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## Richard Newhauser (ed.), *The Seven Deadly Sins: From Communities to Individuals* (Book Review)

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RICHARD NEWHAUSER (ED.), *The Seven Deadly Sins. From Communities to Individuals* [Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 123]. Brill, Leiden/Boston 2007, xii + 308 pp. ISBN 9789004157859. € 99; US\$ 147.

This collection of essays is the fruit of an NEH summer seminar on “The Seven Deadly Sins as Cultural Constructions in the Middle Ages” led by Richard Newhauser at Darwin College, University of Cambridge, in 2004. In the introduction, Newhauser cogently defines *Begriffsgeschichte* and the semantic approach taken by the seminar participants; reviews the scholarly literature on sin and vice; and summarizes the contributions, which are organized into three sections.

The first section, “Communities,” opens with Dwight Allman’s analysis of the meanings of *humilitas* and *superbia* in the context of the Carolingian *renovatio*. Rejecting Plato’s dictum that the just ruler (of the *polis*) cultivates the “welfare and happiness of the ruled” (p. 26), not of himself, Augustine maintained that the Christian ruler (of the worldly city) pursues humility and the spiritual well-being of his subjects; his happiness lies in the promise of eternal salvation. Alcuin, in turn, proposed a synthesis that assumes royal humility and denounces the prideful subject who presumes to challenge the king’s just rule. The jumping-off point for Bridget Balint’s discussion of how concepts of envy informed twelfth-century poetry is Abelard’s assertion that his calamities were spawned by the *invidia* of others. Following a review of classical and patristic sources, Balint turns to the topos of invective, which was enriched by the revived study of Ovid’s verse. Susan Hill compares the modern concept of gluttony—excessive eating attributable to moral deficiency and associated with corpulence, as exemplified by the obese—to the medieval one—improper desire for food or drink attributable to “spiritual deficiency” (p. 59) and associated with sinfulness, as exemplified by Adam and Eve. Building upon the traditional taxonomies, Hill discusses two late medieval works, *The Goodman of Paris* and *Jacob’s Well*, that address the socially disruptive nature of the vice and its corollaries.

The next section, “The Institution of the Church,” begins with John Kitchen’s essay on the sin of nocturnal emissions from the perspective of early monastic asceticism and orthodox Christology. According to Cassian, monks seeking to apprehend the hidden meanings of scriptural texts had to curb this secret sin by decoding the bodily ‘text.’ Furthermore, just as Jesus had not succumbed to the vice of gluttony (Matth. 4:3), so had he withstood all forms of sexual transgression (*fornicatio*). This concatenation illustrates the centrality of harmartiology “to the religion’s episteme” (p. 92). According to Rhonda

McDaniel, Aldhelm's prose *De virginitate* reflects the semantic and conceptual traditions of Cassian and Gregory the Great, while the later, metrical version favors the Cassianic schema. She surmises that the Anglo-Latin author took aim at the overweening pride of virgins in their chastity because nuns at certain English double monasteries disparaged the virtue of the formerly married noblewomen holding positions of power at those communities. The essay by Dallas Denery II addresses lying, one aspect of an influential, alternative tripartite hamartiological schema delineating *peccata cordis, oris et operis*. If, as Augustine averred, each of the eight species of lying was a sin, how is it that some falsehoods recounted in the Old Testament did not elicit divine punishment? How was one to understand Jesus' pretending to walk further than he did after the Resurrection? Scholastics took various approaches in their *questiones*, from dissecting the relationship between word and thought to weighing the importance of the prevaricator's intent. Late medieval sermons that graphically linked individual vices to the expiatory sufferings of Christ took a more affective approach to sin. Holly Johnson notes that the pairings varied and that the sermons, delivered on Good Friday, focus more on the redemptive nature of the torments than the sinful nature of the transgressions. In an essay that mines the rich source material on the costumes for the *autos sacramentales* staged in connection with the feast of Corpus Christi during the seventeenth century, Hilaire Kallendorf discerns some conventional gender and social commentary, as well as some subtle evidence for the transformative nature of clothes.

The volume's last section, titled "Individuals," opens with an essay by V.S. Benfell III tracing the interplay between the vices and references to the Beatitudes (Matth. 5:3–10) in *Purgatorio*. Dante availed himself of elements of a rich hermeneutical tradition that included Aquinas's conflation of Aristotelian ethics with Christian moral theology. The result is a poetic expression of the notion that, while pagan philosophy allows for the apprehension of virtue, only Christian faith provides for the attainment of salvation. In his analysis of the "Summoner's Tale," Derrick Pitard avers that in this critique of the mendicants' commodification of salvation, a charge already leveled by regular clerics like William of St. Amour, Chaucer utilized "greed as a linguistic topos" (p. 212) to express the importance of vernacular modes of communication. Bosch's *Seven Deadly Sins and Four Last Things* is the subject of an essay by Laura Gelfand that interprets the overall design and symbolism of the painting, and the content of the seven scenes depicting the vices. Her detailed descriptions of the iconographic imagery linking the vignettes reveal the trenchant social commentary animating this devotional tool. The concluding essay by Thomas Parisi discerns

numerous affinities between Freud's identity as a psychoanalyst and Virgil's function as Dante's guide. For example, both shepherd their charges/readers on empirically informed journeys undertaken to effect release from bondage to sin/neurosis. Recent advances in neuroscience, biological psychiatry, and psychopharmacology highlight the fictive qualities of Freud's works, rendering the comparison to Dante's *opus* all the more germane, particularly in terms of the problemizations of narcissism and pride.

The essays in this volume illustrate the broad applicability of conceptual history to the study of sin and vice by scholars representing various academic disciplines. Each is limited in scope—a reflection, perhaps, of the seminar's five-week duration—and many review the fundamental primary sources, Cassian, Gregory the Great and William Perardus. Thus, they are accessible to neophytes in the subject, although experts will also look forward to the comprehensive monographs promised by some contributors. Brill is to be commended for upholding production values, as exemplified by the lack of typographical errors and the provision of valuable tables, figures, footnotes, bibliography, and indices.

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