

## AVARICE AND DISCONTENT IN HORACE'S FIRST SATIRE

In *Satires* 1.1 Horace asks the question why people are discontented and praise the fortunes of others, and he gives the answer that they are greedy. The precise connection between question and answer is however far from clear, and some commentators have felt that Horace has combined two separate themes of avarice and discontent without establishing a causal link between them.<sup>1</sup> The great obstacle for critics who argue for thematic unity is to explain how it is that the malcontents of 1-19 are motivated by greed, for Horace is not explicit but merely asserts baldly that it is so (108-9), and leaves the reader to work out the logic. The direct method is to identify to some degree praise of the fortunes of others with an envious desire to outstrip them in wealth. In support we may quote two of the most influential recent interpreters of the *Satires*, to whom all interested in the poems owe a great debt: 'It is *avaritia* that is at the bottom of the misguided yearning after other men's lot. All those people would not be prepared to have a change; rather will they, out of greed, put up with any toil or danger. Greed impels them to call other people happy, to envy them and try to outdo them.'<sup>2</sup> And again: 'In combining the two subjects [i.e. *φιλαργυρία* and *μεμψιμοιρία*] Horace alleges, as he has already done in vv. 28 ff., that the discontent of the grumblers is ultimately based on greed, and that they envy people in other occupations because the latter make more money.'<sup>3</sup> These commentators feel that Horace has made an attempt to establish a direct connection between greed and envy of another man's lot, so that at least a major part of the envy is in fact directed at the other's material possessions. But this, I believe, is untenable. What I wish to do is to make the small but necessary alteration of viewpoint here without which the organic unity of the poem cannot be maintained.

The main sequence of the first forty lines, with which I shall be chiefly concerned, is as follows: How is it that no one is content with his lot in life, but praises those in different occupations? The soldier and the merchant, each caught up in the troubles of his own fortunes, express preference for the other's situation. The lawyer working before dawn envies the farmer and the farmer forced by a lawsuit to come to town envies city-dwellers (1-12). But if some god

<sup>1</sup> Notably Kiessling-Heinze, 7th edn. (Berlin, 1959), introduction to *Satire* 1.

<sup>2</sup> E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> N. Rudd, *The Satires of Horace* (C.U.P., 1966), p. 14. A modified version of the same conclusion on this point is reached by E. Kraggerud, *Symbolae Osloenses* 53 (1978), 133-64: 'Laudatio oder Makarismos ist, wie sich dies . . . in den Beispielen zeigt, auf das Andere und Fremde gerichtet. Darin ist wesentlicher Bestandteil der Wunsch, das Fremde zu bekommen und zu besitzen. Dieser Wunsch hat mit *Avaritia* zu tun, ja fällt mit ihr zum guten Teil zusammen

. . . Zugleich ist Horaz darauf aus, den weiteren Weg zu bezeichnen, wenn er innerhalb jedes Paares den materiellen Neid bei einem der Berufsvertreter (*miles* und *agricola*) betont.' The view of H. Herter, *RbM* 94 (1951), 1-42, who gives a very full survey of modern critics and of ancient parallels, is not entirely clear to me. He rejects avarice as the guiding idea, p. 4, and sees *invidia* and *avaritia* as parallel and complementary, both together leading to discontent, p. 37. This seems to give less than full recognition to Horace's emphasis in lines 40 and 108 ff.

actually gave them the chance to change, they would refuse to do so (15–19). All these people say that they are enduring this toil for the sake of a comfortable retirement, like the ant, which prepares against the time when it will not go out but will use what it has gathered in advance (28–38). But you are deterred by nothing from your pursuit of gain ('*lucrum*'), to stop anyone being richer ('*ditior*') than yourself (38–40).

The phrasing of 1–19 gives little encouragement to those who wish to see envy here directed against the wealth of others.<sup>4</sup> Horace says of the countryman:

*ille datis vadibus qui rure extractus in urbem est,  
solos felices viventis clamat in urbe.*

(11–12)

The countryman does not envy merely the lawyer mentioned in the previous lines, but city-dwellers in general, and surely we are not to assume that he thinks that *all* city-dwellers are better off financially than himself. The widening of scope in this reaction strongly suggests that it is other attractions of life in the city which win the countryman's envy. Further, since material greed is by hypothesis the driving force of men's activity, then, if their envy of others' fortunes is directly inspired by wealth, their refusal to change when given the chance would simply be left unexplained within the terms of the poem. It seems that avarice must cause such an ineffectual envy in an *oblique* rather than a direct way; it is, I suggest, a displaced fragment of a right sense of values. It is a product of stresses which are due to avarice, but it does not in itself satisfy avarice. Hence, if brought to the test, men would not change roles, for change would not further their real ends.

The kind of function which I imagine envy to have here is exemplified in *Sat.* 2. 7. 21–9;

*non dices hodie, quorsum haec tam putida tendant,  
furcifer? 'ad te, inquam.' quo pacto, pessime? 'laudas  
fortunam et mores antiquae plebis, et idem  
si quis ad illa deus subito te agat, usque recuses,  
aut quia non sentis quod clamas rectius esse,  
aut quia non firmus rectum defendis, et haeres  
nequiquam caeno cupiens evellere plantam.  
Romae rus optas, absentem rusticus urbem  
tollis ad astra levis.'*

Though the development of the situation of the two poems is entirely different, for the slave Davus goes on to explore the moral servitude of Horace his master, this passage has some significance for *Sat.* 1. 1. There is the praise of another way of life — this time an ideal from the past — and a refusal to act upon a divine offer to make the wish come true. There is the reciprocated desire of town and country inhabitant for the other's life-style — this time Horace himself is the locus of both desires. And there are similarities of language and phrasing:

<sup>4</sup> Details may be seen in Kiessling-Heinze ad loc.; cf. Rudd, op. cit., p. 13: men envy the greater wealth of those in other occupations, but no mention of this

envy is made in 1–12 because Horace wants to suggest that the fundamental role of greed only occurred to him in the course of writing.

compare 21 above with 'audi quo rem deducam', 1. 1. 14-15; 'laudas', 22, and 'clamas', 25, with 'laudet', 1. 1. 3, cf. 9, and 'clamat', 1. 1. 12. The position of Horace in 2. 7. is in some striking ways similar to that of the people in 1. 1. The most remarkable difference is that now we have reasons given for Horace's refusal to accept the offered transformation. According to Davus, Horace either does not believe what he professes, or he is incapable of living up to his convictions because he is addicted to some vice. These reasons could be very interesting for the understanding of 1. 1. If we could see the praise of other ways of life there as similar to the praise of ancient plebeian ways in 2. 7., then the people's reluctance to change might be motivated similarly to that of Horace.

The required similarity can be established by noting first that elsewhere in *Sat.* 1, namely at 27-40, men hold an ideal which they fail to live up to as in *Sat.* 2. 7; and second that this unfulfilled ideal is parallel to the ineffectual day-dreaming of 1-12. First, men profess the aim of working for a sufficiency in old age, a principle hallowed by the accompanying parable of the ant, which is offered as an adequate justification for a life of toil and is readily acceptable within the Horatian scheme of values. This life-style has something of the ideal felt more strongly in 'the ways of the ancient plebs', and it too constitutes a programme which its professed followers fail to carry out. Second, these are the same people who in their discontent praise the fortunes of others, but would not exchange lots given the chance. That is, their behaviour is parallel to their failure to fulfil their programme of working for a sufficiency, and thus is similar to the unproductive ideal of 2. 7. Praise of other ways of life functions here as praise of ancient plebeian ways does there, as admiration for genuine values somehow beyond reach. And if we ask why the malcontents of 1. 1 would not change, the answer would be, in Davus' fashion, that they don't really believe what they say, or are stuck in the mud and cannot move, the mud in this case being avarice. The change would not make them richer, so they will not change.<sup>5</sup>

The psychology in accordance with which unrealizable desires for another's conditions of life are derived from avarice is apparently as follows: avarice creates discontent in a man because it is unnatural and immoderate, and prevents him from living by his professed and reasonable aims; in his discontent he cannot come to terms with the disadvantages of his own situation, nor can he recognize the advantages which it has — although these are plain enough to others. What he can see are the advantages which others enjoy, and stirred by the discontent which is largely of his own making, instead of abandoning avarice and enjoying the assets of his own situation, he responds to hardship by yearning for an idealized alternative; but the yearning, like the hardship, is to a considerable degree the product of his avarice; should he suddenly get the opportunity to realize the ideal, he would not do so, for he is not really interested in that any more than he is in his professed aim of providing for a comfortable retirement — and indeed the external ideal is chiefly a projection of the peace of mind

<sup>5</sup> Of the two main ancient parallels, Maximus of Tyre 15 *ad init.* treats discontent with one's own lot as basic, so that, should a miraculous change of occupation occur, people would at once be discontented with the new and yearn for the old; while ps. Hippocrates, *Ep.* 17 (370L), though giving special emphasis to avarice,

does not clearly regard it as the sole origin of discontent. See Kraggerud, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-5, for a critique of Fraenkel's claim (*op. cit.*, p. 93) that Horace found in current Cynic and similar discussions the manifestations of discontent reduced to their primary cause, avarice.

which is only to be attained by acting on some such principle as that exemplified by the fable of the ant.

Although I know of no passage in which discontent and avarice are explicitly connected in quite this way, this psychology is entirely appropriate to Horace and to the moral diatribe which is a prominent part of his background in the *Satires*. People who are discontented, says Plutarch,<sup>6</sup> and think that others – the farmer, for example, or the bachelor – are carefree, are like sea-sick travellers changing to a bigger boat but taking their sickness with them; thus a change of occupation does not alter the psychological states which cause distress, namely inexperience, folly, and inability to make proper use of one's resources. What Horace adds to such a scheme is in effect an explanation of the distressing mental condition in terms of avarice: his people are unable to make right use of their resources because they are impelled by greed. But Horace works with a series of vivid pictures – the discontented men and indignant god, the sensible ant – and the discursive framework in which the pictures are set is sometimes sufficient only to allow us to make the connections, and does not always make them for us. The essential situation occurs in two other passages of Horace, both of which have often been compared with *Sat.* 1. 1, but which are especially relevant to my purpose because they lack an explicit psychology but are most easily intelligible when one is supplied along the lines I am suggesting.

Alfius, in *Epodes* 2., builds an extended rustic fantasy, a recurring ideal which he will never realize:

haec ubi locutus faenerator Alfius,  
iam iam futurus rusticus,  
omnem redegit Idibus pecuniam,  
quaerit Kalendis ponere. (67–70)

It is, of course, not the opportunities of greater wealth of which Alfius dreams when he envies the countryman; he recalls his money and reinvests it a fortnight later, but not in buying a farm. He, if anyone, 'laudat diversa sequentis'; nothing prevents him changing: Jupiter, we might say, is easy and lends an ear; but Alfius, intent on further gain, 'non utitur ante quaesitis'. We may read the satire as a commentary on Alfius's behaviour, and see that it is *because* he is avaritious that he would not become a farmer. But why should he dream his Sabine idyll at all, if it were not that his greed leaves him discontented with his own lot? The envied countryman is called 'beatus', and lives 'procul negotiis' and 'solutus omni faenore', 1–4; that is, he enjoys conditions which Alfius notably lacks. One greed drives Alfius on his search for profit, makes him discontented thereby and stimulates him to dreams of a more deeply satisfying life, while at the same time it prevents him from ever putting the idea into effect, because in so doing he would have to give up his greed. The thought connection asserted and castigated in the first *Satire* would admirably and almost indispensably suit Alfius' situation.

<sup>6</sup> On *Tranquillity*, *Mor.* 466 a–d: οὕτως αἱ τῶν βίων ἀντιμεταλήψεις οὐχ ἐξαιρούσι τῆς ψυχῆς τὰ λυπούντα καὶ ταραττοντα. ταῦτα δ' ἐστὶν ἀπειρία πραγμάτων, ἀλογιστία, τὸ μὴ δύνασθαι μὴδ' ἐπίστασθαι χρῆσθαι τοῖς παροῦσι ὀρθῶς. cf. *Ep.* 1. 14. 10–14: 'rure ego viventem, tu dicis in urbe beatum.

cui placet alterius, sua nimirum est odio sors. stultus uterque locum immeritum causatur inique: in culpa est animus, qui se non fugit umquam.' In our poem avarice is the particular way in which all minds are at fault.

The second passage is *Odes* 1. 1. 15–18:

luctantem Icariis fluctibus Africum  
mercator metuens otium et oppidi  
laudat rura sui; mox reficit ratis  
quassas, indocilis pauperiem pati.

The general situation envisaged is different, because the variety of human aspirations presented in the ode is not reduced to a more fundamental drive, but is accepted as ultimate. Nevertheless the situation of the merchant is very much that of the people in *Sat.* 1. 1: in distress brought about because of his occupation he praises the peace of country life; once free from the distress he repudiates this vision in practice although, since he can afford to fit out his ships again, he could act upon it. His motive is given as inability to tolerate poverty, and the contrast with the peace of country life shows that *pauperies* means mere sufficiency rather than penury.<sup>7</sup> Like Alfius, he is impelled by desire for wealth, is accordingly involved in distress, reacts by longing for a contrasting life-style, but will not change because he could not in so doing satisfy his desire for wealth. His envy of the country life is indirectly produced by greed, though of course it does not include the idea that greater wealth might be so gained. In this ode Horace says no more than that, in order to escape poverty, some men persist in their discontented pursuit of riches and will not change despite their praise of other lives; he regards this drive as ultimate in order to present his own ambition of poetic fame as ultimate. But the mechanism by which the drive sets in motion the discontent, the praise and the refusal to change, is suggested clearly enough for the similarity with the first *Satire* to be striking.

Horace then has detected a neat psychological syndrome for explaining why persistent avarice is accompanied by ineffectual day-dreaming. There are two sorts of envy, different though in origin related, which beset people in the poem, namely envy of a more relaxed or satisfying life-style, and envy of the success of one's competitors in the rat-race. Horace moves blandly from the envy which finds voice in cries like 'o fortunati mercatores', to that which is the direct expression of the drive to outstrip others in riches, 'dum ne sit te ditior alter', without indicating that the relationships are different, and even keeping the same persons. The distinction must remain operative even — and this is the hardest combination to accept — when the theme of discontent recurs:

illuc unde abii redeo, qui nemo, ut avarus,  
se probet, ac potius laudet diversa sequentis,  
quodque aliena capella gerat distentius uber  
tabescat, neque se maiori pauperiorum  
turbae comparet, hunc atque hunc superare laboret. (108–12)

The praise of other occupations and the struggle to surpass others in wealth are ascribed to avarice in the same sentence, and the direct expression of greedy envy, 'tabescat', despite its less wholesome tone, might pass as a variation on 'laudet'.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the 'diversa sequentis' are not those to whom the *capella*

<sup>7</sup> Plutarch, *On Love of Wealth*, *Mor.* 524 d, says of one greedy beyond need: πενία γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλλ' ἀπληστία τὸ πάθος αὐτοῦ καὶ φιλοπλουτία διὰ κρίσιν φάλην

καὶ ἀλόγιστον.

<sup>8</sup> The sharp distinction of tone between 'laudet' and 'tabescat' helps us to see that they refer to two different feelings. *laudo*,

belongs, nor are they the 'hunc atque hunc' who must be overtaken. Or rather, they may be the same persons, but if so, they are as it were envied under different descriptions. The farmer might envy the lawyer both because he enjoys the advantages of town life and because he is ahead of himself in the race for riches; if he himself were richer, he might still envy him for his more attractive town life.<sup>9</sup>

Further, Horace's account of discontent works splendidly in connection with people whose burning ambition is to be rich, but its credibility is strained if it is universalized. Is it *true* that there is no one free of avarice? In several other poems, including *Odes* 1. 1, Horace adopts a viewpoint which is quite different, and though most of us at some time might be inclined to claim that love of money is the root of all evil, yet we would perhaps be reluctant to elaborate the principle in detail.<sup>10</sup> Poetry likes round numbers, and zero may be the roundest of them all, but even in our poem *nemo* is modified to *raro*. Still, Horace does ask us to see that mankind as a whole is infected by a ruinous greed, and this, apart from its implausibility as an account of human affairs, leads to further complexity: those whose allegedly happier life-style is the object of envy of the non-competitive sort, are themselves *ex hypothesi* driven by greed and are striving against some and wistfully envying others. Their supposed happiness must then be largely illusory, a phantom of distressed imaginations, and the illusions are reciprocated and universal. This I take to be the heart of Horace's intuition, and the vision of the poem is incomparably deepened thereby. At the same time the mechanism of drive and response is more sophisticated and harder to catch than in *Epode* 2, where we do not have to handle the idea that the countrymen envied by Alfius are unappreciative of the delights he attributes to them, and are toiling relentlessly for riches while nursing their discontent with wrong-headed day-dreams about the delights of the financier's life. Likewise *Odes* 1. 1 is less ambiguous, for here we have people who are

meaning to call or consider someone happy, is inappropriate as an expression of competitive jealousy. It expresses admiration and congratulations for some extraordinary advantage or achievement, as Terence *Heaut.* 381: 'edepol te, mea Antiphila, laudo et fortunatam iudico, id quom studuisti, isti formae ut mores consimiles forent;' *And.* 96-8: 'uno ore omnes omnia bona dicere et laudare fortunas meas, qui gnatum haberem tali ingenio praeditum.' Or it may express good-natured envy of something which the speaker lacks and values but which he does not strive for, as Cicero, *Tusc.* 3. 57: '(potentissimus rex) qui laudat senem et fortunatum esse dicit, quod inglorius sit . . .' and 5. 115: '(Homerus Polyphemum) cum ariete etiam colloquentem facit eiusque laudare fortunas, quod qua vellet ingredi posset et quae vellet attingere;' cf. Plautus, *Rud.* 523-4 (the speaker is soaked): 'o scirpe, scirpe, laudo fortunas tuas, qui semper servas gloriam aritudinis.' Thus in our poem, as at *Odes* 1. 1. 17, the verb resembles μακαρίζω or εὐδαμονίζω

(both used by Maximus of Tyre, loc. cit.) or some uses of ζηλῶ, e.g. Euripides, *I.A.* 16-19 (ζηλῶ, σέ, γέρον, ζηλῶ δ' ἀνδρῶν δς ἀκίνδυνον βίον ἐξεπέρας' ἀγνώως ἀκλεής· τοὺς δ' ἐν τιμαῖς ἡσσον ζηλῶ) translated as *laudo* by Cicero in *Tusc.* 3. 57 above.

<sup>9</sup> Farmers are not always idealized as a foil to avarice; cf. *Ep.* 1. 7. 84-5, where Vulteius, translated to the country, 'praeparat ulmos, immoritur studiis et amore senescit habendi.'

<sup>10</sup> Horace frequently assumes a number of separate fundamental drives; e.g. *Ep.* 1. 6. 47 ff. suggests that one might try to find happiness in wealth or popularity or fine food or love; *Ep.* 1. 2. 55 ff. lists pleasure, envy and hatred, while *Ep.* 1. 1. 33 ff., after mentioning avarice and glory, goes on: 'invidus, iracundus, iners, vinosus, amator . . .' But he does share the contemporary tendency to treat avarice as the typical fault of the age; see Herter, op. cit., pp. 17-18, and, in connection with Horace's major theme of moderation, F. Solmsen, *AJPh* 68 (1947), 337 ff.

actually happy in their jobs, notably the farmer, 'gaudentem patrios findere sarculo agros', 11-12. Both these poems provide a firm contrast by which the discontent of the money-maker may be gauged. Such a contrast is equally required in *Sat.* 1. 1, but Horace runs the risk of undercutting its effect by making the ideal both real and illusory at the same time. This then is a truly audacious extension of the core situation of discontented money-maker versus simple countryman, to the lives of people in general, and one feels that, for all that it rests on an over-simplification of basic human motives, we are contemplating a scheme of quite extraordinary power and finesse, and that here if anywhere Horace's ironical pedestrian Muse approaches the sublime. In this perhaps it may be possible to detect a similarity with Lucretius' treatment of the fear of death as the major bane of human life. In the third book of *De Rerum Natura* a wide sweep of motivation and behaviour is attributed largely or entirely to the one condition: fear of death fosters avarice and ambition 59 ff., thus leading to crime and bloodshed and envy and treachery and even, paradoxically, suicide 82-3. Sick with worry which they do not understand, men spend their lives in a futile effort to escape themselves:

hoc se quisque modo fugit, at quem scilicet, ut fit,  
effugere haud potis est, ingratis haeret et odit  
propterea, morbi quia causam non tenet aeger. (1068-70)

If life has been hard, why do men not die gladly and escape? If it has been pleasant, 'cur non ut plenus vitae conviva recedis?' 938. The similarities with the first *Satire* are such that one might see Horace taking Lucretius' third book as a starting-point, and offering his own account of a single, unrecognized vice which lies behind a varied range of human behaviour, and which prevents men from living a fully satisfactory life.<sup>11</sup>

*University of Queensland*

M. DYSON

<sup>11</sup> I wish to thank Dr. R. W. Hawtrey of the University of Auckland, and Professor K. H. Lee of the University of Canterbury, for comments and criticisms which have improved this essay.