different or even divergent interests without the (human) society being returned to the state of nature where life was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. “There being no common superior to hold individuals (we may say, group) in check, there is a (will be) a constant war of all against all” (Bhandari, 1997:245).

   Power theory looks at the reality of the elements of coercion and objective in human relationships, whether as an individual or groups, as they impact or reverberate on the society. It takes a social psychological look at the motivation of the political actions of man as inhering in the
inevitable and irrepressible urge in humans to dominate their environments, including other humans. Power can be defined as the ability to make others do what they otherwise would not like to do, while at the same time preventing them from making one do what one would not like to do, all with the aid of threat, or actual use, of sanction for non-compliance or benefits for compliance. Politics is seen as a game of power and therefore is concerned with who has (or applies) how much of power, when, and how.

The nature of power includes the following:

1. Power is not absolute but relative. The degree of power differential between any two men will vary that no one man would be more powerful than all the others at all times. The cavity of power is determined by the circumstances of the environment, time and objective.

2. Power is behavioural, in the sense that power can only be measured by its impact. Power is what power does. Therefore it can come in any forum — its impact is what counts.

3. Like money, power is not pursued for its own sake but what it can be used to achieve.

4. Power is not exactly the same as force. While power is a psychological relationship, which may not often involve the use of force, force is a physical relationship aimed at physical constraints or exertions.

This theory is found faulty on several accounts. The operation of power is dependent on the elements of communication, motive and perception, which concepts are in no way acknowledged in this theory. One seeking to influence another’s behaviour requires his moves to be communicated to the other person, who should understand the motives or ends sought to be achieved or what he is expected to do in compliance and what consequences there are for non-compliance; and, he should be able to perceive himself as merely being sought to be influenced instead of being faced with a normal situation or one of no-win-no-loss. As the currency of politics, power is a perfidious (legal) tender. Its exchange rate and, even, acceptability can be very uncertain. In the same way, as a framework for enquiry, it is often treacherous.

THE PHENOMENON OF ENVY

Envy is a primitive human emotion. David Hume (2003: 240-45) finds the explanation or roots of envy in the relations between objects — relations of resemblance, proximity and communication. Resemblance enables comparison between objects of a kind, comparison within kind. Proximity enables a comparison of location in space — nearness in space or time. They are, literally, standing side-by-side. Communication enables a comparison founded on the interaction or contact between objects.

The existence and identity of the individual, the group, social class and power and its differentials among individuals, groups and social classes are a product of social comparison — of resemblance, proximity and communication. Man compares himself with another man (not with animals or a god), and finds the result to his linking, or not; the man is actually his neighbour or one with whom he is in constant social interaction, or encounter, because he thinks they belong to the same class or so. He does not invest this attention on a total stranger or one he might never meet often or one beneath his status.

Frank John Ninivaggi (n.d:2), defines envy as

> the primitive sensation and conflated feeling of privation, powerlessness, inferiority, and hostile distress coupled with the urge to rob and spoil in the face of advantages and their enjoyment existing elsewhere.

According to Hupka and Bachelor,
The envy situation is described by making an invidious comparison of oneself with a possessor... of a valued object...along with the implicit or explicit desire to establish a state of equivalence between oneself and the possessor without intending to change one's behaviour in the direction of acquiring the valued object or one identical to it (Mathes, 1992:36).

The target might be just one person or even a country, and the object of envy might vary from tangible possessions, such as material goods, a loved one, etc, to intangible possessions, such as prestige, being in a loved relationship, etc.

By its nature envy is a basic human emotion excited by social relations. The target of envy needs not to have really done anything to incur it; and, needs not be aware of it, for envy to take place.

Envy is a product of social comparison excited by social proximity, resemblance and communication. The consciousness of the envy of the others is a natural instinct.

Envy exists, but its operational sway is a product of the history, economy and politics of time and place. A society that has managed to completely eschew envy is a utopian concept.

THE SOCIAL SCIENCES’ INATTENTION TO ENVY

As a concept with potentials for framework of analysis, envy is often ignored, or is not getting its due, for any one or combination of certain factors. First, there is the popular misuse and mistake as a synonym for jealousy; and, the further fact of the very intimate or private nature of the latter emotion, not because the former is an emotion. However, the two concepts are as distinct as any two emotions can be: while jealousy is a purely romantic emotion, dealing with or expressing potential or actual loss of a valued one to a real or imagined rival; envy is an emotion of social comparison, in which one is unhappy that another person possesses something one would like to have for oneself and feels inferior because of not having it (Eugene W. Mathes, 1992:6-14).

Second, there is the problem of potential or attendant cultural value of the concept of envy. It is often a taboo and which is often sought to be discouraged, first hand, instead of being sought to be understood, in social relations (Mathes, 1992:39, Schoeck, 1987). The new found penchant in the social sciences since the scientific revolution is to view every concept of value as value-laden and, thus, unworthy the attention of the scientist. Envy, laden with its cultural value, is a candidate for such non regard. Further, this rejection is also multi-disciplinary. The psychologists think envy has so much culture in it that it belongs in the domain of sociology, while sociologists are convinced it is the concern of psychology, since it is in the mind or psyche.

The third hindrance to a better appreciation of the potentials of envy as an analytical concept to a better understanding of social relations, especially of the power variety, is the dominance and intellectual deification of the concept of society. Under the enduring influence of Rousseau’s General Will – which raises the society above the individual that it signifies what is best and pure for all, even when the individual does not quite understand or see it that way. This way envy would be merely a product of the individual’s transitory Actual Will which is beneath the refinement of the same individual’s Real Will, representing his whole interest and which is in line with the General Will. Therefore, since the General Will is the synthesis of the Real Will of the individuals (D.R. Bhandari, 1997:317-18), it would be inconsistent to impute envy to the society since the real will of its members is purer than that. Having synthesized into a General Will it has purged itself of such base emotion as envy. Schoeck (1987:247-50) holds Emile Durkheim and
Edward A. Ross responsible for spreading this idea of a reality of a social entity with benevolent intent and will – beyond being envious of its offspring, the individual.

ELITISM, GROUP AND POWER: ENVY AS THE LINK

Group theory studies behaviour as social relations and which tends to overlap into various aspects, while elitism insists on social relations and which inexorably overflow into a certain aspect, namely power. Power theory studies the individual in a social relation of a kind, one in which coercion is a factor. On its own, the phenomenon of envy looks at the individual in a social relation of motive and needs. With it, the mythical power player would no longer be a machine or the Leviathan, but a normal being with very elemental emotions — some of them not so ennobling, anyway.

Envy can be seen as the emotional foundation of these three theories and as such a uniting or common basis of intelligible analysis. The fact of natural inequalities it the endowment of virtues enables some to have more and, thus, more ability than the others. Those who have become the elite and those only can (qualify to) compete for power and leadership. This way, the society is divided into groups of: elites and non-elites. However, this distribution is not of a black-and-white clarity, but rather of shades, varying from the most endowed to the least endowed, as none is perfectly endowed or completely un-endowed. Circumstances of the environment and time can enable one possessing limited virtues to, literally, rise above oneself and advance beyond those of his social propinquity, and apparently towards the direction of the elite; or fall and degenerate in the opposite direction, below his peers.

Further. Because of the possibilities of this, interest and envy come into the otherwise idyllic picture. It is in the interest of one to rise above, and not to fall below, ones ranks. One begins to see the interests to be protected and those to be advanced. Those who share interest naturally begin to gravitate in the same proximity, resulting in disparate social groups, all competing to attain their goals, thereby resulting in the auto-equilibrium of the pluralists, Even, those who seem not to advance and those who fall coalesce into groups, too. ‘Success’ which actually is the result of this ‘circumstance of environment’ breeds not only groups but also envy. Those who get left behind or fall behind envy the more fortunate ones.

Within the concept, group and power of elitism inhere the psychological elements of envy and rivalry, otherwise disguised as competition, and the social element of inequality. These elements are so infused in one another that they might give the impressions of tautological description. However, their relationship and identities could be ascertained in the following explanations:

1. Equality and inequality: Inequality is perhaps the most incontrovertible fact of human existence (Gupta, 1998:312) - social, political, economic, psychological. This is a consequence of both “nature and nurture” - birth and environment and opportunity (Appadorai, 1978:68). Out of this inequality of birth and circumstances springs social inequality, as some people have, or develop, great capabilities to possess and acquire the most of the greater virtues (and values) to the disadvantage of the others. In the course of social interaction, and out of convenience, those who did not possessed these virtues recognized some parity - similarity and equality - among themselves and disparity with those who did not possess those virtues and values (Appadorai,1978:86-87). Out of this grew class consciousness — not necessarily in the Marxian conception of antagonism, but of dependence and yet separateness Therefore, within elitism, group or power inhere the contradictory or antithetical concepts of equality and inequality but in some sort of symbiotic existence.

2. Envy and rivalry (Competition): Envy consists in idealizing the embodiment of certain virtues or values in another, either as an object of emulation and love, or rejection and hate. In the former, it induces one to see ways to replicate such virtues in oneself (through positive achievement) while in
the latter it induces one to seek to eliminate such from oneself either by negative achievement of avoidance or the removal of such virtues (or vices) and those who embody them. Virtue (or value), here means esteem, things possessed, not for the sake of their intrinsic worth but for the sake of what emotions they evoke in the society and which emotions are vicariously possessed in the possession of such things. If everybody is seeking to replicate or acquire a given virtue or value; and, if the same is not easily achievable, it implies that some people might succeed while the others would fail. Inherent in the desire to acquire the given virtue are the emotions of worth and worthlessness, admiration and contempt; and, whichever side of this divide on which one finds oneself and seeks to remain or escape is the stuff out of which competition and achievement are made.

To achieve or succeed calls for the exertion of one's best of abilities - and opportunities. And, the stiffer the competition, the more exertion of abilities required, and the higher the value to be attained. Those who succeed (in acquiring that value) would be differentiated from the others, for prestige or abhorrence, as determined by the emotion (element) of envy in the observer. For the 'prestige' and admiration, those who possess none or less (of those virtues) would be inspired to acquire them while those who already have them would seek to maintain their position (of disparity) by continuing to possess or have access to them or by having more and more, than others.

For envy, those who have none or less of the values would seek to address the situation with denunciation and probably attempts to punish those who have more, or try to alter the foundations and system of values in order to neutralize this.

Among the elites there is constant power struggle that creates the two sub-classes of ruling elite and non-ruling (alternate) elite and within the ruling elite class there is yet a struggle directing to the top. It is expected that envy plays a decisive role in this struggle.

By its nature, power has never created equality - there is always some form or sense of disparity in power – its distribution, exercise, and effect. The inequality of power demonstrated in the acquirement of positions and the demonstrative effects of displays of the present benefits thereof, definitely induces envy in humans – who happen to be friends or allies or colleagues – who would constantly endure the pains of inferior comparison. According to David Hume (2003:240),

So little are men govern'd by reason in their sentiments and opinions, that they always judge more by comparison than from their intrinsic worth and value.

In the presence of sameness of class or social propinquity – there exists below the surface, the emotion of envy. The only member of the group who is beyond this emotion is the top leader. According to Francis Bacon,

envy is ever joined with the comparing of a man's self; and where there is no comparison, no envy; and therefore kings are not envied but by kings (Schoeck, 1987:199).

The top man is the target of the envy of the other members of the group: but the target of his own envy is the top man in the rival groups. A catastrophe hitting the leader of a group would favour the envy of the other members of his group, who would see both the chance of eliminating their comparison and by the opportunity for them to come up; and, the leader of the rival group, who sees the same phenomenon of comparison vanish. But the members of the rival group are not affected in their envy.

Following the above: envy makes it up the comparison ladder of power in the group, to the very top; and, from where it now makes a leap across, to the other neighbouring groups with which the other enjoys some sorts of proximity of power, sameness of kind, and interaction for power.
Within the group envy has a stability role in a curious way. The mindfulness of the man on top of the envy of those immediately below him necessitates care and tact in his conduct. Envy is the emotion the physical expression of which is competition for power. Take away envy, and power struggle would be without its soul and energy. The awareness of this is what keeps the despot within limits sanity and of even handedness as he takes steps to deal with the envy of his henchmen or, beyond sanity to deal with his envious henchmen by trying to appease the one or stamp out the others.

The civil government is in fact a mechanism that restrains envy as the caveman by the fear of punishment; in the absence of which the envious man would invade to destroy the property of his neighbour; and everyman would spend sleepless nights worrying about the envy of neighbours. The acquisition of wealth – in fact the enjoyment of any fruits of legitimate success – necessitates the establishment of civil government in order to keep envy from destroying or disrupting it (Adam Smith, 2003:902).

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ENVY: ENVY IN SOCIAL CONTROL

Envy is not all malevolent as portrayed in popular perception; it has both negative and positive roles in the society. Its positive role is as the potent subterranean force in social control. In the role of social control, envy has been identified in the following acts or operations:

1. As “Disinterested Tendency to Punishment”: The Operation of this Tendency motivates the function of police. The begrudge of the thief, criminal or law breaker might essentially not come from our hatred of the act but the possibility that the perpetrator might succeed and enjoy the fruits therefore, while we cannot! Out of this emotion springs the acts of police, informant, critic, etc. which acts are encouraged as public spirited (Schoeck, 1987:416).

2. As internal Restraint on Dynamics of Power: Envy saps the internal resource of the group to power, “…the pre-eminence or predomination of any one group in the society is potentially limited by the mutual envy among members of that group, or by their envy of the leader. This also applies to the absolute tyrant” (Schoeck, 1987:416). The domestic environment of envy prevents the development of enough cohesiveness to free enough resources for external contest for power.

3. Dynamics of Envy as Check on Absolutism: In so far as the ubiquity of envy runs counter to the unlimited monopoly of power, it will lead to its (power’s) dispersal. The ability of any group for power is largely dissipated by the mutual envy of other groups and the first group’s anxieties about the envy of the other groups.

4. Envy Implicated as Moving Force in Revolutions: The destructive frenzies that accompany revolutions as expressed in destruction of lives and property, often by the lower class against the upper class, is driven by a coalescence of individual envy into group and class envy, and action. The inability of the social sciences to anticipate, diagnose and remedy revolutions owes to the non understanding of the phenomenon of envy.

5. Envy is Self-Domesticating in Social Control: The individual’s envy is sought to be concealed in platitudes and apparently disinterested actions, to avoid the cultural backlash against the envious man. Extreme demonstrations of envy often antagonize the rules of social behaviour, norms or laws of the community and is sternly punished by the envy of the others.

6. Preservation of Tradition Requires Envy: The preservation of tradition depends on a significant operation of the element of envy. ‘The many who cannot dare; opposing the few who dare to challenge ‘established and existing order’, and the fear of ostracization by the latter in the hands of the former’, is the fabric which preserves traditions.

CONCLUSION. We shall sum with Helmut Schoeck (1987:421):
Social coexistence, and especially any cooperation requires reasonably efficient social controls. This means that the unsupervised members of the group, impaled by what are often only widely envious feelings, must keep jealous watch upon each other, least any deviate from the appointed task: none can be certain that he will not be denounced.

The inattention of the social sciences to this phenomenon owing to lack of understanding continues to weaken their abilities to explain the dynamics of power in the society as their otherwise good frameworks of elitism, group, and power inexplicably come short of the pass mark. Envy is the emotion in the motion of power in the society, democratic or despotic, the unseen hand that keeps the community together, in spite of all possibilities to the extreme. That no society has ever recorded any success in curtailing envy, besides showing its resilience, shows its innatism or innateness in man and a simply misunderstood or ignored nature of man, that may have the potentials to explain the gap between theories and realities, precepts and practices in social sciences analyses. Some of the emotional impetus to human behaviour is concealed in this underground emotion and any attempt to avoid its consideration or study betrays a desire to run away from both truth and reality of human social behaviour. The natural and inalienable right to nurse envy is, at the individual level, the determinant of choices and actions of independence; and at the social level, a source of comparison and relation to others. And, in both, envy is an effective source and factor of social control. It is at the point of social control that envy is socially significant in understanding the individual as a behaviour unit in the group involved in the dynamism of power. The conquer of the fear of envy in self and the overcoming of envy as social control is at the foundation of human development and civilization – anytime we manage to overcome envy, we achieve for the self and take humanity a step further on the road of development and civilization – up and away from the dwelling of the caveman!

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