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MODERN TRENDS ON MODERN THOUGHT.

The Ohio State University, Ph. D., 1969
Languages and Literature, modern

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan
ACEDIA AND RELATED TERMS IN MEDIEVAL THOUGHT
WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
SIEGFRIED WENZEL, B. A., A. M.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1960

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Department of English
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<tr>
<td>Archiv</td>
<td>Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen.</td>
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<td>Baeumker</td>
<td>Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique, doctrine et histoire.</td>
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<td>DSAI</td>
<td>Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique.</td>
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<td>DThC</td>
<td>Early English Text Society, Original Series.</td>
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<td>EETS</td>
<td>Early English Text Society, New Series.</td>
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<td>EETS, ES</td>
<td>Harvard Theological Review.</td>
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<td>HThR</td>
<td>Journal of English and Germanic Philology.</td>
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<td>JEGP</td>
<td>Modern Language Notes.</td>
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<td>MLN</td>
<td>Modern Language Review.</td>
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<td>MLLR</td>
<td>Modern Philology.</td>
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<td>MLA</td>
<td>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.</td>
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<td>RHE</td>
<td>Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique.</td>
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INTRODUCTION

In his book on Matthew Arnold, Lionel Trilling has described Empedocles’--and young Arnold’s--plight as that of the split between imagination and reason.

The ancient world, sunlit and warm and mysterious, is a world the weary Empedocles cannot believe in; imagination is quite dead for him, killed by his knowledge. Rationalism and materialism have destroyed mystery "by rule and line," have clipped the angel's wing and emptied the once-haunted air and Empedocles feels that life is no longer to be supported.¹

Trilling goes on to compare this feeling to eighteenth-century spleen and to the anhedonia, noia and ennui of Arnold's own contemporaries. Then he says, "the Middle Ages called the same malady acedia..."²

Trilling was not the first or the only critic to relate the modern disenchantment with life to the medieval term. T. S. Eliot did the same in his essay on Baudelaire, though he made a rather interesting distinction between acedia and ennui.³ The general tendency of many scholars and literary critics has been to see in acedia a predecessor of various forms of modern melancholy and disgust with life.

¹ Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold (New York, 1939), p. 83.
² Ibid., p. 83.
This trend, which has almost become a fashion among the literati, began at least with Sainte-Beuve. In his history of Port-Royal he defined *acedia* as "l'ennui propre au cloître . . . ; une tristesse vague, obscure, tendre, l'ennui des après-midi. Le besoin de l'infini vous prend . . ." and suggested that it was reflected in the infinite longings of Chateaubriand's *Rene*. The *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* also makes *acedia* a close relative of melancholy and the *mal-du-siècle*. And Aldous Huxley, in a brilliant though very short essay, says that "acciédie is still with us as an inspiration, one of the most poignant of literary themes." He considers it as the ancestors of Renaissance melancholy, Romantic *mal-du-siècle*, and nineteenth-century *ennui*, and claims that "the progress of accidie" was set in motion by the great disillusionments of the French Revolution, industrialization, and World War I.

What, then, is *acedia*? Although, to my knowledge, the concept has never been analyzed at length, several short studies have

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4See, for example, John Ciardi's recent article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, March 19, 1960, p. 22.


8In the Middle Ages the form *acciédia* was used interchangeably with *acedia*. For the sake of consistency I shall use the spelling *acedia* throughout my study, except, of course, in quotations and in reference to Petrarch's concept.
been published from which a fairly clear account can be drawn. The
nineteenth century produced a small number of investigations into the
history of the term. Sainte-Beuve's short footnote, published in
1840, has already been mentioned. In 1852 the French scholar A. de
Martonne issued an article on "Recherches sur l'acédia,"9 which de­
pends somewhat on Bourquelot's studies of legal aspects of suicide10
and considers medieval acedia as straight ennui de vie, creating a
picture that strongly foreshadows Huizinga's Waning of the Middle Ages.
The first landmark in the historical study of acedia, however, was the
"Introductory Essay Concerning Accidie" by Bishop Francis Paget of
Oxford.11 Paget examined the term as it appeared in patristic litera­
ture from Cassian on, in Thomas Aquinas, Dante and Chaucer, and in some
seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theological handbooks. He also
pointed out the survival of the sentiment in various nineteenth-century
literary men.

The sharp distinction between the word acedia and the "thing"
it signified was also made by H. Cochin, who studied the Greek and
Latin history of "accuria," failing however to see its connection with

9A. de Martonne, "Recherches sur l'acédia," Annales de la Société
académique de Saint-Quentin, IX (1852), 187-199.

10Félix Bourquelot, "Recherches sur les opinions et la législa­tion
en matière de mort volontaire pendant le moyen âge," Bibliothèque
de l'École des Chartes, III (1841-42), 539-560; IV (1842-43), 242-266,
456-475.

11Francis Paget, The Spirit of Discipline, 4th ed. (London, 1892),
pp. 1-50.
the seven deadly sins. Cochin, as well as all other investigators, owed much to previous philological studies, notably the article on acedia in Du Gange's Glossarium ad scriptores mediae et infimae latinitatis and Dom Gazel's (or Gazaeus') commentary on Cassian's works printed in volume forty-nine of the Patrologia Latina. In comparison with such pioneer work, A. Ernout's recent philological considerations of the term have very little to offer.

The most comprehensive modern presentations of acedia are found in two encyclopedias. G. Bardy, in the Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique, gives a rich historical portrait of the concept together with many references to the sources. By definition, of course, his summary is restricted to auteurs spirituels. The same restriction qualifies E. Vansteenberghe's article on "Paresse" in the Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique, which is a solid presentation of the historical development of acedia as well as of its doctrinal aspects. In contrast, Tarocchi's treatment of "Accidia"

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in the *Enciclopedia Cattolica*\(^{17}\) presents no historical material. Wider in scope than these articles is the previously mentioned essay by Huxley, which gives an excellent précis of the history of the phenomenon through fifteen centuries. Many historical data are also contained in a study by P. Alphandéry, who analyzed *acedia* during the centuries from Cassian to St. Thomas from the medico-psychological point of view.\(^{18}\)

Besides the information contained in such individual studies of *acedia*, much can be learned about the concept from general discussions of subjects that are closely related to it. Above all, the literature on the system of the seven cardinal sins refers constantly to *acedia*. Professor Morton W. Bloomfield's comprehensive study of *The Seven Deadly Sins*\(^{19}\) is basic for the understanding of the origins and history of this thought pattern and represents the point of departure for my own investigation. Furthermore, *acedia* is frequently touched upon in works on the origin of monasticism.\(^{20}\) In this


\(^{19}\)Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*. An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature ([East Lansing], 1952).

connection I should especially mention a penetrating study by Roger Cailliois, which shows very interesting relationships between acedia and general mythological phenomena. Similarly, several studies on mystical theology and on the theory of work have contributed to the study of acedia. Finally, the concept is frequently mentioned and discussed in scholarly and critical works on Petrarch.

From the listed studies the following account of acedia emerges. The term refers to one of the seven deadly sins, the neglect of spiritual duties. Except for occasional references in the writings of the Egyptian Desert Fathers, acedia did not appear until Cassian, the great intermediary figure in the history of European monasticism. From then on it was a firmly established term in the Latin vocabulary of theological writers until the Renaissance. In Middle English literature it sometimes appeared Anglicized as "accidie," but mostly it was translated as "sloth." In Middle English this word had a narrower

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22 Particularly valuable are: M. Lot-Borodine, "L'Aridité ou Siccitas dans l'antiquité chrétienne," Études carmelitaines mystiques et missionnaires, 22e année, II (1937), 191-205; and Gonzague Truc, "Les états mystiques négatifs (La tièdeur—l'acédia—la secheresse)," Revue philosophique, LXXIII (1912), 610-628.


24 So in Cochin's study, op. cit. For further literature, see the notes to chapter VI, below.
meaning than it has today; it designated sloth in God's service and included various spiritual faults, ranging from religious laziness to despair of one's salvation. The term was also used by Petrarch, but with a meaning that seems to imply a total break with the medieval tradition. Petrarch's accidia appears very much like the melancholy of Werther and René. Consequently, modern scholars and critics have felt justified in claiming accedia as a forefather of modern melancholy; in this particular development Petrarch is thought to furnish, as in so many other respects, the link between the Middle Ages and our modern world.

This genetic relationship has often been affirmed, but never analyzed with penetration nor proven beyond doubt. Furthermore, the picture of accedia which I have drawn from secondary literature does not reflect the frequent contradictions between various authors. For example, quite often it is stated that accedia was a vice or a malady of the monks;²⁵ but the reader of Piers Plowman gets the strong impression that "accidie" and sloth were nothing but the inertia of the ordinary layman.²⁶ In there a relation between the two? or are accedia and sloth, perhaps unrelated concepts, referring to quite dissimilar faults of different groups of society? Moreover, previous studies of

²⁵For example, Sainte-Beuve, loc. cit.; Otto Zöckler, Die Tugendlehre des Christentums geschichtlich dargestellt in der Entwicklung ihrer Lehrformen (Gutersloh, 1904), p. 279.

²⁶W. Langland, The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman, ed. W. W. Skeat (Oxford, 1886), B V, 392-468 and other passages; see below, chapter V.
the term have been almost exclusively based upon theological literature, mostly the writings of the Fathers and the great teachers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Did acedia enter secular literature at all, and if so, in what form? Professor Bloomfield's work is the only extensive study of the scheme of sins in both theological and secular writings. It focuses, of course, on the history of the system rather than on one particular sin and can, thus, not concern itself too deeply with the meaning of acedia.

I propose, therefore, to investigate the meaning of the concept in medieval, especially Middle English literature—both religious and secular. It is my purpose to study the history of the term from its beginnings to the end of the fifteenth century, and see what changes it underwent. Thus, the following is primarily a study in historical semantics. My attention will focus on the word acedia and its Middle English analogues, not on the psychological state or the sentiment which it indicated. My method will be an analysis of passages where the word is used and clearly defined. In the main, the analysis will follow the chronological order of the documents, beginning with the origins of the concept among the Egyptian desert monks. The textual criticism devoted, during the past thirty or forty years, to their writings, especially to Evagrius Ponticus, will allow me to present a more accurate account of the beginnings of acedia in that milieu than previous studies have been able to give (chapter I). An exclusively chronological order, however, will not be advisable for the next chapters, because after the seventh century
definitions of acedia began to appear everywhere and repeated the same hackneyed formulae. In order to avoid tedious repetition and the mere listing of medieval texts that mention the word, I will select the most important passages from the great Latin theologians up to the thirteenth century (chapter II) and then investigate the term in different genres of vernacular literature. By "genres" I mean the large categories of Middle English devotional literature (chapter III), the English mystical writings (chapter IV), and medieval belles-lettres (chapter V). In these sections I shall try to present a comprehensive portrait of acedia as it appears in Middle English and some related non-English texts (French sources, Dante and Boccaccio). My purpose in these chapters will be to complete the picture of the concept derived from Latin theological material.

Finally I wish to give at least a tentative answer to the question about the precise relation between acedia and melancholy. To clarify that relation fully would necessitate a series of studies on Renaissance melancholia, Romantic Weltschmerz, and modern mal-du-siecle, each set in comparison with the medieval concept. All I hope to achieve here is to determine the exact conceptual location of Petrarch's accidia in the supposed development from acedia to melancholy, and to draw whatever conclusions can be drawn from comparing Petrarch's with the traditional medieval term (chapter VI).

To elucidate some of these interesting relations, however, is only corollary to the fundamental concern of this study: to investigate the nature of the concept acedia and to present its origins,
growth, and complexity as found in medieval literature. My concern is historical, and my purpose is to arrive at a more profound understanding of an idea which in medieval culture was so important and widespread that we find it, not only in sermons, catechetical handbooks, and the great theological summae, but also in the Canterbury Tales, in Dante, and in numerous works in the fine arts. After I have explored the meaning of that distant forbear, I shall look at its supposed modern descendents (chapter VII). Although I shall not deal with them in any great detail, I shall make some general comments, trying to assess the differences in attitudes and sentiment and to suggest a common basis in human experience.
CHAPTER I

THE ORIGINS OF THE CONCEPT

The word acedia is of Greek origin. In classical Greek literature it occurs several times as akédeia and akedia, denoting carelessness, indifference; physical or mental torpor and apathy; weariness, or exhaustion. The oldest text which preserves the word seems to be the pseudo-Hippocratic treatise "On the Glands"; in Homer a verbal noun derived from akédeia with the general signification of "uncared for" means "unnourished, unburied." Yet the word is apparently not very common in pre-Christian Greek texts. Among the Roman classics only Cicero seems to have employed the term; it occurs once in its Greek form in a letter to Atticus.

Despite its infrequency in classical Greek literature, however, the term acedia was well known to the translators of the Old Testament. In the Septuagint akedia occurs in at least three, its derivative akedian (or akediazein) in six more passages, where it


2Ad Atticum, XII, 45, 1.

denotes weariness, heaviness, dejection. Of all these passages the most important for the subsequent history of the term in European culture is Psalm 118:28—"My soul slumbers on account of acedia." We shall presently see what special meaning in this connection the word acquired from the third century on, through Origen's interpretation of this passage.

In contrast to the Septuagint, the New Testament does not use ἀκεδία at all. It is equally absent from the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, with the exception of the Pastor Hermas, where it seems to denote "spiritual negligence." A figure of a young man appearing in the third vision reprimands the early Christian community:

Like elderly men who have no hope of renewing their strength, and expect nothing but their last sleep, so you, weakened by worldly occupations, have given yourselves up to sloth [ακεδίας, plural], and have not cast your cares upon the Lord.

The same meaning of "negligence" or "listlessness" in spiritual matters appears again in Origen's works. In the Philocalia, for example, acedia stands for a listlessness which results from not

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4My translation. The Authorized Version translates the Hebrew original differently. The Vulgate has: "dormitavit anima mea prae tedium." Biblical passages in this study will be cited according to the Vulgate.


understanding the meaning of the Scripture. Of greater significance, however, are Origen's remarks on **acedia** in his commentary to the Psalms. With regard to the passage in Ps. 118:28 already mentioned he explains:

"**Acedia**" is a commotion, of longer duration, of both the irascible and the concupiscible part of the soul; the former being provoked against something present, the latter desiring something absent. "**Slumber**" is the neglect, on the part of the rational soul, of the virtues and of the knowledge of God. "**Sleep**" is the voluntary separation of the rational soul from the real life. For that reason the wise Solomon admonishes not to grant sleep to the eyes, nor slumber to the eyelids.

The exegesis, in the terms of Hellenistic psychology, seems to imply two important elements: first, **acedia** belongs to the "lower" parts of the soul and consists of both an aversion against present conditions (the Latin translation has *taedium*) and a desire for something else; second, this psychological state is responsible for the neglect of the highest spiritual goods and may lead to their complete and willful renunciation. "**Sleep**" is, of course, taken in its spiritual meaning, as the state in which the human soul is unresponsive to the spiritual realities. It is worthwhile to remember the powerful

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7 The Philocalia of Origen, ed. J. Armitage Robinson (Cambridge, Eng. 1893), XII, 2.

8 Origen, Selecta in Psalmos, Ps. 118:28 (PG 12:1593). The translations in this study are my own unless otherwise indicated.

9 I am referring to the division of the soul into three parts, as ultimately derived from Plato (cf. Phaedrus, 246).
mythological connotations which the concept of "sleep" had in the
Hellenistic world during the first Christian centuries: in the myths
and speculations of the Gnostics, for example, "sleep" stands for the
existential state of the human soul after its fall from heaven, when
it is poisoned by and enmeshed in the evil world.\textsuperscript{10} "Sleep," in this
sense, refers to a basic type of human existence and implies the loss
of knowing what man ontologically is and what his goals in this life
are.\textsuperscript{11} Much of this \textit{Lebensgefühl}, no doubt, penetrated into early
Christian teaching; it is enough to remember St. Paul's call: "Now it
is high time to wake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer
than when we believed" (Rom. 13:11). If seen against such a background,
a\textit{cedia} immediately gains a tremendous importance and dignity, and
denotes not merely a transient mood of listlessness, but a fundamental
threat to man's spiritual existence.

Origen is our earliest witness, again, for another aspect of
\textit{cedia} which was destined to have a long history through the Middle
Ages. In commenting on Psalm 90:6 he says, "The 'midday demon' is
said to be the demon of \textit{cedia}."\textsuperscript{12} I will consider the identification


\textsuperscript{11}A good example of this mythological significance of sleep is
furnished in the "Hymn of the Soul," verses 34-35, of the Acts of
pp. 411-415.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Sel. in Psalm.}, Ps. 90:6 (PG 12:1551).
of acedia with a demon later, and will survey the subsequent history of the daemonium meridianum in another chapter. For now, this particular exegesis leads us to a group of texts in which acedia appears with relative frequency and possesses attributes that will increasingly enrich our understanding of the term. I am referring to the body of literature which reflects the life and teaching of the monks who inhabited the Egyptian desert during the fourth and fifth centuries. The earliest of these writings, Athansius' Vita sancti Antonii, dates from about A.D. 357. It mentions acedia once in a list of bad effects, such as fright, confusion, sadness, etc., caused by the attack of the "evil ones," but gives no more detailed description. But if the biography of St. Antony is of little value for this study, the surviving stories of his followers--mostly the hermits and monks in Scete and Nitria, near Alexandria--yield much relevant material. From about 400 on, the doctrines and deeds of those monks--the Desert Fathers, as they have come to be called--were written down and collected in huge, rather unorderly compilations. These claim to transmit the teachings of the Fathers in the form of occasional or solicited utterances regarding spiritual matters. Their topics are mostly of an ascetical and sometimes mystical nature. They rather faithfully reflect the life, practices, and ideals of the Fathers and of the whole movement of early Christian monasticism, which was to become the model and stimulus for the monastic life in the West.

\[13\text{Vita sancti Antonii, ch. 36 (PG 26:896).}\]
major collections are the Historia Monachorum, \textsuperscript{14} Palladius' Historia Lausiaca,\textsuperscript{15} and the Apophthegmata.\textsuperscript{16} From them we can gain a somewhat incomplete but still fairly precise picture of what acedia meant to early Christianity, and of the intellectual environment that produced the concept.

Acedia is, first of all, a temptation by which a religious person is attacked and with which he has to fight. The recluse Theodora explains, "You must know that whenever one has embraced the quiet [i.e., the religious] life, the Evil One immediately comes and oppresses the soul by acedia [en akedias]. . . . "\textsuperscript{17} Antony in the desert "fell into acedia and a great darkness of evil thoughts,"\textsuperscript{18} and another recluse, Alexandra, is asked how she could "all by herself fight with acedia and with evil thoughts."\textsuperscript{19} Acedia, then, is a certain

\textsuperscript{14} A fourth-century novelistic report of a journey through the Egyptian desert. The Latin text (FL 21:387-462), which is perhaps the original version, was written by Rufinus of Aquileia.


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Apophth.} 311 (PG 65:201).

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Apophth.} 1 (PG 65:75).

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{HL}, 5 (PG 34:1017).
"vice," one of a series of moral evils which "harm the soul." Its particular nature is tedium, boredom with the spiritual life. A young man, for example, follows an old monk's spiritual advice for two days, but then is affected by acedia and follows his own will. This state of boredom is characteristic of beginners in the spiritual life, but it also attacks monks who are well versed in spiritual battles, and tries to make them shun their ascetic practices by holding before them the dreariness of a very long life full of hardships. The boredom usually takes the form of a distaste for the cell where the monk lives. Thus Nathanael, in the beginning, was mocked by the devil so that "he seemed to feel a distaste for his first cell and went off and built another nearer a village." The flight from the cell is the usual effect of acedia, the immediate reaction of the still untrained and impatient monk. But sometimes acedia leads on also to the complete renunciation of one's ideals or the whole religious life. Palladius speaks of acedia as responsible for making

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21 Apophth. 267 (PG 65:186).

22 Palladius, Vita Chrysost., p. 106.


24 Macarius, Historiae (PG 34:209), and H. L., 25 (PG 34:1068).
monks break their vows and abandon the ascetic life for marriage. In other cases it leads its victim to murmurs against his brethren when they refuse to comfort him with edifying talks about spiritual matters. In sum, acedia is one of the worst temptations that befalls the solitary monk. It has to be resisted with strength and patience, and the main remedies recommended in this struggle by the Fathers are prayer, the singing of psalms, and especially work with the hands. St. Antony, when he was much troubled by acedia and prayed for help, had a vision of a man making ropes in the intervals between his prayers. The recluse Alexandra used to spin flax for the same purpose. When she was asked how she fights acedia, she gave in reply her daily schedule:

From early morn to the ninth hour I pray hour by hour, spinning flax the while. During the remaining hours I meditate on the holy patriarchs and prophets and apostles and martyrs. And having eaten my bread I remain in patience for the other hours, waiting for my end with cheerful hope.

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29 Palladius sets up a list of virtues contrary to vices; to acedia is opposed patience (hupomone). 30 *Vita Chrysost.*, p. 133.
30 So Mother Syncletica, whose advice appears in several places, e.g., *Vita Patrum*, V, 71 (PL 73:924) and *Vita s. Syncleticae*, 40 (PG 28:1512).
31 Abba Isaias, *Oratio* 17 (PG 40:1148).
32 *Apophth.*, Antonius 1 (PG 65:76).
These scattered remarks in the compilations of stories and sayings of the Egyptian monks, then, show acedia as one of the hardest temptations of the Desert Fathers, born of boredom with the solitary life and leading ultimately to the denial of one's spiritual ideals. This picture of acedia becomes richer and more detailed when we pass on to the writings of the most literary and original of the desert monks. Evagrius Ponticus was a very popular preacher in Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Empire, before he left the city in 382 in order to live as a monk on Mount Nitria, near Alexandria. There he became the disciple of Macarius, one of the most famous Desert Fathers. He died in 399. Evagrius had not only absorbed the erudition and doctrines of Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus, his teacher, but had also carefully studied the Alexandrian theologians Clement and Origen. It is especially the latter to whom Evagrius owes the most, from metaphysical speculations down to biblical exegesis. This close dependence accounts for the almost total neglect Evagrius suffered among Western theologians during the later Middle Ages: when Origen was pronounced heretic and his writings condemned, Evagrius faded too. Yet he deserves better. His dependence on Origen in speculative matters is eclipsed by his originality in ascetic and

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34 Evagrius himself admits his discipleship, Practicus I, 66 (PG 40:1240) and II, 93 (1249).

35 Evagrius' dependence on Origen is shown by W. Bousset, op. cit., pp. 287 ff.
mystical teachings. Bousset called him the "beginner and creator of true Christian mysticism," and more recently I. Hausherr has praised him as the wellspring of the great Eastern mysticism which extends from the fourth to the fifteenth, even into the twentieth century.

Unfortunately, to date no comprehensive study of Evagrius' doctrines has been produced. This gap is mostly due to the absence, so far, of a clearly established and easily accessible corpus Evagriana. During the last thirty years or so Orientalists have been able to identify more and more texts, mostly Greek or Syriac, as Evagrian, and have attributed to him works which before had been believed to come from Nilus and Basil the Great. The work of establishing an Evagrian corpus seems now to be in its final stage.

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37 Bousset, op. cit., p. 92.


40 Cf. especially the work of J. Muyldermans. A summarizing account of his findings is given in his Evagriana Syriaca, Bibliotheque du Museon, vol. 31 (Louvain, 1952).

41 Cf. the good survey of the corpus in Muyldermans, op. cit., and—more summarily—in Rene Draget, "L'Histoire Lausiaque, une œuvre écrite dans l'esprit d'Évagre," RHE, XLII (1946), 323-325, note 1. In my references to Evagrian works I use the titles as listed by Muyldermans.
Many of his works which are relevant to the study of acedia belong
to the genre of gnomic literature: Evagrius laid down his teaching
in concise and pregnant sententiae which aimed at giving his brethren
practical advice about the religious life. In several treatises,
however, he describes certain phenomena—among which acedia takes a
very important place—at greater length and furnishes for our study
an unparalleled wealth of information.

The following paragraph, which reads like a "character,"
presents many traits of acedia already found in Origen and in stories
about the Desert Fathers:

The demon of acedia, also called "noonday demon," is
the most oppressive of all demons. He attacks the
monk about the fourth hour and besieges his soul
until the eighth hour. First he makes the sun appear
sluggish and immobile, as if the day had fifty hours.
Then he causes the monk continually to look at the
windows and forces him to step out of his cell and to
gaze at the sun to see how far it still is from the
ninth hour, and to look around, here and there,
whether any of his brethren is near. Moreover, the
demon sends him hatred against the place, against life
itself, and against the work of his hands, and makes
him think he has lost the love among his brethren and
that there is none to comfort him. If during those
days anybody annoyed the monk, the demon would add
this to increase the monk's hatred. He stirs the
monk also to long for different places in which he
can find easily what is necessary for his life and
can carry on a much less toilsome and more expedient
profession. It is not on account of the locality, the
demon suggests, that one pleases God; He can be wor-
shipped everywhere. To these thoughts the demon adds
the memory of the monk's family and of his former way
of life. He presents the length of his life-time,
holding before the monk's eyes all the hardships of
his askesis. Thus the demon employs all his wiles so
that the monk may leave his cell and flee from the
race-course. 42

42 De octo vitiosis cogitationibus (hereafter referred to as DOVC),
This sketch of the temptation of acedia must now be considered in detail and supplemented with remarks from other Evagrian writings. It is to be noticed, first of all, that the attack of acedia occurs at a certain time of the day, namely from about 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., i.e., the hours around noon, the hottest part of the day. Hence acedia is equated with the midday demon of Psalm 90:6. The fact that this temptation is attributed to the agency of a demon will concern us later. The peculiar nature of the temptation is weariness and boredom with religious exercises. The spirit of acedia brings to the monk's mind all his burdens and hardships and tries to make him abandon his efforts to endure them. Acedia, so to speak, weakens and dissolves the psychic stamina (the tônos) and "devours" the strength of the soul. More precisely, acedia is a boredom, sometimes with manual work, but more often with prayer. Especially

7 (PG 40:1273). Similar "characters" appear in De octo spiritibus malitiae (hereafter referred to as DOSM), 13-14 (PG 79:1157-60) and Antiochus, Homilia 26, "De Acedia" (PG 89:1513 ff.). Antiochus wrote about 614 and owes much to DOSM.


44 Tractatus ad Eulogium, 8 (PG 79:1104); Antirrheticus, 47. The latter work is most important for the study of acedia. It has been preserved only in a Syriac version and was printed with a modern Greek translation by Frankenberg, op. cit., pp. 472-545.

45 Antirrh., 29.

46 Tract. ad Eul., 8 (PG 79:1104); DOSM, 14 (PG 79:1160); ibid., 16 (1161).

47 Antirrh., 38.

48 Ibid., 1.

49 De oratione, 75 (PG 79:1184).
when the mind during prayer is filled with thoughts of anger or
lust, it is apt to "fall prey to the demon of acedia," which then
attacks it like a raving dog.\textsuperscript{50} But even when there are no other
sinful thoughts in the mind, acedia can oppress the soul during
prayer, and "dim the holy light in her eyes."\textsuperscript{51} Other favorite
occasions for its attack are the communal recitation of psalms,\textsuperscript{52}
especially during the night, when the monk pronounces the words badly
or not at all,\textsuperscript{53} and reading and meditation.\textsuperscript{54} In the latter case
the monk begins to rub his face, stretch his arms, and look at the
wall; when his eyes return to the book in front of him, he tries in
vain to understand the written words and, instead, counts the leaves
and calculates how many quires there are.\textsuperscript{55} This weariness may be
the result not only of heat, fasting, the monotony of life and the
surrounding desert, but also of bodily sickness.\textsuperscript{56}

The effect of such a mood is an aversion to the cell, to
the brethren, and to the form of life which the monk leads.\textsuperscript{57} Under
the attack of acedia the monk grows angry with his brethren and easily

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50}\textit{Pract.} I, 14 (PG 40:1226).
\item \textsuperscript{51}\textit{Antirrh.}, 16.
\item \textsuperscript{52}\textit{Tract. ad Eul.}, 8 (PG 79:1104); \textit{ibid.}, 28 (1129).
\item \textsuperscript{53}\textit{DOSM}, 14 (PG 79:1160).
\item \textsuperscript{54}\textit{Antirrh.}, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{55}\textit{DOSM}, 14 (PG 79:1160); \textit{Antiochus, Homilia} 26 (PG 89:1516).
\item \textsuperscript{56}\textit{Antirrh.}, 6 and 36.
\item \textsuperscript{57}\textit{Antiochus, Homilia} 26 (PG 89:1516).
\end{itemize}
finds fault with them, or he becomes infuriated against elders who, at that particular moment, refuse to give him spiritual comfort. Thus, feelings of wrath are often born of acedia. But more commonly it is sadness and grief that are associated with this vice. The conscientious monk grieves at his own spiritual malaise; or he is sad about his seeming failure in comparison with others and is hence carried toward envy. Ingratitude is another frequent companion of acedia.

This whole complex of boredom, tedium, and dejection usually leads to one of two evils: sleep, or the flight from the cell. Acedia counsels the monk to quit spiritual exercises, like reading and meditation—often with the suggestion that it is not quantity or the human effort that matter. The next step is abandonment to sleep. But even if the monk consents to a short rest, the slumber is not always refreshing: the dreary life continues. Acedia will then create a desire to leave the cell or the dwelling-place. As in Palladius and the Apophthegmata, so is this flight for Evagrius the most common result of acedia. The weary monk receives the impression

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58 Antirrh., 9 and 30; for "muttering" as an effect of acedia see also Ibid., 13 and 48.
59 Ibid., 55.
60 Tract. ad Eul., 6 (PG 79:1101); Antirrh., 31.
61 Antirrh., 23. 62 Ibid., 50.
63 Ibid., 5 and 8. 64 Ibid., 28.
65 Tract. ad Eul., 12 (PG 79:1109); Antirrh., 15, 26, 33, and 57.
that elsewhere he will find the basic necessities of life more easily and will make better progress in the spiritual life. In thus suggesting a morally good motive for leaving the cell, acedia displays an astonishing, and of course very dangerous, subtlety. Sometimes boredom of the cell is disguised under the desire to visit the sick and to comfort the brethren, but more commonly acedia drives the monk to visit his parents and friends in the world, either as a work of mercy, or simply for his own sake, to "relax" among them.

The ultimate aim of this temptation is, of course, the complete desertion of the religious life. Acedia can easily turn the monk's attention back to the world and make him love again what he has renounced. It shows him those who continue to live in the world as happy, even as perfectly capable of achieving saintliness without enduring the hardships of the desert. In some cases, a little prick to the monk's pride is added: he becomes weary of the solitary life because people in the world claim he has taken it up on account of professional incompetence or mere unmanliness. But in general the causes of desertion are purely negative: cowardice and pusillanimity. The soul besieged by acedia is made so confused and weak that

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66 *De malignis cogitationibus* (hereafter referred to as DMC), 12 (PG 79:1213).
67 *Antiochus, Homilia* 26 (PG 89:1516).
68 *Antirrh.*, 7, 39, 43-45, 53.
73 *Tract. ad Eul.*, 8 (PG 79:1104).
it sees no end of the hardships, privations, and trials.\textsuperscript{74} The demon deceitfully depicts a life of many bitter years, old age, and disease to come.\textsuperscript{75} This weariness itself and the multitude of temptations cause the monk to grieve at his state of mind and to lose courage.\textsuperscript{76} He becomes more and more depressed and finally gives up his hope of ever reaching peace and perfection.\textsuperscript{77} The end is despair of God's mercy and of salvation.\textsuperscript{78}

From these last remarks it is already obvious how extremely dangerous to the spiritual life the temptation of acedia is. It represents not merely an obstacle or a set-back to man's ascent toward perfection, but threatens the very act of climbing. No wonder, then, that Evagrius calls the demon of acedia "the most oppressive of all,"\textsuperscript{79} who attacks not one part or the other of the soul, but seizes it totally.\textsuperscript{80} By fomenting a despair of being able to endure the rigors of solitude, and the desire to relax or to quit the spiritual strife, acedia strikes at the very roots of the type of life which the Egyptian monks embraced as their way to perfection. In order to understand their way, it is necessary to glance at the ascetic teaching and practices of the early monastic movement. What did those monks go into

\textsuperscript{74} Antirrh., 34 and 40. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 25 and 32.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 20, 37, 49, 54, 56. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 12 and 14.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{79} DOVC, 7 (PG 40:1273); Pract. I, 19 (PG 40:1225).
\textsuperscript{80} Pract. I, 25 (PG 40:1227).
the desert for? I will try to sketch an answer which summarizes
the respective teaching of the Alexandrian theologians, the Desert
Fathers (who can only be understood within the intellectual milieu
of the School of Alexandria\(^{81}\)), the great Cappadocians (especially
Basil and Gregory of Nyssa), and Maximus the Confessor, in whose
work "many"—indeed, all the listed—"roads converge."\(^{82}\) It is
fairly accurate to say that, except for individual differences in
very minor matters, these writers agree on the main points that are
relevant to this study, so that from them a system of ascetical
theology which was common in the Eastern parts of early Christendom
can be easily abstracted.\(^{83}\)

The monks left the world and withdrew to the desert in
order to concentrate all their efforts, physical and psychic, on
achieving perfection. The withdrawal (anachóresis) was necessary
for the absolute detachment from worldly occupations and from society.
Perfection, in Christian terms, consisted ultimately in the union
with God, the knowledge and contemplation of God (gnôsis theou, or
theoría). Although this was an absolutely free gift from God, un-
obtainable by man's efforts alone, one still could prepare one's

\(^{81}\)Cf. Bousset, op. cit., p. 292.

\(^{82}\)Viller-Rahner, op. cit., p. 242.

\(^{83}\)For the following brief sketch I have used the studies by
Walther Völker, Das Vollkommenheitsideal des Origines (Tübingen, 1931)
and Gregor von Nyssa als Mystiker (Wiesbaden, 1955); Karl Heussi, Der
Ursprung des Monchtums (Tübingen, 1956); Jean Danielou, Platonisme et
théologie mystique (Paris; 1944); Chadwick, op. cit.; Maximus the
Confessor, Four Centuries, trans. P. Sherwood, Ancient Christian
soul for it. In the history of Christianity the question of the exact amount of human "preparation" or cooperation has received varying answers, from total denial to an almost exclusive preponderance. It seems that the Desert Fathers, in practice, inclined to place a rather high value upon the human effort. This "preparation" was frequently thought of as a journey or an ascent (prokópe in Gregory of Nyssa and others⁸⁴), parallel to the allegorical interpretations of Israel's fight against the Canaanite nations⁸⁵ or of Moses' ascent to Sinai.⁸⁶ It could roughly be divided into an "active" and a "contemplative" part.⁸⁷ The former consisted in the complete detachment from the world and the ensuing struggle with evil inclinations; the latter, concomitant with, but mostly posterior to the first, trained the monk in what would now be called meditative and contemplative prayer, that is, the occupation of the mind no longer with itself, but with God and the divine mysteries. Though in practice the two parts cannot be separated, they may theoretically be equated with asceticism and mysticism. The temptations, then, and especially acedia, belong to the "active" part of this "preparation" for the union with God.

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⁸⁵E.g., Origen, In librum Jesu Nave, homily 12 ff.; cf. Irénée Hausherr, "De doctrina spirituali Christianorum orientalium quaestiones et scripta," Orientalia Christiana, XXX, 3 (1933), 143-216.

⁸⁶In Gregory of Nyssa; cf. Volker, loc. cit.

⁸⁷It should be noted that this distinction does not refer to vita activa and vita contemplativa qua states of life, as the terms
The aim of this activity was, for the Egyptian monks, the so-called apátheia. This key term signalizes a freedom from disturbing passions, the control of the senses, desires, feelings, and memory by reason.\(^8\) To obtain it, the monk had, in particular, to fight against, and control, his pathe, his passions. These are, according to Gregory of Nyssa, affections of the irrational part of the soul, which have their origin in sense impressions or in memory and produce a desire, often accompanied by pleasure. When these affections have grown so far, it is the duty of reason, the rational part of the soul, to judge them and separate the good from the harmful. If reason decides itself for the bad, man commits a sin of thought. If, however, reason is incapable of constantly watching the affections and controlling them, man's soul remains in a state of imperfection. For reason is then subject to the ebb and flow of affections, which tyrannize it and keep it in a state of turmoil. It is precisely this imperfection which the Desert Fathers tried to overcome. Their goal was a state of peace (hesuchia), where the pathe were kept under the unswerving control of reason. This state of apátheia is not the same as the Stoic "impassiveness," but rather the freedom from perturbation and, especially, from evil thoughts.

These latter require further discussion. According to the Fathers' teaching, the pathē were morally indifferent. But they were the instruments, so to speak, on which evil powers outside man played. Such evil powers had, for the Fathers, a concrete existence and were believed to be demons. The demonology of early Christianity with its corollary, the objectivation of sin, is a fascinating subject, but too complex even to be sketched here. As far as our subject is concerned, the question arises whether, for the desert monks, acedia was ultimately a psychological state or an objective power attacking the monk from outside. The answer, derived from the linguistic evidence of the texts we have so far analyzed, is ambiguous. Acedia is as frequently called a demon to whom the monks fall prey (tō tēs akedias daimoni perιnίntein), as it is considered an "evil thought" (ho tēs akedias logismós) or a "movement" of the soul (kinesis, in Origen). In Origen's work we found the two views side by side. The confusion was eventually clarified by considering acedia as a psychological state—an "evil thought" (logismós)—which could be caused by an evil spirit. This process of "psychologizing" evil is already found in Evagrius' writings; contemporary and subsequent theologians in the East and in the West furthered it more

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89 See above, pp. 13-15.
and more, as we shall see in the following history of the term. 90

The relation between the passions of the soul, demons, evil thoughts (i.e logismoi), and sin is explained clearly in the following passage from Maximum:

From the passions [pathē] embedded in our soul the demons seize opportunities of stirring up in us impassioned thoughts [logismōus]. Then, warring upon the mind through them, they force it on to consent to sin. When the mind is overcome, they lead on to sin of thought; and when this is completed, they finally carry it prisoner to the dead. 91

It must be kept in mind, however, that the moral efforts of the monks were not so much directed against sin (the avoidance of sin was considered a sine qua non of the "active" part of a monk's life) as against the dominion of logismoi and the confusion they wrought in the soul.

One of Evagrius' great contributions to formal theology was to establish a list of eight chief logismoi—the list which would eventually lead to the seven capital vices or deadly sins of the Middle Ages—and to include acedia in it. 92 The appearance of this

90 The rest of this and the following chapter will repeatedly be concerned with attempts to clarify and to systematize the psychology of acedia and the other main vices. In chapter IV we shall meet with other "psychologizing" interpretations of the daemonium meridianum.

91 Maximus the Confessor, Four Centuries, II, 31 (Greek text, PG 90:993; trans., P. Sherwood, op. cit.).

92 Lists of the eight logismoi are found in: Antirrh.; DOCV (PG 40:1272 and 1277); De vitis quae opposita sunt virtutibus (PG 79: 1140 ff.); DOSM (PG 79:1145 ff.); DMC (PG 79:1200 ff.).
system of eight vices\textsuperscript{93} in Evagrius raises the question of its provenance and ultimate roots. This problem has been the subject of much scholarly discussion and still awaits its solution. I can here only refer to Professor Bloomfield's comprehensive study of \textit{The Seven Deadly Sins}\textsuperscript{94} and the rich bibliography it contains on the subject. As to Evagrius' part in the history of the capital-sin scheme, we are confronted with two basic questions: first, why did he select from a vast number of evil thoughts the particular ones he enumerates, and second, why eight of them? In other words, what is the rationale for his selection and classification?

The proposed answers fall into two categories. Some scholars believe that Evagrius' scheme is modeled upon Stoic and Neo-Platonic patterns of \textit{páthe} and of the evils opposite to the cardinal virtues. Attempts to show this relation, however, necessarily make use of a good deal of speculation and juggling of terms. The majority of scholars, therefore, link Evagrius' list to the myth of the soul-journey, during which the individual soul receives gifts from the seven planets (which gifts are the evil inclinations); after death the soul, ascending to heaven, has to account for its moral actions at each of the seven stations (\textit{telónia}).\textsuperscript{95} This theory has

\textsuperscript{93}"Vice" is here understood as "a persistent evil thought," and not in the later sense of sinful \textit{habitus} or disposition.

\textsuperscript{94}Morton W. Bloomfield, \textit{The Seven Deadly Sins} ([East Lansing], 1952).

\textsuperscript{95}Morton W. Bloomfield, "The Origin of the Concept of the Seven Cardinal Sins," \textit{HThR}, XXXIV (1941), 121-128; Jonas, \textit{op. cit.}, pp181-187.
more credibility since traces of the myth can be easily pinpointed in mystical speculations, especially by Gnostic writers, of the first centuries after Christ, including works which reflect the intellectual milieu of the Desert Fathers. It can also be connected with the demonology of the monks. The difficulty in deriving the scheme of the eight vices from this myth, however, is the number eight. Hausherr has shown that Evagrius received this number from Origen's interpretation of the struggles of Joshua against the enemies of Israel (Deut. 7:1 ff.),\(^97\) an interpretation which is also applied to the struggle against the eight chief \textit{logismoi} by Cassian.\(^98\)

It seems, then, that at least three major elements have been suggested as possible sources for Evagrius' scheme: biblical exegesis, Gnostic myth,\(^99\) and Hellenistic psychology and ethics. I am inclined to believe that, rather than stressing one element to the exclusion of the others, one should take all three into account as influences on the establishment of Evagrius' list. It is a commonplace


\(^97\)Origen, \textit{In librum Jesu Nave}, homily 12; I. Hausherr, \textit{op. cit.}

\(^98\)He explains the number eight by adding the Egyptians to the seven Canaanite peoples, \textit{Coll. V}, 17-18. Similarly, the New Testament text applied to the eight \textit{logismoi}, Matt. 12:43-45, also speaks of a total of eight demons (one plus seven).

\(^99\)"Gnostic" because of the basic fear of the planets, the pessimistic attitude toward the universe; cf. Jonas, \textit{op. cit.}, passim.
that the period in which Origen and Evagrius lived was characterized by religious and philosophical syncretism, that the great Alexandrians --Philo, Clement, and Origen--used whatever thought-patterns were available and useful, without always harmonizing them. Does it not stand to reason that a similar process might have taken place in the creation of the eight-aliases scheme?

Whatever the origin of the formal elements contained in Evagrius' scheme of the eight logismoi, this list sums up the main spiritual obstacles that stood between the monk and his goal, the peace of his soul and union with God. To struggle with and to overcome such obstacles was the first and foremost tenet which the desert monks held in their program toward perfection. "Through the logismoi the demons fight against our soul, and they are warred against with much difficulty by our endurance," says Evagrius. The weapons in this spiritual fight are the common elements in any form of asceticism:

The askesis consists in that you in no wise take the satisfactory amount of bread, of water, and of sleep; that you promptly resist any logismoi, whatever it be, with firmness and prudence, asking God for these virtues; that you be intent upon your reading, prayer, the office, in speaking with God and remembering Him; that you do not give your mind to wandering thoughts. This is the highest degree of perfection, that your mind never separate itself from God; whenever it does so, bring it back.

Logismoi and temptations are, of course, not yet sinful. On the

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contrary, they are the means by which the monk grows strong, by
which God educates him. "As the Boreas nourishes the seed, so
temptations strengthen the soul."\footnote{DOSM, 13 (PG 79:1157).}

What has been said about the logismoi in general, applies
to acedia in particular. In order to fight it successfully, endurance
and patience are needed before anything else. Patience, especially,
should rule over all hardships,\footnote{Tract. ad Eul., 8 (PG 79:1104).}
because it "crushes acedia"\footnote{Institutio ad monachos (PG 79:1236).}
and guarantees a tranquil life.\footnote{DOSM, 13 (PG 79:1157).}
The special form that patience takes in this fight is the endurance of the cell, no matter how
tedious it becomes. "Keep your cell!" seems to be the main advice
the beginners are given.\footnote{Speculum monachorum, 55, ed. Hugo Gressmann, in Texte und
Untersuchungen, XXXIX (Leipzig, 1913); Pract. I, 19 (PG 40:1225).}
To it is added the nourishment of supernatural hope\footnote{Pract. I, 18 (ibid.).}
and of joy.\footnote{Tract. ad Eul., 6 (PG 79:1101).}
More specific remedies against acedia
are the contemplation of the Last Things and of the sufferings of St.
Paul.\footnote{Antirrh., 49.}
Three things, finally, are especially indicated against this
vice. First, the shedding of tears. Together with patience, tears
are able to crush acedia. One of the severest forms of acedia occurs when it renders the monk unable to weep. A second powerful remedy against this and all other logismoi are the "spiritual words" (lógoi pneumatikoi), that is, biblical passages or phrases which the monk during temptations would repeatedly pronounce to collect his mind and drive the evil spirits away. The model for this ascetical practice is Jesus in His temptation in the desert (Matt. 4:1 ff.; Luke 4:1 ff.). This custom has been universal during the Middle Ages and up to our times; it may suffice to point out the recitation of psalms as a remedy against temptation in the Ancrene Riwle, Richard Rolle's invocation of the Name of Jesus, the "ejaculatory prayer" of St. Ignatius and modern Catholicism, and the one hundred and fifty biblical passages in the appendix to Luther's Kleiner Katechismus, which used to be memorized in grade school and, later, remembered in the tribulations of life. Evagrius, similarly, compiled an entire book of biblical passages, the Antirrheticus, as weapons for his fellow-monks in their spiritual battle. This

110 Inst. ad monachos (PG 79:1236); Speculum virginum, 39, ed. Gressmann, loc. cit.; Antirrh., 10.
111 Antirrh., 19; Spec. monch., 56.
112 DOSK, 13 (PG 79:1157).
114 Cf. his statements in the prologue (ed. Frankenberg, pp. 473 ff).
little anthology is divided into eight sections, one for each capital
logismós, and the utility and occasion for each biblical verse is
briefly indicated. For acedia Evagrius gives fifty-seven logoi. Two
examples may illustrate their form and structure:

28) Against the logismós of acedia which knocks
the work out of the hands and makes the body lean
in slumber against the wall; (Prov. 6:9 ff.).

38) To the soul who has been enervated and weakened
by the logismoi of weariness and acedia which live
in her, and who gives up in her bitterness, whose
strength has been eaten up by her great wretchedness,
and whose endurance is close to being broken by the
violence of such a demon . . . ; (Jerem. 38:16).

Besides these spiritual means Evagrius also recommends a
bodily remedy against acedia: work with the hands. As already
shown by remarks in the monks' stories, the Desert Fathers valued
manual labor very highly, not only for the acquisition of their sus-
tenance and for charitable purposes, but also as a great help in
their struggle for perfection. The neglect of manual labor, how-
ever, is—in Evagrius—not especially mentioned among the effects of
acedia.

It has been necessary to devote so much attention to Eva-
grius because in his writings the concept of acedia has—speaking in

115 See above, p. 18 and n. 31.
chronological terms—reached its state of maturity. The majority of elements later attributed to acedia by Latin theologians and in Middle English texts are already present, in one form or another, in the Evagrian corpus. This does not exclude, however, partial developments or shifts in emphasis. Before we pursue the history of the concept further, it may be worthwhile pausing for a moment and looking back at what has been found so far.

By the beginning of the fifth century, then, acedia has come to stand for a particular "vice" or evil inclination, namely, spiritual weariness and boredom. As such it is connected with a distinct cultural milieu, Egyptian monasticism, from which the concept in its full form has sprung. It is intimately linked to the specific Weltanschauung and the purposes of that milieu, whose psychology and ascetic and mystical theology have given the term its peculiar undertones. By about the year 400 acedia has, furthermore, received its place within a more or less fixed scheme of vices; it is now clearly defined, delimited, and classified within a system. But in

Evagrius' tendency to systematization is also manifest in his division of the logismoi into those which are proper to the life in the world and those which belong to the solitary life (including acedia), see DOVC, end (PG 40:1278); and the distinction between vices of the animal part in man, those of his "human" part, and those which belong to both (acedia), see Capita cognoscitiva, 28, in Muylder mans, "Evagriana," Museon, XLIV (1931), 54. However, Evagrius' system is not yet fully consistent. His position in dividing the vices between either the two lower, or all three parts of the soul is not univocal. Draguet's attempt to make this division has no certain basis in Evagrius' texts, as this scholar himself recognizes (op. cit., p. 351). As a matter of fact, the finer psychological analysis and systematization of the logismoi, and especially of acedia, became a chief task for post-Evagrian thinkers, as I hope to be able to show.
Evagrius—and this must not be overlooked—it is strikingly evident that the concept of acedia is gained from actual experience—his own individual experience\(^{119}\) and that of the whole group he represents.\(^{120}\)

In the literature of Egyptian monasticism the term acedia clearly refers not to a lifeless concept taken from booklore, but to some existential reality.

During the centuries following the climax of Egyptian monasticism, in theological writings coming from the Eastern part of the Empire the concept of acedia shows little development. I have been able to find the word used only in a few scattered places. Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580-662), for example, mentions it several times in his *Four Centuries on Charity*, where it is obviously derived from the Desert Fathers.\(^{121}\) It seems, however, that Maximus was concerned with probing more deeply into the connections between the vices and the pæthe of the soul. In one passage he speaks of pæthe proper to

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\(^{119}\)Cf. Evagrius' frequent changes to first person singular pronouns in *Antiirrh.*, 12, 16, 21, 22, 27, 42, 53. Bousset speaks of the closeness of the *Apophth.* to the experience and tradition of the monks (*op. cit.*, p. 77).

\(^{120}\)The fact that Evagrius' writings express the thought and experience of a large part of the Egyptian monks has already been stressed by Frankenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

\(^{121}\)If thoughts of concupiscence and anger remain in the mind during prayer, acedia is bound to come, *Four Cent.*, I, 49 (*PG* 90: 969); the monk must under no circumstances flee from his monastery, *ibid.*, 52. Maximus took Evagrius "pour son principal maître spirituel," J. de Gellinck, *Patristique et moyen âge*, vol. III (*Gemioux [Belgium], 1948*), p. 214.
each of the three parts of the soul, while acedia "grasps all the powers of the soul" simultaneously. In another sententia he considers self-love as the well-spring of all logismoi. From it come first the three main logismoi of concupiscence (viz., gluttony, avarice, and vainglory), while all the other logismoi, including acedia, follow from one or the other of these three. A somewhat new element is brought to acedia by Diadochus, a fifth-century bishop of Photike (Epirus): he includes idle conversation among the causes of this vice.

Acedia is similarly called "a twig on the branches of loquacity" by John Climacus. This monk of the monastery on Sinai during the first half of the seventh century wrote a comprehensive treatise on the spiritual life, called Scala Paradisi, in which he arranged the different stages and obstacles of the way to perfection in thirty steps. Gradus XIII is devoted to acedia and collects the elements already contained in Evagrius. Acedia is "a letting-go of the soul, faintness of the mind, neglect of ascetic practices, hatred of one's vows, praise of worldly things, a calumniator of God, languor in psalm-singing; it is weak in prayers, like iron in

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122 Cent. I, 67 (PG 90:973).
123 Cent. III, 56 (PG 90:1033).
125 Scala Paradisi, 13 (PG 88:857).
service. . . "

John then lists more details of the attack of acedia. Besides the elements already known from previous writers he also speaks of headache, fever, and dizziness as accompanying symptoms of acedia during the hot hours of the day. He knows the scheme of eight chief vices and distinguishes between five proper to the solitary life, and three belonging to those who "live under obedience."" 

Equally unoriginal, though of greater importance as the fountain, for Western theologians and philosophers, of late Greek wisdom and thought-patterns, is John of Damascus (d. 749). He speaks of acedia in his Sacra Parallela, a florilegium of passages from the Bible and the Fathers, in which he includes a précis of Cassian's teaching on the subject. In a letter to a monk, entitled "On the Eight Spirits of Wickedness," he recognizes his debt to the Fathers and recommends against acedia manual work, reading, prayer, and hope for the future goods. Elsewhere he prescribes patience, 

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126 Scala Paradisi, 13 (PG 88:860). The rest of this sentence makes no sense; obviously, the text is mutilated.

127 Ibid., 27, second part (PG 88:1109); this division is Evagrian, cf. above, p. 38, n. 118.

128 John's main work has the Greek title "The Fountain of Knowledge," of which De fide orthodoxa forms the third part.

129 De octo spiritibus nequitiae, 8 (PG 95:81).
endurance, and thanksgiving as aids against this vice. Like Maximus the Confessor he derives all vices from self-love via gluttony, vainglory, and avarice. Of greater importance than these remarks, however, was a passage on four kinds of sorrow (tristitia), which directly or indirectly was to influence the further history of acedia. It will be examined more closely in connection with Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas.

John of Damascus was one of the great mediators of philosophical thought between Greece and the Latin West. The transmission of the concept of acedia to the West, however, together with the scheme of the eight vices, was the work of John Cassian. Having been born between 355 and 365, Cassian entered a monastery in Bethlehem and became thoroughly familiar with the coenobitic life. About 386 he traveled in Egypt and visited the hermit-colonies of the desert monks of Nitria and Scete. There he came to know Evagrius and his teaching—the primary influence upon John's later literary work. The condemnation of Origenism (400) and the concomitant persecution of its followers drove Cassian from Egypt.

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130 De virtute et vitio (PG 95:93).
131 Ibid., (PG 95:89).
132 De fide orthodoxa, II, 14 (PG 94:931).
133 The following account is according to Chadwick, op. cit.
134 Ibid., p. 86 and n. 2.
After other expulsions from Constantinople and Rome he finally landed in France, where, in the second decade of the fifth century, he founded several monasteries at Marseilles. For these young monastic communities Cassian wrote two treatises on the spiritual life, the De Institutis Coenobiorum (published about 425) and the Collationes Patrum (426-428).\(^{135}\) The former is a description of the monastic life as Cassian had known it from Palestine and Egypt, and includes many of the religious ideals and techniques he had observed. Books V-XII of this work treat the eight chief vices. Cassian's second work, the Collationes, deals with similar subjects, pretending to be a report of "conferences" with the most famous Desert Fathers. This work is, of course, directly derived from the tales of monks and gnomic literature of the desert. In contrast to Evagrius, Palladius, and the Apophthegmata, however, Cassian's writings have a more systematic and artistic—in short, literary—quality.\(^{136}\) Nevertheless, they continue and develop Evagrius' compilation and schematizing of the Fathers' doctrines.

In Cassian's efforts to hand down the ascetic traditions of Egyptian monasticism, the scheme of the eight vices plays a most

\(^{135}\) Ed. Michael Petschenig, in Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, vols. XIII and XVII (Vienna, 1886 and 1888).

\(^{136}\) The Coll., for example, in contrast to the Apophth., unite material on the same subject-matter and attribute it to only one Father. Cf. Bousset, op. cit., pp. 72 ff.
important part. Of the twelve books of *Inst.*, eight are entirely devoted to it. Again, *Collatio* V, put into the mouth of Abba Serapio, considers "de octo principalibus vitiiis." Each vice is described in detail, and relations between different vices are shown. Cassian establishes, for example, a genetic concatenation of the chief vices, so that each originates from another. 137 This seems to have been the first attempt to interlock the members of the eight-vice scheme, although a similar genetic concatenation of vices (outside the Evagrian tradition) was already made by Macarius, who connected impatience—*acedia*—laziness—negligence within a longer chain of vices. 138 In Cassian the vices are, furthermore, classified according to the influence of the body (lust and gluttony are vices of the soul and the body, in contrast to pride and vainglory which are only vices of the soul) and to the location of their causes (external: avarice and wrath; internal: *acedia* and sorrow). 139 This classifying tendency seems to me characteristic of John Cassian; more instances of it will be given presently.

According to the above outlined classification of the vices, *acedia* arises "without any external provocation," as is proved by the experience of the solitaries. 140 Cassian's description of this vice--

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137 *Coll*. V, 10.

138 *Homilia* 40, 1 (PG 54:764).

139 *Coll*. V, 3.

the locus classicus for the West—is contained in book X of Institutiones. It begins:

Our sixth combat is with what the Greeks call akedia, which we may term weariness or distress of heart. This is akin to dejection, and is especially trying to solitaries, and a dangerous and frequent foe to dwellers in the desert; and especially disturbing to a monk about the sixth hour, like some fever which seizes him at stated times, bringing the burning heat of its attacks on the sick man at usual and regular hours. Lastly, there are some of the elders who declare that this is the "midday demon" spoken of in the ninetieth Psalm.\footnote{Inst., X, 1.}

This vice, Cassian continues, instils in its victim abhorrence of the place, disgust of the cell, and contempt for the brethren. The monk becomes disinclined to any work within the cell. He deems his life spiritually useless and imagines that he could make better progress elsewhere. If he does not leave the place, he might even forego his salvation. . . . The slackness of his body, hunger, and the heat make him unquiet and confused in mind. He begins to think it better to go out and perform some deed of mercy: visiting the sick, or bringing comfort to a brother.\footnote{Ibid., 2.} Then the monk either sinks into slumber or leaves his cell and looks for consolation in other people's company. If flight becomes a habit, the monk will soon give up his profession altogether.\footnote{Ibid., 3-6.}
All these elements have already appeared in Evagrius and the stories of monks. Along with them, however, some new aspects of acedia occur in Cassian's works which seem to be original with him, and, I think, are instances of his fondness for classification. The first is the definition of acedia, which in Cassian becomes fixed as "taedium sive anxietas cordis." Second, Cassian likes to establish sub-divisions of the vices. Thus, "of acedia there are two kinds: one of which sends those affected by it to sleep; while the other makes them forsake their cell and flee away." Finally, Cassian summarizes the effects of each vice in abstract concepts and compares them to the members of a tribe. The unlimited number of possible sins can thus be reduced to groups and classified as offspring of the eight chief vices, which are their "roots." With this, Cassian marks the beginning of the efforts to develop the "progeny" of the chief vices, a theme so dear to the theological ingenuity of the later Middle Ages. Again and again the effects of these basic

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144 Inst., X, 24 (about Abba Paulus, who used to burn his annual work) and 25 (Abba Moses, who warns against running to older monks for comfort) are clearly derived from monk stories. In Coll. V, 23, however, Cassian gives as the virtue which is opposite to acedia, fortitudo. In previously considered writings this function belongs to patience or endurance (hupomone), cf. the list of virtues and vices in Palladius, *Vita Chrysost.*, p. 133 (see above, p. 18, n. 29). Fortitudo as the virtue opposite to the vice of acedia is frequent in the later Middle Ages.

145 Inst., X, 1; *ibid.*, V, 1; Coll. V, 2.

146 Coll. V, 11.
inclinations were to be presented allegorically as the children or offspring of persons and beasts, or as branches and twigs on the tree of vices. We will have frequent occasion to speak of this particular form of schematization, the progeny of acedia, throughout our study. In Cassian the following members are already enumerated: "laziness, sleepiness, rudeness, restlessness, wandering about, instability both of mind and body, chattering, inquisitiveness." ¹⁴⁷

Besides thus systematizing the tradition of the eight vices, including acedia, John Cassian, I believe, influenced the history of this concept in still another way. In book X of Inst.--his main discussion of acedia—he devotes only six chapters to its description. The remaining chapters 7-25 of the same book deal with the question of the monks' attitude toward work, toward manual labor. Cassian's point here is that, upon the authority of St. Paul (chiefly I Thess. 4:9 ff.), the monks are obliged to gain their sustenance by the work of their hands. ¹⁴⁸ If I am not mistaken, this would mean that Cassian considered idleness, neglecting to work for one's living (even if perhaps excused by reference to the priority of religious exercises over bodily labor), as part of acedia. Such an emphasis on otiositas

¹⁴⁷ Coll., V, 16: "de acedia [nascuntur] otiositas, sommolentia, inportunitas, inquietudo, peruwagatio, instabilitas mentis et corporis, uerbositas, curiositas."

¹⁴⁸ The same subject is the theme of Augustine's De opere monachorum (about 400), which also argues from St. Paul's doctrine and personal practice. Cassian's dependence on Augustine here is very likely.
indicates to me a noticeable difference from the conception the
Egyptian monks formed of acedia: a shift of emphasis from spiritual
boredom and dejection toward physical lassitude and plain laziness.
I do not wish to maintain that in Cassian (or in his followers, for
that matter) the concept of acedia lost its reference to a mental
state, that it became, so to speak, de-spiritualized. But it seems
to me that with this very delicate change Cassian opened the door
to a widening of the meaning of the term which was to enter the
scene after him.

Not that such a widening was unmotivated. Our investigation
has so far shown that the concept of acedia, as the sin of spiritual
weariness, originated among the Egyptian monks. It was strongly
tinged with the specific hues of the hermitic or semi-hermitic life
in the desert, which had its peculiar conditions, ideals, and prac-
tices. At the same time, it had come to form part of the scheme of
eight vices, that is, of evil inclinations common to all men, against
which everyone—monk or not—had to fight in order to achieve perfec-
tion. What shapes would the capital vice of acedia take on under
conditions different from those of the Desert Fathers? The answer to
this question will be contained in much of the following discussion.
A certain change in the conception of acedia has already been noted
in Cassian's work. His inclusion of otiositas may very well be ac-
counted for by the different organization of the monastic life in the
West, i.e., its preference for the coenobium, the strongly organized
community of monks with its ideal of self-support, where the individual
member was expected to work with his hands for the necessities of the whole community. Other changes in the concept of acedia can be expected when the term, together with the system of chief vices, is adapted to the secular life, both of priests and of laymen. Finally, further developments may be looked for when theological inquiry takes hold of the scheme of vices and attempts to rationalize previous experience and penetrate and elucidate it by means of the current concepts of man and his destiny. Acedia, in its origins, reflected the experience of the Egyptian monks. We will now have to determine what remained of it, what was changed, and what was added during its history in the West.
CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACEDIA IN LATIN THEOLOGY TO 1300

During the period from Cassian to the thirteenth century the concept of acedia not only continued to live, but penetrated into theological literature beyond strictly monastic writings, so that it was soon fairly ubiquitous in the various kinds of religious literature: sermons and legends, collections of tales and exempla for preachers, meditations, catechisms, and the great summae. Anticipating the results of the investigation to be made in this chapter, we witness two major tendencies in the period under consideration. The concept of acedia underwent, first of all, a widening of meaning in order to fit new and non-monastic conditions. It became more and more a generic term signifying "the neglect of one's spiritual duties," of which the Evagrian "boredom with the cell, with the solitary life" formed only a part. The second tendency was the attempt to analyze and define its nature, causes, and divisions with increasing subtlety, and to embody the concept in the great synthesis of theological, moral, and psychological knowledge which was the aim of twelfth- and thirteenth-century theologians. The rational efforts of men like Hugh of St. Victor and Thomas Aquinas established acedia as a generic term of rather large scope. Both these tendencies bore upon acedia only
insofar as it was considered one of the chief vices, and we consequently find the term almost exclusively in texts which deal with the capital sins.

However, in spite of thus becoming more and more a generic term, acedia continued to preserve its special reference to the solitary life and to ring with the undertones which we observed in the literature of Egyptian monasticism. At the time when the concept was raised to the greatest degree of abstraction—in St. Thomas—we find acedia, in other monastic writings, referring to quite concrete states of spiritual disease, such as tedium with the monastery, the desire to roam at large, and the subsequent despair of never reaching one's goals.

These general tendencies in the history of acedia up to 1300 must now be examined in detail. The term seems to have been unknown in the Western Empire before the publication of Cassian's chief works. I have been unable to find the word in the writings of the great Latin Fathers of the fourth century: Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. St. Jerome, in his famous letter to the monk Rufinus, recommends manual labor as a help against the wiles of the devil, and refers to the practices of the Egyptian monks. But the evil to be combated by work is otium, leisure or idleness, because it provides the occasion for all kinds of temptations. Elsewhere, Jerome lists four vices, opposed to

the four (cardinal) virtues; but acedia is not among them, nor does Jerome here approach the Evagrian scheme. In a similar fashion, St. Augustine, commenting on Psalm 106:18, writes that God shall be praised "not with tedium, sadness, anxiety, or loathing, but in exultation." He uses the terms taedium, moeror, anxietas, and fastidium, but not acedia. In his treatise on the necessity of manual work for monks Augustine recommends, or rather orders, labor in order to practice humility and to acquire earthly goods either for the supply of the monastery itself or for charitable purposes. Work, however, is not recommended as a help against acedia. The evils which Augustine mentions in connection with the neglect of work are only otium and pigritia (laziness).

It is only about A.D. 425 and through Cassian that the term acedia became known in the West. The Institutiones and the Collationes had an immense influence on the religious life of Europe. Their influence was, of course, coupled with the spread of monasticism in Europe and, more specifically, with the growth of the Benedictine

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2 Comm. in Naum, 3 (PL 25:1256).

3 In Psalm 106, 18ff. (PL 57:1425). In Ep. 48, 2 (PL 55:188) Augustine warns against the opposite temptations of pride and sloth, which hinder the right performance of spiritual work. For "sloth" he uses the term desidia.


5 Ibid., XXV, 32-33.
order. St. Benedict drew largely on Cassian's ideas when he organized his community and wrote his Rule (523-26). Moreover, Cassian's two works became prescribed reading-matter for all monks. Chapter 73 of the Regula Sancti Benedicti puts them beside the Bible and the Rule of St. Basil as exemplifying, for the monks, both the good life and obedience, and as the "tools" for acquiring virtues.6 Likewise Cassiodorus, when he set up the principles for the religious and "liberal" education of his monks at Vivarium, prescribed the perusal of Cassian, especially because of the guidance which the monks could receive from the exposition of the eight chief vices.7

St. Benedict himself was apparently the first Latin writer after Cassian who used the term aedea, or rather the adjective acediosus derived from it. Chapter 48 of the Rule prescribes that one or two older monks make the rounds during the hours when the monks are engaged in the lectio and see to it that there be no frater acediosus who, not intent on his reading and study, gives himself to idleness (otium) or gossip and thus not only wastes his own time, but disturbs and seduces others. He is to be warned and, if this proves to be of no avail, should be punished, as an example to the whole community.


7Cassiodorus, De institutione divinarum litterarum, 29 (PL 70: 1142).
Besides showing the danger of acedia to the community life, Benedict's scanty remark reveals nothing of the significance which this concept might have had in his time and world. A new chapter of the history of the term opens, however, as we turn to Gregory the Great. St. Gregory adopted the scheme of the eight vices and introduced several considerable changes. The most important of them for this study are the reduction of the Evagrian octad to a list of seven principalia vitia, and the possible fusion of acedia with tristitia. In Gregory's list acedia is no longer mentioned. The word occurs only in a commentary on I Kings, which is a revised version of Gregory's oral deliveries made by one of his companions. In this latter work, acedia and tristitia occur side by side in a series of six vices. Acedia is defined as taedium cordis (Cassian's formula) and is set against the meditation on celestial goods, which can overcome the vice.

If, indeed, this tract is not Gregorian, we are faced with the strange fact that St. Gregory did not use the word acedia, nor did he include anything similar to it in his list of the chief vices. We could leave this situation with a simple statement of fact, were it not that Gregory exerted an enormous influence on medieval theology.

8Moralia in Job, XXXI, 45 (PL 76:620 ff.).
and religious thought, and that *acedia* continued to live as one of the seven capital sins—not only the concept, but the very word. It is in the light of later theology that Gregory's omission of *acedia* poses a rather puzzling problem. Gregory himself, of course, knew states of depression and boredom: not only is he one of the very few great medieval figures who have left an autobiographical account of a state of dejection which is very close to modern melancholy, but on several occasions he also described with much insight phenomena of spiritual depression. These he called *taedium*, *gravitas cordis*, *desidia*, *torpor negligentiae*, but never *acedia*. What had happened to the term?

St. Thomas, who was probably as puzzled by this as we are, states that Gregory used the term *tristitia* in the place of *acedia*. But this explanation immediately raises the question of what happened, then, to the former chief vice of *tristitia*. Modern scholars seem to agree that the two originally different vices of *tristitia* and *acedia* became fused into one, labeled *tristitia* by Gregory. As far as I see, the only basis for this view is the list of "daughters" of

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10 *Dial.*, I, 1, Introduction (PL 77:150).

11 For example: *Moralia*, I, 36 (PL 75:551); X, 18 (959); IX, 34 (888); V, 31 (708-9); II, 46 (589).

12 *De malo*, qu. 11, a. 1, resp.

tristitia given by Gregory (since he does not describe the capital vices in detail), and the subsequent history of this vice. Cassian and Gregory established the following different progenies of acedia and tristitia:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cassian</th>
<th>Gregory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acedia:</td>
<td>Tristitia:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>otiositas</td>
<td>malitia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somnolentia</td>
<td>rancor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importunitas</td>
<td>pusillanimitas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inquietudo</td>
<td>desperatio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pervagatio</td>
<td>torpor circa praeccepta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instabilitas mentis et corporis</td>
<td>vagatio mentis erga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verbositas</td>
<td>illicita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curiositas</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comparison shows that three of Gregory's terms (rancor, pusillanimitas, and desperatio) correspond verbally to three "daughters" of Cassian's tristitia, while Gregory's torpor and vagatio, though not verbally identical with anything in Cassian's list, savor very strongly of acedia. The sixth term, malitia, which I take to mean "ill-will," may be closely related to rancor; both stand for wrong attitudes toward one's neighbor. Thus, Gregory's vice of tristitia is indeed a combination of traces taken from the two Evagrian-Cassianic vices.

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14 Coll., V, 16.

15 Moral., XXXI, 45 (Fl 76:621).

16 But see St. Thomas, who considers malitia as ill-will against the divine good; cf. below, pp. 80-81.
I consider this **tristitia**, however, not as the result of a simple fusion—following the mathematical rule that two and two make four—, but rather as a new creation out of mere parts of the old vices. The reason for the innovation must now be examined in detail.

St. Gregory has given us no hint; we can therefore only speculate on the basis of the previous and later history of **acedia-tristitia**. It has been suggested that Gregory’s fondness for number symbolism compelled him to reduce the scheme of eight vices to seven. This, however, does not explain the changes in the conception of **acedia-tristitia**, and, besides, the number seven was not arrived at by simple omission of one vice.\(^\text{17}\) It is evident that despite his overwhelming concern for allegory and symbolism Gregory had more rational motives for his innovation.

Dom Robert Gillet has recently suggested that Gregory did not mention **acedia** either because he did not distinguish it clearly from **tristitia**, or because, on the contrary, he perfectly grasped its morbid character and, thus, considered it as lying outside the realm of morals.\(^\text{18}\) The latter idea—**acedia** as a physical disease—will be discussed in connection with St. Thomas. The former suggestion, however,—the conceptual affinity of **acedia** and **tristitia**—may

\[^{17}\text{For Gregory's changes in the system of the chief vices, see Bloomfield, op. cit., pp. 72 ff.}\]

to a large extent explain what happened to the two vices in Gregory's system. In the descriptions given by Evagrius and Cassian many symptoms of the two vices overlap. Some effects common to both tristitia and acedia are: dejection and sorrow, absence of the wonted elation in religious exercises, impatience in work and devotion, rancor against the brethren, and, ultimately, despair of achieving the spiritual goals. The following part of a portrait of tristitia could as well be applied to acedia:

It does not allow it [the mind] to say its prayers with the usual gladness of heart, nor permit it to rely on the comfort of reading the sacred writings, nor suffer it to be quiet and gentle with the brethren; it makes it rough and impatient in all the duties of work and devotion. . . .

This partial identity of acedia and tristitia was probably felt by the Egyptian hermits themselves. Mother Syncletica, for example, speaks of a certain form of tristitia (Greek lûpe) and adds that "many call it acedia." And Cassian, finally, begins his description of acedia by approaching it very closely to tristitia, which in his list immediately precedes: "affinis haec [viz., acedia] tristitiae est. . . ."


20 Vita S. Synclethicae, 40 (PG 28:1512) and Vitae Patrum, V, 71 (PL 73:924).

21 Inst., X, 1.
Together with this partial overlapping of the two concepts an ambiguity inherent in the term *tristitia* itself helped to frustrate further the attempt at clear systematization. St. Paul had already distinguished between a positive (*tristitia secundum Deum*) and a negative form of sorrow (*tristitia saeculi*). The former is sorrow for one's sins (or the sins of the world), which leads to penance and salvation. The "sorrow of the world," on the other hand, born of thwarted earthly desires, leads "to death." A careful distinction between the two can be found from early times on, whenever *tristitia* is defined. Only the *tristitia saeculi*, of course, is morally evil. But the sadness which results from non-fulfilled carnal desires has its roots in other vices: in avarice or gluttony, lust or pride—as a matter of fact, in any of the chief vices. Is it, then, justifiable to give *tristitia* a separate place beside the other root-sins, or is *tristitia* not rather an evil flower that may spring from each of them? It is obvious that before probing questions of this kind the Evagrian-Cassianic *tristitia* could not preserve its status as a principal vice.

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22II Cor. 7:10.

23For example, Mother Synclética's *sententia*, see note 20; Evagrius, *Ad Eul.*, 7 (PG 79:1101 f.); *De octo spiritibus malitiae*, 12 (1157); and Cassian, Inst., IX, 10-11. Later examples: Alcuin, *De virtutibus et vitiiis*, 33 (PL 101:635); Bernard (?), *De modo bene vivendi*, 11 (PL 184:1219-20).

Whether or not such questions actually were in St. Gregory's mind, I am not prepared to decide. The mentality of this most influ-
tential Church Father and the sources of his philosophical equipment have, unfortunately, never been explored to any degree of satisfac-
tion. It is generally assumed that many of his ideas came from
Augustine, but a careful analysis of details—like the present prob-
lem—shows much independence. As far as the development of acedia
is concerned, I am very much inclined to consider Gregory as one of
the early and important Christian thinkers who had to reinterpret
traditional doctrines in the light of Hellenistic, more precisely
Aristotelian, philosophy and psychology. It seems that Gregory's
changes in the concept of tristitia were largely due to such specu-
lations as I have indicated above, speculations partially prompted
by Hellenistic psychology, where tristitia (lupe) signified one of
the four basic passions (not vices). I shall postpone the further
discussion of this point until the examination of the work of St.
Thomas, where the Aristotelian theory of passions plays a fundamental
role.

Another reason has been suggested to explain Gregory's
innovations in the scheme of sins. Dom Gillet makes the differences
of ideals and techniques between Eastern and Western monasticism
responsible for Gregory's departures from Cassian. Moreover, Greg-
ory wrote his moral treatises with the view of applying Christian
ethics to more general human conditions beyond the monastic form of
life. As regards acedia in particular, this vice was apparently felt to be peculiar to Egyptian monasticism; its less frequent occurrence or less oppressive character in the West may have led Gregory to deny it the place of a separate chief vice. Later writers clearly recognized that Gregory's change was occasioned by differences in living conditions. Rhabanus Maurus (ninth century), for example, describing acedia in great detail, adds that the "sancti Ecclesiarum Dei doctores" subsumed this vice under tristitia, while the Egyptian Fathers and oriental writers had made it a special vice, "for this reason namely, that this passion has been to a greater extent experienced by monks and solitaries and is a grim and frequent enemy of those who live in the desert." Gregory's innovation, then, would reflect his concern with the moral attitudes of a wider audience outside the strictly solitary life.

But the monastic life itself in the West is radically different from its Egyptian model, and many of its ideals and practices may have easily contributed to making the "boredom with the cell" a less excruciating phenomenon than it was in the East. For one thing, St. Benedict's idea of perfection was not apatheia, brought about by unremittingly watching the movements of one's mind, but the positive cultivation of virtues (the twelve steps on the ladder of humility).  

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26 De vitis et virtutibus, III, 54, "de acedia" (PL 112:1377-78). The second half of the sentence is taken from Cassian.

27 Regula Sancti Benedicti, chapter 7.
Moreover, Western monks, unlike their brethren of Scete and Nitria, did not live solitary in the desert, but dwelled in well-regulated communities. Their anachorësis, though still accompanied by physical withdrawal from the world, consisted primarily in a more abstract and spiritualized "movement": the relegation of the will of the individual into the hands of his abbot; absolute obedience to the head of the monastery is the basic principle for the Benedictine monk. The immediate consequence of this self-denial is complete submission to a fixed regula. The monk's individuality is merged in an order, in a community life; practically every minute of his day is regulated by appointed activities. Spiritual exercises and manual work, private meditation and "public" service, alternate in a measure which tries to take the conditions of the human body and mind well into account. Allowances for natural "weaknesses" are made: in summer, for example, during the hot hours after lunch, the monks are allowed to rest on their beds—precisely at the time when the "demon of acedia" used to strike the Egyptians! This respect for the conditions of life, a fixed and diversified daily schedule, prescribed manual work, the transference of individual decisions to the abbot, and a different conception of the immediate spiritual goals—all of these factors explain why a lesser degree of emphasis was placed by Gregory upon the traditional acedia. It must be added, however, that though lacking an experience comparable to that of the Egyptian Fathers, Western

Regula, chapter 48.
religious writers after Gregory continued to use the term. The concept of *acedia*, with all the denotations it had acquired in Egypt, proved too useful to be discarded.

The immediate consequence of Gregory's innovation with regard to *acedia-tristitia* was a long-lasting confusion of terms and of the number of vices to be included in the list of chief sins. Until the twelfth century the Cassianic and the Gregorian schemes continued to live side by side, sometimes even in the same writer.29

Thus, many Carolingian theologians and penitentials speak of eight vices and list *acedia* and *tristitia* separately.30 Others present a list of seven capital sins, in which *acedia* does not appear.31

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29 For a detailed account of the history of the seven sins in that period, cf. Bloomfield, op. cit., pp. 77-104.


A very popular anonymous work is of some interest in this connection. I am referring to the treatise *De vitiorum virtutumque conflictu*, which appears in Migne's *Patrologia* several times and is attributed to
few instances one of the seven vices is called acedia, while the term tristitia is not used (except, of course, in the definition). Finally, from the twelfth century on, the sevenen list becomes generally accepted and acedia is given as a synonym for tristitia.

Peter Lombard, for example, calls the vice "acedia vel tristitia." This seems to have been the solution to the problem of simultaneously following the authority of St. Gregory and preserving the very useful concept of acedia. What this vice meant to the twelfth-century theologian we shall see presently in the discussion of St. Thomas.

Before looking at the Summa Theologica, however, we must briefly examine the appearance of acedia in theological literature up to about 1200. A few generalized remarks will be sufficient here.

various authors (PL 17:1149 ff.; 83:1131 ff.; 143:559 ff.). It is a word-battle between twenty-four (or twenty-five, in PL 143) vices and their opposite virtues. Each vice raises several tempting questions according to its nature and is properly rebutted by the corresponding virtue. The model of this particular debate seems to be a passage in Gregory ("False arguments, by which the capital vices strive to deceive our mind," Moral., XXXI, 45, 90, PL 76:622). The order of the twenty-four vices is such that they can be, without any tour de force, divided into the seven chief sins according to St. Gregory. To acedia-tristitia would belong: tristitia, torpor vel ignavia, inquieta (or dissoluta) vagatio, and desperatio. Acedia is not mentioned by name.

32Hugh of St. Victor, Expositio in Abdiam, 2 (PL 175:383-384), and De sacramentis, II, 13, 1 (PL 176:525-526); but compare notes 31 and 33.

33Sententiae, II, 42, 8 (PL 192:753). Hugh has "tristitia seu acedia" in De fructibus carnis et spiritus, 7 (PL 176:1000). I have found this formula also in a much earlier document, the ninth-century Capitula ad presbyteros parochiae suae, by Bishop Theodulf of Orleans, ch. 31 (PL 105:201).
because, first, the discussion of this vice in ecclesiastical writers of this period is extremely repetitious, consisting mostly of the same formulae; and second, the more interesting speculations about acedia which arose in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are gathered up in the work of Thomas Aquinas and will be considered in that connection.

In religious writings after St. Gregory the term acedia is very seldom used apart from lists and discussions of the seven capital sins. This does not mean that the psychological states known by that name were unfamiliar to the writers. But whenever some author speaks of spiritual boredom, weariness, undefined sorrow, the desire to quit, and similar phenomena which the desert monks attributed to acedia, he prefers to use different and more specific terms. Jerome and Gregory have already been mentioned as examples. In Gregory and others desidia frequently seems to mean the same as acedia. Caesar of Arles uses it ("desidia tepor vel negligentiae") in a series of six vices, the others being lust, wrath, sorrow (tristitia), avarice, and envy. Peter Damian, in the tenth century, still gives it the same denotation. Other words applied to descriptions of what looks like acedia are:


36 De perfectione monachorum, II, V, and VII, in Paolo Brezzi (ed.), "De divina omnipotentia" e altri opuscoli (Florence, 1943), pp. 208,
exactly like acedia are s e g n ities and torpor animi. More com-
monly, specific terms for separate symptoms usually attributed to
acedia are used: t e d i u m , moeror, ignavia, negligentia, o t i o s ita s , and others. St. Bernard, in one of his sermons, equates
acedia with torpor and t e d i u m , but in another sermon, where he

224, and 240; Sermo 74 (PL 144:919). Torpor desidiae is responsible
for the mechanical recitation of prayers in Adam Abbas (fl. 1190),

37 For example, R a theri us, Dialogus confessionalis, 18 (PL 136:
406).

38 For example, Bishop Tajón of Saragossa (seventh century), Sen-
tentiae, IV, 25 (PL 80:942), describes spiritual slumber, negligence,
and lack of vigilance as torpor animi. Peter Damian frequently speaks
of ignaviae torpor, cf. De perf. monach., III and VI (op. cit., pp. 214 and 228); also Sermo 74 (PL 144:919).

39 Taedium: Gregory, Moral., X, 18 (PL 75:939 f.).

40 Moeror: Gregory, Dial., I, 1, Introd. (PL 77:150); Peter
Damian, De perf. monach., II (op. cit., p. 212).

41 Ignavia: frequent in Peter Damian, op. cit., III and VI (pp. 214 and 228).

42 Negligentia: Boniface has it among the ten bad fruits on the
tree of vices, Aenigmata, in Ernst Dummler (ed.), Poetae Latini aevi

43 Jonas of Orleans, in discussing the eight chief vices, gives
otiositas as a synonym for acedia: "Sextum vitium acedia, id est
otiositas. . . ." De institutione laicali, III, 6 (PL 106:245). See
also below, p. 70.

44 "Ergo cum te torpore, acedia, vel taedio affici sentis, . . . "
Sermo 21 in Cantica, 5 (PL 185:874).
clearly refers to spiritual boredom, \(^{45}\) he does not employ the word at all.

In the very few passages which I have found, where the word acedia does occur apart from the sin list, the term apparently refers to very special phenomena. Peter Damian, for example, once speaks of the control over various parts of the body which he connects with corresponding vices. Thus, the palate should be guarded against gluttony, the heart against the phantasms of [evil ?] thoughts, and the eyes against acedia. \(^{46}\) Elsewhere, Peter commends an old recluse for his unrelenting fervor in religious exercises:

"It is a very great wonder that the boredom of acedia never oppressed his eyes." \(^{47}\) For Peter Damian, then, the term acedia must have meant somnolence. \(^{48}\) In his list of chief sins he has, of course, only tristitia. \(^{49}\) Some more examples of a similarly restricted denotation

\(^{45}\)Sermo secundus in festo S. Andreae Ap., 4 (PL 183:510); he says, "in vigiliis dormitat anima nostra prae taedio . . . ."

\(^{46}\)De perf. monach., XV (op. cit., p. 280); the Italian translation has "non lasciarsi prendere da sonnolenza."

\(^{47}"Illum etiam valde mirandum, quia nunquam eius oculos acediae taedium deprimit"; ibid., XXIII (p. 522).

\(^{48}\)See also his letter to the bishops Theodosius and Rodulphus, where he mentions the escape from acedia as one of the reasons for his literary work; Lib. IV, Ep. 11 (PL 144:321). It is impossible to deduce the precise meaning of acedia here from the context.

\(^{49}\)Sermo 74 (PL 144:919 ff.) and De horis canonicis, 1 (PL 145:223).
of acedia can be met with in mystical writers, whom I shall consider in the final section of this chapter.

In contrast to the extremely rare appearance of the term acedia in isolation, the word was frequently used, during this period, in connection with the seven or eight principal vices. It would be tedious to present all the documents where it occurs in such a context. The major writers of the Carolingian period who dealt with acedia at some length have already been listed. Moreover, the semantic history of the term from Gregory to the scholastic movement reflects little change. Some writers who had special interests in psychology continued to speculate about the relations between particular vices and the parts of the soul, just as Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory the Great, and others had done in scattered remarks before them. Alcuin, for example, has left one of the earliest medieval systematic treatises on psychology, in which, following the Platonic tradition, he distributes the chief vices among the three parts of the soul. Acedia, here, belongs to the irascible part: it is the corruption of anger (the passion), which man possesses in order that he may resist and combat sin. As a systematic work on psychology, however, Alcuin's

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50 See above, n. 30.

The full psychological analysis of acedia and its location in a well-structured system came only with the great Schoolmen.

The morphology of the vice of acedia in this period can best be demonstrated by the description which Rhabanus Maurus gave of it.

The eighth and last poison [virus] of the eight principal vices is acedia. From it arise languor of the mind and a harmful sluggishness, which renders man useless to any good work and pushes him to his destruction. Wherefore it is written: "Idleness is the enemy of the soul," which the devil, hostile to all good, engenders in man through the mentioned disease [morbus] of acedia; so that he injuriously causes man to be listless and exert himself the least in good works. For acedia is a plague which proves to be of much harm to those who serve God. The idle man grows dull in carnal desires, is cheerless in spiritual works, has no joy in the salvation of his soul, and does not become cheerful in helping his brother [?], but only craves and desires and performs everything in an idle fashion. Acedia corrupts the miserable mind which it inhabits with many misfortunes, which teach it many evil things. From it are born somnolence, laziness in good deeds, instability, roaming from place to place, lukewarmness in work, boredom, murmuring and vain talks. It is defeated by the soldier of Christ through reading, constancy in good deeds, the desire for the prize of future beatitude, confessing the temptation which is in the mind, stability of the place and of one's resolution, and the practice of some art and work or prayer, and the perseverance in vigils. May the servant of God never be found idle! For the devil has greater difficulty in finding a spot for temptation in the man whom he finds employed in some good work, than in him whom he encounters idle and practicing no good.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{52}De ecclesiastica disciplina, 3, "de agone Christiano" (\textit{PL} 112:1251 ff.). This repeats in an expanded form what Alcuin had said in \textit{De virtutibus et vitiis}, 32 (\textit{PL} 101:635).
It is obvious that Rhabanus relies heavily on Cassian. In a different treatise from the one quoted he defines acedia with Cassian's words: "Acedia Graece, Latine taedium sive anxietas cor-dis." But he immediately adds—and this is significant—, "... vel etiam otiositas dicitur."\(^53\) Idleness, which had occupied such a large space in Cassian's discussion of acedia, is now fully equated with this vice. Here the application of the chief vices, especially acedia, to all men, including the layfolk outside the "quiet life," has reached its culmination. In Rhabanus' description the specific reminiscences of Egyptian monasticism are omitted or toned down; otiositas is a spiritual allure which all Christians may incur, as Rhabanus explicitly affirms;\(^54\) and the essence of acedia is no longer boredom with the cell or the solitary life, but—less concretely—negligence in performing spiritual works.\(^55\) Under the concept of spiritual negligence (or "sloth," as the vice came to be called in Middle English) could then be included not only specific sins of the monk, such as sluggishness in reading and prayer,\(^56\) but

\(^{53}\) De vitiiis et virtutibus, III, 54 (PL 112:1377).

\(^{54}\) Ibid., III, 58 (1379-80); Rhabanus, extracting passages from Cassian, addresses himself to monks, but then turns to all Christians. He also proves at length, from Scripture, that idleness is a vice: "quod otiositas vitium ... .", De eccl. disc., III (PL 112:1252).

\(^{55}\) De vitiiis, III, 55 (PL 112:1378).

\(^{56}\) Ibid.
also corresponding faults which were peculiar to the life in the world: dicing, hunting, and unbecoming joking at the times hallowed for religious observances. These tendencies, only hinted at in Rhabanus' writings, were to burst into full bloom in our later vernacular literature.

Rhabanus' discussion of acedia is a typical, though an uncommonly rich, example of the treatment which the vice received by Carolingian and later theologians up to the thirteenth century. If the name acedia was preserved, its definition shifted more and more to "neglect of spiritual duties." The vice is discussed at length almost exclusively in presentations of the seven capital sins; by itself, acedia occurs very seldom. There is, however, an interesting combination of the term's two modes of existence and of the differences in meaning that have been shown, in Hugh of St. Victor.

Hugh adopted a seven-sin list. The vice we are considering he called, sometimes tristitia, at other times acedia, and occasionally tristitia seu acedia. The latter occurs in a treatise, frequently attributed to Hugh, which develops the allegory of the two trees of vices and of virtues. The vice is here defined as "an anguish of the mind which is perturbed by the frustration of its desire through something contrary,

57De ecol. disc., III (PL 112:1253).
58See above, nn. 31-33.
or, the loathing to perform a good deed well. Among its progeny of seven branches there is one called acidia [sic]. Hugh defines it as "a sorrow or weariness or overwhelming bitterness of the spirit, born of a very great confusion of the soul. By it, spiritual delight is quenched, and the mind is, as if by the beginning of despair, overthrown in itself."

I take this strange duplication of the term as indicative of two things: first, the usefulness of the word acedia as the generic name for the chief vice, and its preference over tristitia; and second, the desire to include the traditional phenomenon of acedia, as it had been described by Evagrius and Cassian, in the sin-list. This specific form of acedia is in our days commonly called "monastic acedia." We shall presently see some of its manifestations in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux and Bonaventure.

Before we turn to those mystical writers, however, we must carefully examine the scholastic analysis and schematization of acedia. From the preceding survey it has become clear, I hope, that the inclusion of the concept of acedia in a well-ordered, rational system of sins depended on the solving of two or three basic problems. First, the "psychology" of the phenomenon of acedia had to be studied.

59De fructibus, 7 (PL 176:1000-01). This definition clearly juxtaposes the Evagrian-Cassianic tristitia (the effect of thwarted carnal desires) and acedia (weariness of life).

60Ibid., (1001); the same definition occurs in De sacramentis, II, 13, 1 (PL 176:526).
with accuracy. Second, acedia had to be strictly distinguished from tristitia, in order to put an end to the confusion engendered by Gregory's innovation. This distinction could only be arrived at by finding a very precise and sharp definition of acedia and by establishing, as a corollary, the nature of its sinfulness. Such a definition ought, third, to be general enough to cover both the "neglect of spiritual duties" and the "monastic acedia."

From the Schoolmen I will choose St. Thomas as the best representative of the scholastic discussion of this vice. The sin of acedia was analyzed and arranged in a theological system by all the great thinkers of the various "schools" during the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, such as Hugh of St. Victor, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Duns Scotus. Thomas, however, ranks foremost among them, not only because of his later position of authority in the teaching of the Church, but also on account of the solidity and comprehensiveness of his work. His mature thought on acedia is laid down in the Summa Theologica; the vice is also dealt with in the earlier Quaestio disputata de malo. In both cases, Thomas discusses acedia as one of the seven capital sins.

Basic to Thomas' analysis is the definition of acedia as "tristitia de spirituali bono" (sorrow about a spiritual good). In other words, Thomas solves the historical confusion between acedia

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61 Summa Theologica, II-II, qu. 35; and De Malo, qu. 11.
and tristitia by considering the former a species of the latter.

He derives this distinction from a classification made by Nemesius. This fifth-century bishop of Emesa, speaking of the passions of the soul, distinguishes four species of sorrow (lūpe)\(^62\): one which causes speechlessness (áchos), an oppressive sorrow (áchthos), envy (phthónos), and compassion or sympathy (óleos). Nemesius obtained both the names and the definitions of these four from Stoic philosophers.\(^63\) The Nemesian scheme was taken over, unidentifiable, by John of Damascus.\(^64\) In the twelfth century both John and Nemesius were translated into Latin by Burgundio of Pisa. Burgundio then rendered áchthos, the oppressive sorrow, by "accidia, ...tristitia aggravans."\(^65\) On this translation rests Thomas' knowledge of these Greek writers and their classification of the passion tristitia, which he accepts as authoritative.\(^66\) The rendition of áchthos by "accidia" gives, of course, a peculiar slant to the Greek concept, for which Burgundio is


\(^63\)For example, Stobaeus and Diogenes Laertius. They divided tristitia, however, into nine species. Cf. B. Domanski, "Die Psychologie des Nemesius," Beiträge Baeumker, Bd. III, Heft 1 (Münster, 1900), esp. p. 121, n. 2.

\(^64\)De fide orthodoxa, II, 14 (PG 94:931).

\(^65\)In his translation of De fide orthodoxa, ed. Eligius M. Buytaert, Franciscan Institute Publications, no. 8 (St. Bonaventure, New York, 1955).

\(^66\)I-II, qu. 35, a. 8; also in II-II, qu. 35, a. 1, arg. 1; De Malo, qu. 11, a. 1, arg. 5 ff. Thomas also uses the phrase "tristitia aggravans" in the same contexts. Following Burgundio, Thomas and his contemporaries attributed Nemesius' treatise to Gregory of Nyssa.
responsible. I can explain Burgundio’s use of the term “accidia” in this context only by reference to the by then well-established tradition of the vice, its firm position in the patterns of chief vices, and its post-Gregorian connection and confusion with tristitia. Sorrow, tristitia, was numbered among the principal passions as far back as Aristotle and Plato. It is the painful affect of man’s sensitive soul caused by some present evil, such as wounds, lack of food, the loss of a friend, or the frustration of one’s hope for a raise in salary. Following Aristotelian psychology, Thomas elaborates a system of eleven "passions" and attributes tristitia to the vis concupiscibilis; but at the same time, accepting the tradition of Plato, Augustine, Nemesius, and Boethius, Thomas reckons tristitia among the four principal passions (where it sometimes is also called dolor). The scheme of four can be further reduced to the two basic affects of joy and sorrow, or pleasure and pain (gaudium and tristitia), which already in Aristotle and his followers were the final affective states to which all other affections led. Tristitia, then,

67 An earlier, ninth-century, translation of Nemesius by Alfanus (ed. C. Burkhard, Leipzig, 1917), for example, does not translate achthos and defines it as "afflictio aggravans."

68 An excellent survey of Thomas’ doctrine on the passions and its sources is the article by Matthias Meier, "Die Lehre des Thomas von Aquino de passionibus animae in quellenanalytischer Darstellung," Beitrage Baeumker, Bd. XI, Heft 2 (Munster, 1912).

69 I-II, qu. 25, a. 4, sed contra.

is the very fundamental reaction of man's sensitive nature to everything which appears to be an evil.

Insofar as tristitia is a passion, it is of course morally indifferent. Where, then, does the difference between it and the sin of acedia lie? Thomas answers that the moral value of passions depends on their object, on what the passions are applied to.\(^7^1\) Tristitia may be either pain and sorrow about some "external evil," such as a wound, being burnt on the stake, or the loss of one's possessions; or the sorrow about some "inward good," as for example the possession of knowledge, the acquisition of virtue, or the glory of martyrdom. The latter type of sorrow alone is sinful per se, while the former is morally evil only when indulged in to an excess (inordinate, or tristitia immoderata). The truly sinful tristitia, then, is sorrow about something that appears to be an evil, but is in reality a good.\(^7^2\) The true good, now—in theological terms—, is the spiritual good, bonum spirituale: whatever forms or leads to Man's ultimate happiness as it exists in the mind of his Creator. To loathe it constitutes tristitia de bono spirituali and is morally evil—the sin of acedia.

\(^{7^1}\) II-II, qu. 35, a. 1, ad 1. As to the connection between passion (which is a motus originating in the sensitive soul) and sin (which is a motus of the will, in the rational soul), see I-II, qu. 24 and 77.

\(^{7^2}\) II-II, qu. 35, a. 1, resp.; De Malo, qu. 11, a. 1, esp. ad 4.
It may be objected that sorrow about some spiritual good is not so much a particular vice, as, rather, an effect of other vices. For example, the glutton is sad about a diet which would give him only what he absolutely needs; or the proud man feels dejected when his schemes for personal exaltation fail. This sadness caused by thwarted desires had been included in the Evagrian vice of tristitia (lúpe) \(^7^3\) and thence passed into Gregory’s acedia-tristitia. But Thomas distinguishes very carefully between it and the true acedia. Sadness about some spiritual good—more accurately, about the virtues which are opposed to the other single vices—is indeed not a special sin. In the same way, sorrow and pain arising from the efforts one has to make in order to acquire some virtue or to avoid sin, do not form a special vice. Acedia rather refers to sorrow about the bonum divinum, the divine good itself. It is the direct opposite of the joy in God, the joy which accompanies (or should, by necessity, accompany) the love of God. \(^7^4\) The bonum divinum attracts and demands man’s love for its own sake; to neglect it and to be sad about it is sinful. This particular sin is acedia. In contrast, to be sad about bona spiritualia in the larger sense, such as the objects of virtues, either because one loves the objects of vices better, or

\(^7^3\)See above, p. 59.

\(^7^4\)Consequently, for St. Thomas acedia is by its nature opposed to the virtue of caritas, not to patience or fortitude. See esp. De malo, qu. 11, a. 3, arg. 7 and ad 7; and also a. 2, resp.
because the love of virtue is connected with some hardship, is not acedia, but merely an effect of other vices.\textsuperscript{75}

Using these distinctions as a basis, St. Thomas is able to clarify some corollary issues of the discussion about acedia. One objection states that acedia is nothing but laziness (pigritia)—laziness being defined as the shunning of efforts because of accompanying bodily hardships. To this Thomas responds with the distinction explained in the preceding paragraph, viz., that to be sad and neglectful about spiritual goods on account of the labors that accompany their acquisition is not acedia.\textsuperscript{76}

Another objection to the inclusion of acedia among the capital sins uses certain expressions in Cassian that describe it almost as a physical disease or defect\textsuperscript{77}—which of course could not be considered as sinful. Thomas answers with a reference to the fact that the passions are one of the main bridges between body and mind, and that changes in man's physical nature may very well incline the soul to mortal sin. The physical "defect" (which comprises hunger and suffering from heat), however, is not the same as acedia, but only the possible cause of a strong disposition for it.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{75}The subject of this whole paragraph is treated in II-II, qu. 35, a. 2.

\textsuperscript{76}II-II, qu. 35, a. 2, arg. 3 and resp.

\textsuperscript{77}Esp. in Inst., X, 1, where Cassian speaks of a fever that comes at regular hours. See above, ch. I, p. 45.

\textsuperscript{78}II-II, qu. 35, a. 1, arg. 2 and ad 2.
The sin of acedia must likewise not be confused with the longing for spiritual success and the sadness which sometimes overcomes the monk when he realizes how far he still is from his goal.\(^7\) The longing for the spiritual goods one is striving for is different from the contempt of the goods one has received from God. Only the latter contempt and ingratitude belong to acedia proper.\(^8\)

Even if it is granted that acedia is sinful and forms a special vice, so another objection says, it cannot be a mortal sin because it does not run counter to any of the Ten Commandments. Thomas' answer: "Acedia is opposed by the commandment to sanctify the Sabbath. This commandment orders the peaceful rest of the mind in God [\textit{quies mentis in Deo}], to which is opposed the sadness of the mind about the divine good."\(^9\)

Lastly, St. Thomas tries to clear up the historical confusion in the progeny of acedia and tristitia, caused by the divergent lists of Cassian and of Gregory the Great.\(^10\) It might seem that Gregory's list of "daughters" includes some that do not properly...

\(^7\)Again, the argument is based on Cassian, who speaks of the monk who, driven by acedia, is depressed because he feels no spiritual comfort, and wishes to live in another monastery which, he is sure, will be more profitable for his progress. \textit{Instit.}, X, 2.

\(^8\)\textit{II-II}, qu. 35, a. 1, arg. 3 and ad 3.

\(^9\)\textit{II-II}, qu. 35, a. 3, arg. 1 and ad 1.

\(^10\)See above, p. 56. Instead of quoting Cassian, Thomas uses Isidore of Seville, who has the same progeny in \textit{In Deut.}, 16 (\textit{PL} 83: 366).
belong to acedia (viz., rancor, malitia, pusillanimitas, and desperatio), and that Cassian's list is incompatible with Gregory's. But Thomas gives a rationale for each member of the progeny. The capital vice, he says, is related to its "daughters" as their cause finalis. When we say someone acts in a certain way "on account of acedia," we mean two things: either he simply flees what causes him sorrow and pain, or, driven by the weight of sorrow, he deliberately turns to more pleasurable activities. From this initial distinction between two psychic "movements" Thomas derives the following division:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Flight from sorrow} & \quad \text{Flight from things that cause sorrow} \\
\text{Struggle against things that cause sorrow} & \\
\text{Turning to outward things which delight} & \quad \text{spir. goods that are ends in themselves--desperatio} \\
& \quad \text{spir. goods that are means to an end--torpor circa praecipita} \\
& \quad \text{men who lead to spir. goods--rancor} \\
& \quad \text{spir. goods themselves--malitia} \\
& \quad \text{--evagatio circa illicita}
\end{align*}
\]

As to the second part of this objection, Thomas declares that there is no real discord between the progenies of Cassian and Gregory. Cassian's longer list can be easily reduced to Gregory's six

\[83\] II-II, qu. 35, a. 4, argg. 2-3.

\[84\] Ibid., resp. and ad 2.
"daughters." Pusillanimitas and desperatio correspond in both lists; as for the rest:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cassian:</th>
<th>Gregory:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>amaritudo is an effect of rancor = rancor</td>
<td>torpor circa praecpta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>otiositas</td>
<td>evagatio mentis circa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>somnolentia</td>
<td>illicita</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importunitas mentis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curiositas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verbositas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inquietudo corporis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instabilitas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gregory's malitia, finally, is almost synonymous with acedia.86

By these careful distinctions and definitions St. Thomas has achieved a rational synthesis not only between Cassian and Gregory, but also between the various historical components of acedia, and between the vice itself and the system of capital sins, current scholastic psychology, and the tenets of moral theology. The long labor of schematization, begun by Evagrius, has in Thomas reached its climax. Acedia is built—to a perfect fit—into the structure of Christian moral theology. It has received its incontestable place as one of the seven "deadly sins" and is, as such, geared to a fundamental aspect of human behavior, the passions. Thomas' definition links acedia to the affects of pleasure and pain—the very roots of the affective and

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85II-II, qu. 35, a. 4. ad 3.

86As a comparison with Isidore's or Cassian's original lists shows, Thomas left out pervagatio in his quotation in arg. 3 and also in his refutation. The idea is, of course, contained in Cassian's inquietudo corporis and instabilitas, as well as in Gregory's evagatio as interpreted by Thomas.
volitive life, and the basis of all moral action. Vices and virtues flow from the psychological principles of moral behavior, love and hatred of good and evil. The seven capital vices, including acedia, the sinful sorrow about the things that belong to God, are logically derived from these basic relations. The structure of the Summa Theologica perfectly bears out these ontological connections: acedia appears after the discussion of caritas as the opposite of the joy which accompanies the love of the divine good.

Seen within these larger relationships, the concept of acedia has reached the highest degree of abstraction of which it is capable. Thomas' definition of this vice is much less concrete than Evagrius' "boredom with the cell," Cassian's "taedium sive anxietas cordis," or Rhabanus' neglect of spiritual duties. But it covers these and other widely different phenomena, because it reaches deeper into the roots of human behavior than the former definitions did.

The meaning of acedia in the Summa appears to be identical with the etymological sense of the word: lack of care, incuria, or not-caring-for. This nearly identifies the vice with a fundamental human attitude, that of spiritual indifference, rather than with passing faults that lie closer to the surface, such as boredom, getting up late, or mumbling one's prayers without attention. The latter, of course, flow from the former. But to have penetrated to their very well-spring is,

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87I-II, qu. 84, a. 4, resp.; and De malo, qu. 8, a. 1, resp.
I think, the greatest value of Thomas' contribution to the history of acedia.

The enormous breadth of scope which the vice has thus gained must not make us overlook, however, that for St. Thomas acedia is a capital sin, and nothing but that. Its frame of reference is theology and the system of Christian ethics. Moreover, aspects that might have been included in acedia but are not sinful, do not interest the Angelic Doctor. Although physiological symptoms of acedia are taken into account (yet only insofar as their relation to sin is concerned), the connection with states of spiritual dryness or frigidity among the mystics is not weighed. Thomas' work is avowedly not a free speculation on theological or other subjects, but a philosophical exposition ab ovo (in terms of the "new" logic and science) of the sacra doctrina. The passages we have analyzed may, consequently, be considered as merely an apologia for the seven capital sins. This, of course, does not detract the least from the tremendous significance of Thomas' insight into acedia and human behavior. Only, we must not expect to find what Thomas never intended to give.

For this reason it is understandable why, not only in St. Thomas, but in almost all writings of a strictly theological nature during the high Middle Ages, we find very few or no remarks which directly reflect the experience of acedia in actual life. The

88See above, n. 77.
situation is somewhat different in works of a less rigidly systematic character, such as sermons, homilies, treatises on the religious state, books of devotion, and similar genres. In order to provide some contrast to the abstract, detached discussion of the vice in the *summae* and handbooks, I should now like to look into a few mystic writers of the same period and see how *acedia* appears in their utterances.

What has been said for the centuries before St. Thomas can be repeated here: the term *acedia* appears, outside the seven-sin scheme, comparatively seldom. Quite often other, more specific words are used to describe attitudes of spiritual sadness, tedium, neglect, etc. An example from a sermon of St. Bernard has been alluded to before. From the same century dates a very fine psychological description of this phenomenon as it takes hold of the solitary monk in his cell. But again, it is called *languor spiritus* and *taedium cordis*—not *acedia*. As possible reasons for the absence of the term I can only suspect that either the word was not commonly known before the theological syntheses of the thirteenth century, or that *acedia* bore too strong a connotation of mortal sin and was,

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89See above, pp. 65 f.

90See above, p. 67.

therefore, inapplicable to the mental depression common in the religious life.

In Thomas' days, however, acedia was recognized as (and called) one of the chief vices which religious people had to contend with. Bonaventure says,

By this vice mostly the religious are affected. Because only very few secular people know it, even though it be a vice. For, those who are attached to the world are hardly able to grasp the idea of the spiritual life, in spite of the fact that this vice is listed among the seven chief vices. But when we talk to spiritual persons, who can understand this vice,...

The vicious phenomenon of acedia is, thus, considered as peculiar to the monastic life. Above all, it usually bothers the novices most acutely. "Those recently converted from the world," a Cistercian abbot of the end of the twelfth century writes, "however fervent they may be in their devotion, often labor under the vice of acedia." For their cure the abbot recommends especially "frequent and friendly conferences with their master." At heart, the monastic acedia is boredom and disgust with the spiritual life, as St. Bernard testifies in a letter to Abbot Suger. Bernard praises Suger's improvements in his monastery of St. Denis, particularly the variety

92 Bonaventure, De passione Domini sive vitis mystica, 66 (Opera, ed. Quaracchi, vol. VIII, p. 197)

93 Adam Abbas Perseniae, Ep. 1, "de institutione novitiorum" (PL 211:586). St. Bernard also speaks of the "cooling off" of novices (Sermo 65 in Cantica, PL 183:1063), but does not mention acedia. However, for his knowledge of the term see the following quotation.
in religious exercises which Suger introduced under his rule, because "the variety of holy observances keeps at bay tedium and acedia." Speaking of the diversity of religious practices, a curious linking of ideas should be noted: in a Lenten sermon Peter Comestor states that since acedia consists of a certain torpor of body and soul, the Church, in order to help people cast off the vice, has instituted a certain motion of the body, namely the processions from one church to another, which the Pope makes almost every day during Lent . . . .

Yet processions do not alleviate the spiritual torpor which monks experience in their solitude. This can be overcome only by constant alertness—its very opposite. Isaac Stella once preached a very moving sermon, in which he interpreted morally the episode of Jesus' sleeping during the storm. When the monk gives way to acedia, Christ in his soul falls asleep, too, and immediately the storm and the waves rise: the tumult of evil thoughts, like an inner tempest, breaks loose. "Let us be vigilant, then, my brethren, let us be vigilant above all against that plague of acedia!"


95 Peter Comestor, Sermo XI in Quadragesima (PL 198:1754).

St. Bonaventure, too, preached vigilance against acedia, because this vice "takes all the spiritual good in man away." Like a worm that eats and destroys wood, so does acedia afflict the righteous man. In another sermon Bonaventure specifically mentions falling asleep in choir as an aspect of acedia. Drowsiness and actual sleep during religious services were some of the most notorious effects of this vice. We shall encounter them frequently in vernacular literature and in Caesar of Heisterbach. The latter, in his collection of exempla, recorded several miraculous stories about sleepy monks. Bonaventure also has one in the mentioned sermon; his slumbering Franciscan friar was cured of acedia by a vision of Christ carrying the Cross. In addition to sinful sleep, other common symptoms of monastic acedia are summed up by Bonaventure as follows:

Acedia is strong in a religious person when he is lukewarm, drowsy, idle, late (to choir service), negligent (in singing), slack (in fighting his torpor), dissolute (in conversation), undevout (at mass), sad (in countenance), and bored (in his cell).  

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97Sermon de sancto Nicolao (Opera, vol. IX, p. 477a).

98This traditional simile for acedia, based on Scripture, occurs already in Evagrius (De octo vitiosis cogitationibus, PG 79:1456) and Cassian (Inst., IX, 2-3), who, however, used it for tristitia.


100See below, chapter III.

101De perfectione vitae ad Sorores, 1 (Opera, vol. VIII, p. 109a). The explicatory phrases in brackets occur only in one MS.
The vice (which in Bonaventure's work looms surprisingly large) can be mastered only by the cultivation of spiritual joy. Acedia, to Bonaventure, consists in the lack of zeal and cheerfulness: "Many there are who do good works either by constraint, or by necessity, or by custom; their actions are motivated by no eagerness whatsoever. This vice is properly called accidia." Consequently, acedia "cannot be perfectly avoided among the evils of this life unless one rejoices in the Holy Ghost." This serious vice, he says, elsewhere, must be cured by "iacunditas spiritualis, ... which revives the sick and dejected mind, stirs it to spiritual meditation, and gives it back the desire for work, prayer, and reading ... Fear and sorrow shut up one's heart, but security and joy open it." To this inner joy must be added social affability:

In order to drive away, with the utmost effort, all the coldness of acedia and sorrow (in which the way to confusion lies hidden), ... you must always be joyous and tranquil in your inner and outward behavior. Do in no way contradict or resist anybody in anything, but rather acquiesce always in everything, as long as this does not prevent God's glory or the salvation of your soul.

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102 Bonaventure several times reckons acedia among a triad of nequitiae: concupiscencia (or invidia), iracundia, and accidia; cf. Sermo I, "de modo vivendi" (Opera, vol. IX, p. 725a) and De perf. vitae, loc. cit.

103 De passione Domini, loc. cit.

104 Sermo I, loc. cit.

105 De passione Domini, loc. cit.

106 Ep. de XXV memorabilibus, 15: "de fuga accidia et tristitia" (Opera, vol. VIII, p. 495a).
This spiritual cheerfulness parallels Thomas' gaudium in bono spirituali; it equally reflects the joyful and amiable character of Franciscan spirituality, so outstanding a feature in its founder as well as his present-day sons.  

St. Bonaventure has another passage on acedia which is of some interest for this study. In a sermon he speaks of seven impediments to spiritual fruit-bearing—an allegorical development of the seven-sin scheme. Acedia is here compared to dryness of the soil. The definition of the vice given in the passage is not new; but the simile opens a new aspect of acedia in the Middle Ages. Very frequently in mystic writers metaphorical expressions like dryness, aridity, lukewarmness, sterility of the mind, etc., are used for psychological states very similar to the vice of acedia. The connection of this so-called "monastic acedia" with the mystic state of dryness is important enough to merit some discussion in detail in a later chapter. We shall then see that this connection existed

107 St. Francis insisted that his brethren should show their laetitia spiritualis by a cheerful face: "This spiritual gladness likewise he loved especially in his brethren, and indeed he quite often reproved them for outward sadness and acedia." Speculum perfectionis, ch. 95, ed. Paul Sabatier (Manchester, 1928). See also ch. 96, and the Rule of 1221, ch. 7.

108 Sermo VI (Opera, vol. IX, p. 460a).

109 For example, St. Bernard's Sermo 54 in Cantica, 8 (PL 183: 1041-42).

110 See below, chapter IV.
already in the works of the Desert Fathers. The analysis of "monastic acedia" and, especially, Bonaventure's writings indicates, therefore, that—in spite of Gregory's attempt to abandon the term and the rationalizing and systematizing work of the Schoolmen—the concept of acedia in the thirteenth century still resembled closely the logismós that had once plagued Evagrius and the desert monks.
CHAPTER III

ACEDIA IN MIDDLE ENGLISH DEVOTIONAL LITERATURE

After tracing the history of acedia from its beginnings through Latin theological literature up to the thirteenth century, we now turn to the English scene and will examine, in this and the following chapters, the concept in our vernacular literature from the thirteenth century to about 1500. Again we enter a different milieu from the one previously studied, different not so much in its geographical as in its cultural and social aspects. The vernacular works from this period in which the concept of acedia is most likely to appear were, in contrast to the Latin summae and meditations for monastic circles, written for a wider and predominantly lay audience. We can expect, first of all, that extensive treatments of the concept in the English language would stress aspects particularly relevant to a less sophisticated, a popular audience. It is this emphasis, the "popular" side of acedia, so to speak, that the following investigation will try to uncover.

The present chapter deals with "devotional literature." I take this concept in its larger sense and refer to works that were avowedly written to furnish religious instruction and to produce in the reader religious attitudes and sentiments—handbooks of
categorical information, sermons and homilies, meditations, and instructions for the vita contemplativa. In keeping with the aims set forth in my Introduction, I will not present an exhaustive listing of texts that deal with acedia, but will try to draw a portrait of the vice as it appears in this particular literary milieu. The type of literature to be examined here sets this chapter off from the following, where I will consider the English mystics of the fourteenth century together with some problems raised by their writings. After that I will look at the work of some key figures of medieval belles-lettres, such as Chaucer, Dante, Gower, etc. The present chapter, then, covers Middle English works of a didactic and religious nature produced between approximately 1200 and 1450.

The concept of acedia entered English literature in various forms. The word was either Anglicized to accidie or accide, or translated with the help of words of Anglo-Saxon stock. Aelfric, for example, treating the eight "head-sins," writes: "se sixta is accidia, thae th is asolcennyss . . ." (lit. languor, sloth, remissness).

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Elsewhere he lists **asolcennyss** together with **slaewthe** (lit., slowness). Other words clearly used to translate the Latin term are: **onlusthede** (lit., disinclination, listlessness), **sleacmodness** (lit., slackness of the mind), **aemelnes** (lit., loathing), and perhaps **arhhedede** (lit., faintheartedness, cowardice). One of the Old English versions of Benedict's *Regula* has no exact translation for the *frater acediosus*, but renders freely: "thaest thaer man brother ymbe idelnesse and unnette spraece beo . . . ."
These different renderings of *acedia* varied greatly in their relative frequency. The *Middle English Dictionary* lists not more than ten documents where *accidie* or its variant forms appear (an eleventh text has *accidious*); I can add only two further texts. The earliest of these passages is in a document from the beginning of the thirteenth century, the *Ancrene Riwle*; the latest appear in texts from around 1400 (*Hilton: The Desert of Religion*). Before 1200, *asolcennyse* was the most frequent Middle English term for *acedia*. This, however, and the listed companion terms were all superseded by forms of the word *sloth*, which at least from the thirteenth century on became the standard Middle English term for the vice of *acedia*.

The passages which show us how *acedia* was translated into Middle English also indicate in what context we find the vice: in lists and descriptions of the seven deadly sins. All the information about the concept as it is reflected in Middle English devotional literature comes from longer or shorter treatments of the conventional sin scheme. This does not mean that the concept of *acedia* was lifeless.

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10 *Sloth* and spelling variants; slowness and variants (e.g., in Dan John Gaytryge's Sermon, The Lay Folks' Catechism, and *Handlyng Synne*); and *sloghthehede* (*Handlyng Synne*).
and schematized. On the contrary, it stimulated medieval minds to manifold imaginative and creative efforts. But it was always within the system of the chief vices that acedia lived and proliferated.

The most detailed accounts of the vice can be found in the treatments of the seven sins which appear in handbooks written for popular instruction. Such treatments received, in the thirteenth century, special attention by the Church. At that time the great religious movement of the mendicant orders concerned itself deeply with the kindling of religious fervor and devotion among the broad masses of the population. It began, so to speak, an active "inner mission" on a large scale. One major pursuit of this decidedly popular movement, which spread over all Europe, was the systematic instruction of the lay folk in the basic tenets of their faith. The means for such instruction was, of course, the sermon. In England the Franciscan John Peckham, Archbishop of Canterbury, decreed in 1281 that every pastor should expound to his community the cornerstones of Christian doctrine four times each year (Lambeth Constitutions). The cornerstones were: the articles of faith, the commandments, the seven works of mercy, the seven capital sins, the seven chief virtues, and the seven sacraments. To comply with the order satisfactorily, the multitude of parish priests needed a clear and simple exposition of those doctrinal matters in the form of a manual. This need was soon fulfilled.

As far as the English scene is concerned, several handbooks of this sort are extant. A good example is The Book of Vices and
Virtues. This is a fourteenth-century translation of the French Somme le Roi, composed 1279 by the Dominican Lorens d'Orléans. The Somme, in its turn, was based on Latin handbooks, notably the Summa Vitiorum of Guilielmus Peraldus. The Book of Vices and Virtues treats the Ten Commandments, the (twelve) articles of faith, the seven deadly sins, the Lord's Prayer, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the virtues, the bodily works of mercy, the sacrament of confession, and related subjects. Similar manuals for lay education are the Lay Folks' Catechism and Jacob's Well.

The missionary work of the mendicant orders also led to an increased emphasis on confessional practices. As a consequence, a second type of handbook began to appear, which aimed at giving instruction in matters of confession and helping the faithful prepare themselves for the reception of the sacrament. In these manuals

11 Its date is about 1375. Another version of Friar Lorens' Somme is the Ayenbite of Inwyt of 1340, in the Kentish dialect.

12 Ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Noloth, EETS, 118 (London, 1901). Date: 1357.


15 The several types of handbooks were, probably, mostly written for the priest, not directly for lay readers. They were intended to help preachers and confessors in their work of instructing the lay folk.
for confession and Beichtspiegel we also find extensive treatments of the seven chief sins. The *Handlyng Synne*, for example, expounds and illustrates the Ten Commandments, the seven deadly sins, the seven sacraments, and the twelve points of confession. Besides these two types of handbooks the general movement towards religious lay education produced other works of less comprehensive scope, in many of which the seven sins are likewise set forth in great detail.

Along with the desire to systematize the chief sins and their species, another thoroughly medieval characteristic permeates most Middle English treatments of acedia: the tendency to present matters of doctrine in allegories. Several types of allegorical treatment of the seven sins are predominant. The most common is the metaphor of the tree of vices with its branches and twigs. This image was apparently developed for the first time in a work attributed to Hugh of St. Victor and became extremely fashionable in the later Middle Ages. The treatise describes a tree of vices with seven branches, each of which bears seven fruits (except for the branch of luxuria, which has twelve). The opposite of this is the tree of virtues, of similar structure. Following this tradition, the


17 See Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* ([East Lansing], 1952), p. 84.

18 *De fructibus carnis et spiritus* (PL 176:997-1010).
Middle English versions of St. Edmund’s Speculum, for example, arrange the species of the sins as "branches," while the fifteenth-century poem The Desert of Religion develops a whole forest of twenty different trees, among which grow a tree of vices and a "tree of accyde." The latter has three main branches with six twigs on each. Towards the end of the Middle Ages tree-tops of this sort grew extremely bulky: on the tree of vices in The Kalender of Shepherds, a very popular almanac, the branch of "Slouthe" produces no less than seventeen side-branches with 154 "small branches."22

Another common allegorical device connected with the seven sins—less systematic but more dramatic than the preceding—is the castle image. It combines two different metaphors, the house of the soul and the battle between virtues and vices. Here the seven sins are presented as enemies who attack man’s soul. The


21 Lines 557 ff.

22 The Kalender of Shepahdes [1518?], ch. 7. In the illustration in ch. 21, however, the branch of Sloth has only seven twigs.

23 For the history and spread of this allegory, see G. R. Owd, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (Cambridge, Eng., 1933), pp. 77 ff.; and Roberta D. Cornelius, The Figurative Castle (Bryn Mawr, 1930).

24 For Christian writers the concept of the house of the soul and its defense goes back to Matt. 24:43.

Sawles Warde, several versions of Grosseteste's Château d'Amour, The Abbey of the Holy Ghost, and the Templum Domini are Middle English examples of this allegory. In them, however, acedia is not described with the same minuteness as in other allegories.

The counterpart to the house of the soul is the castle or the temple of the devil, in which the sins perform various offices suitable to their nature. Bromyard, who developed this allegory most extensively, calls the slothful the devil's chamberlain. More frequently the devil is connected with the capital sins in a different metaphor. A fifteenth-century homily presents the sins as his daughters, who are married to various classes of society. The marriage figure is developed in grand style by Gower's Mirour de l'omme. Here the sins are Satan's grandchildren (by Death and Sin) and get married to World. Each of them, including acedia (Accidie or Accide), produces several children, which are then described with much detail.

A different image for the progeny of the vices is used in the Ancrene Riwle. The seven sins are compared to animals, each of which is followed by a more or less numerous offspring. Sloth, in this company, appears as a bear who has eight "whelps": torpor, pusillanimity, heaviness of heart, idleness, "grucching," sorrow of

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26 Owst, op. cit., pp. 81 ff.

27 John Bromyard, Summa Predicantium [Basel, 1484], A.VIII, art. 4.

28 In MS. Gloucester Cathedral Library; cf. Owst, op. cit., p. 96.

the world, negligence, and despair. The metaphorical use of an animal's litter for the progeny of a vice is comparatively rare. However, it is a frequent medieval practice to liken sins and the chief vices to animals. The representation of vices as beasts, seemingly a simple literary topos, has in reality anthropological implications which still await clarification. For example, on the one hand the Egyptian monks apparently believed that individual sins, being demons and therefore objective powers outside man, could actually enter the bodies of animals.  

On the other hand, it is equally true that from classical antiquity on the personification of vices has been nothing but a literary device, based on the similarity between human behavior and the characteristic traits of certain animals. But Christian exegesis, believing in the analogical relationship between the different levels of Creation, gave that similarity an ontological foundation. Medieval thinkers were convinced that the animal world, like a mirror, faithfully reflected human morals. Certain animals, then, mirror man's vices, not because of superficial resemblances observed by philosophers and poets, but because they were created for man's instruction. A

30 Cf. Bloomfield, op. cit., p. 79 and n.

literary product of this belief is the Physiologus, in which the nature of a number of animals is—according to the light of medieval science—described and subsequently explained as symbolic of some moral or spiritual truth. I have not been able to find any reference to acedia in the Physiologus tradition itself, but the procedure is frequently used in devotional literature. Conventionally, the vice of sloth is represented by the ass: "A slow man is lyche an asse, for an asse louyth weel ese, and is lothe to trauayle, but he be con-
streynd therto." Besides the ass and the bear, sometimes the dog serves to illustrate sloth or slothful behavior.

A final allegory of the seven sins which had some importance for Middle English devotional literature was the image of the Apocalyptic Beast. The French Somme le Roi, following traditional exegesis, interpreted the seven heads of the beast as the seven "head-sins." The same image was developed by the Middle English versions

32 Jacob's Well, EETS, 115, p. 103.


34 Rev. 12:3. For the history of this interpretation, see Bloomfield, op. cit., p. 85.
of the Somme, notably The Book of Vices and Virtues and Avenbite of Inwyth. Here, sloth forms the fourth head and possesses three branches with eighteen subdivisions. In this allegory, the figure of the beast furnishes only the starting point. During the further development of the seven sins and their progeny it is almost completely lost sight of.

A more consistent allegorical development together with the systematic exposition of the seven sins is achieved in Jacob's Well. This fifteenth-century work intends to teach, by way of an extended allegory, "the Cleansing of Man's Conscience." The sinful nature of man is likened to a pit full of ooze and mire. It must be purified step by step with the tools which well-cleaners use, until it becomes a fit receptacle for the limpid water of grace. First of all, the slime of the Great Curse must be removed. Then we reach the mire of deadly sin, where heavy toil begins with shovel, spade and pickax, in order to clean every inch of the well. This is the struggle against the seven vices. When they are cleared away, we arrive at the firm ground of the virtues, in which there are seven water-springs (the gifts of the Holy Ghost). But the five water-gates (the senses) must be shut against temptation, to keep the fresh water in the well. Then the pit must be curbed with stones (the works of mercy). Finally, the Lord can rest there and bring with Him the water of Grace.

The allegory alludes, of course, to Jesus' rest at Jacob's Well, see John 4:5 ff.
Within this allegorical fable are thus treated: repentance, the seven deadly sins, confession, the senses, the seven virtues, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the articles of faith, the sacraments, the Ten Commandments, the works of mercy, and the Pater Noster—in short, all the catechetical material appointed for popular instruction. Acedia appears with a long progeny divided into three parts: sins that hinder the beginning of a good life, those that prevent the amendment of a bad life, and finally those that bring man to an evil end. Under the three headings appear eighteen species of Sloth, which are typical of all Middle English handbooks of religious instruction:

A) Forms of acedia which hinder the beginning of a good life.
   1) "Slugnesse": sluggishness, laziness in the performance of religious duties.
   2) "Tendirnesse of flesch": too much consideration for the comfort of the body.
   3) "Ydelnesse": idleness or engagement in idle activities.
   4) "Heuynesse of herte": torpor of the mind in performing spiritual deeds.
   5) "Lythernes of herte": reluctance to repent or to confess.
   6) "Arwenesse": cowardice in the undertaking of spiritual works.

B) Forms of acedia which prevent the amendment of a bad life.
   1) "Tarying": delay of repentance and good works.
   2) "Reccheleshed or neclygence": lack of care for spiritual obligations, neglect in fulfilling spiritual and worldly duties.
3) "Forgetyng": forgetting sins in confession.

4) "Sleuth": faintheartedness (sleuth in this text is distinguished from slowthe).

5) "Lacches": slackness, laxness of the will in relation to spiritual goods.

6) "Faylyng": slackness in service, neglect of professional duties.

C) Forms of acedia which bring man to a bad end.

1) "Vnbuxomnes": disobedience to authorities.

2) "Vnpacyence": impatience, unwillingness to accept what antagonizes one's own will.

3) "Grucchyng": murmuring.

4) "Heuynes": grief at unpleasant words and deeds of others, almost oversensitivity.

5) "Langure": despondency, exaggerated sorrow.

6) "Wanhope": despair of God's mercy.

The model for this large progeny of acedia and for the tripartite scheme is found in the French Somme le Roi and its Middle English versions. It influenced, besides Jacob's Well, also the allegorical poem The Desert of Religion and represents already a fairly advanced stage in the vernacular elaboration of the progeny. In other Middle English texts acedia is given a smaller number of daughters or branches, and a variety of combinations occur. Later, near the end of the fifteenth century, the tendency seems to have been—at least in popular works—towards an almost boundless enumeration of species of
Sloth; the *Kalender of Shepherds* with its 154 "small branches" of the vice is an illustration of this trend.

The abstract concepts listed in such progenies, however, give a very incomplete picture of the way in which *acedia* appeared in Middle English devotional literature. Common people are taught with profit not by abstract ideas like "lacches" and "arwenease," but by concrete examples and vivid illustration. In accordance with this didactic principle, most of the handbooks, all relevant sermons, and many other works of religious instruction are full of concrete exemplifications of sloth. These furnish the material for the following portrait of the vice. The picture is based on several elements which run through the various forms of devotional literature. First, many systematic lists of the progeny, as already mentioned, offer a multitude of concrete details. Furthermore, a number of handbooks for confession and of homilies provide descriptions of sloth which read like a Renaissance "character." Finally, writers frequently used illustrative devices to bring home their point. Early medieval homilists (Augustine, Gregory, etc.) and their followers included hearsay stories and incidents or figures from the Bible in their works in order to exemplify a moral lesson. In the course of such homiletic practices the vice of *acedia* became associated with certain

similes and exempla which eventually formed the ready-made stock-in-trade of the popular preacher. The topoi for acedia which are commonly found in Middle English literature reveal much of the meaning the concept had for medieval men.

A word or two must still be said of the medieval exempla. They are short narratives about human characters, told to illustrate a point of moral or dogma and to delight the audience.\(^\text{37}\) Although many of these tales were taken from older literature, a surprising number came from the personal experience of the homilist or preacher. As a matter of fact, the exempla are one of the most direct reflections of actual life which we have from the Middle Ages. The stories about people suffering from acedia bring the modern reader as close to the actual experience of medieval men as he can get. In their reflection of experience they are comparable only to the stories of the Egyptian monks. Their value for the medieval sermon and for literature in general has long been recognized.\(^\text{38}\) Medieval authors themselves found them so useful that, from the thirteenth century on, they collected the tales and catalogued them according to the moral involved. Caesar of Heisterbach, for example, gathered the "crumbs" of contemporary events, as he said, for the edification of his


\(^{38}\text{Owst, op. cit., pp. 149 ff.}\)
Cistercian brethren. He devoted an entire book of his *Dialogus* to Temptation, defined the seven deadly sins, and told several stories for each. In the fourteenth century the material was incorporated in alphabetical manuals for preachers. Bromyard's *Summa Praedican tum*, for example, under letter A VIII, gives the nature of *acedia*, its effects, progeny, remedies, etc., and also a number of *exempla* of the vice. In such manuals the other *topoi* (stock similes, Biblical examples, etc.) were of course included, too.

The general definitions of *acedia* found in the devotional literature under consideration agree substantially with that of Thomas Aquinas regarding the vice as a wrong attitude towards the *bonum divinum*. The famous Canons of the Council at Lambeth (1281) established the following definition: "Acedia est taedium boni spiritualis, ex quo homo nec in Deo, nec in Divinis laudibus delectatur: ex qua sequuntur ignorantia, pusillanimitas, et similia."  

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40For *acedia*, see book IV, chapters 27-56.

41It should be noted that Bishop Reginald Pecock's outspoken disagreement with Thomas in the matter of the seven capital sins is an exceptional phenomenon for fifteenth-century England. Pecock repeats, rather stubbornly, the arguments refuted by Thomas that sloth is not a vice, and that it is not a separate capital vice. His refusal to follow the "great famose scole doctoure" springs from a general aversion against scholastic authorities and the medieval schemes of vices and virtues. See his *Donet*, ed. Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock, *EETS*, 156 (London, 1921), and *The Folewer*, ed. E.V. Hitchcock, *EETS*, 164 (London, 1924); cf. V.H.H. Green, *Bishop Reginald Pecock. A Study in Ecclesiastical History and Thought* (Cambridge, Eng., 1945), and Bloomfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-226.

42*The Lay Folks' Catechism*, *EETS*, 118, pp. 93-95.
Archbishop Thoresby's version, in 1557, was essentially the same, but included the absence of delight in practicing good works. Thoresby's Instruction for the People was translated into Middle English and is commonly known as the Lay Folks' Catechism. It defines the deadly sin of "slauthe or slawness" as "ane hertly anger or anoye til us of any gastyly gode that we sal do." Definitions in other texts often stress either the careless attitude toward God ("slowth in Goddes serues"), the failure to accomplish good deeds (idleness in doing good, "werynesse of goode deedes"), or, finally, psychological states of loathing, torpor, and disgust. These are, of course, only emphases on different components of the same phenomenon.

\(^{43}\) Acedia est taedium boni spiritualis, quo quis nec in Deo, vel in ejus laudibus, aut bonorum operum exercitione delectatur, ibid., pp. 92-94.


\(^{46}\) E.g., YW, II, 344.


\(^{48}\) The Mirror of St. Edmund, EETS, 26, p. 25; Avenbite of Inwyty, EETS, 23, p. 31; Aelfric's Second Letter to Wulfstan, 165.
In its essence, then, sloth is the incomplete, slack love of God, lukewarmness, spiritual torpor, "heaviness of heart"—in short, what may metaphorically be termed "spiritual sleep."\(^{50}\)

It is the opposite of alertness and vigilance. The biblical stock example for the lack of these latter virtues is Isbœseth (II Kings 4:5 ff.), who lay and slept during the day, entrusting the guard of the gate to a woman (i.e., reason grown feeble), and thus permitted his enemies to enter and slay him.\(^{51}\)

Among the common folk, spiritual slumber expresses itself best in the negligent attitude toward the Sunday observance. Sloth makes man unwilling to hear Mass or keeps him entirely away from the divine service.\(^{52}\) Very frequently the softness and warmth of the

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\(^{49}\) In order to avoid clustering the following mosaic of Sloth in Middle English devotional literature with footnotes, I shall refer only to passages in relevant minor texts and list here the major works from which the mosaic is culled: The Book of Vices and Virtues, EETS, 217, pp. 26-30; Avenbite of Inwyt, EETS, 23, pp. 31-34; Handlyng Synne, EETS, 119 and 123, lines 4237-5324; Jacob's Well, EETS, 115, pp. 103-117.

\(^{50}\) For different kinds of allegorical "sleep," see Innocent III, Sermo II dom. I in adventu Domini (PL 217:319-324).

\(^{51}\) In Middle English literature this example of sloth occurs in the Ancrene Riwle, EETS, 225, pp. 121-122. The moral interpretation seems to come from Gregory, Moralia in Job, I, 35, 49 (PL 75:549; cf. also PL 79:799). Alan of Lille (Summa de arte praedicatoria, 7, PL 210:126) and Bonaventure (Sermo de sancto Nicolao, Opera, ed. Quaracchi, vol. IX, p. 477a) also use it.

bed prove too strong a temptation. Sloth persuades priests and laymen to stay in bed when the bell rings, especially on a cold morning. *Handlyng Synne* introduces a servant, Terlyncel (from the French *Tyre-lincel*), who advises his master, apparently a priest, to rest till after matins, because Mass is enough for him. In a certain monk this special form of *acedia* produces a strange physical effect: at the time for matins he always finds himself covered with sweat and is believed to be seriously ill, until one day his abbot sees two devils light a big fire under his bed at that particular hour . . . .

If sinful morning slumber does not hinder people from attending obligatory services altogether, it makes them at least late. In his *Instructions for Parish Priests* Mirk has the confessor ask his penitent about coming late for Mass. In a debate between the devil and a man who is returning from church, the devil, trying to tempt by sloth, counsels his victim to be late for Mass. The *Myroure of oure Ladye* considers latecomers as one of the chief distractions of

53 Tirelincel appears again in Gower’s *Mirour*, 5197 ff., where he is a devil.


55 *EETS*, 31, line 1165.

56 *A dispitisoun bitwene a god man and the deuel,* lines 764 ff., *EETS*, 98, pp. 348 ff.
of the mind during God's service, and Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry has a story about a feudal lord and his lady who, by their lateness, caused the whole community to be deprived of the Sunday Mass.

Cutting short one's attendance of the divine service at the end is equally sinful and another effect of sloth. The vice often makes people wrathful when they are faced with a lengthy service. Priests for that reason speed up their performance, and laymen rush out of the church before the end. The author of the Liber exemplorum reports that a woman living in his neighborhood had a vision of her dead sister, who was thrown into hell because she had always left the church before Communion.

The time which slothful people actually spend in church is not fully used for the proper purpose. They are lax in praying and their minds are unoccupied because of their ignorance of the basic prayers, including the Pater Noster and the Creed. Ignorance of spiritual matters in general can also be an effect of sloth. The Ancrene Riwle, for example, speaking of unsteadfast faith, superstition


58 Thomas Wright (ed.), The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry, Compiled for the Instruction of his Daughters, EETS, 33 (London, 1868), chs. 28-29. This story, however, is told to exemplify not so much acedia as good behavior.

59 Mirk, Instructions, EETS, 31, lines 1173 f.

and sorcery, considers these as sins of pride if a person knows their nature and sinfulness; if he does not, then these faults "are heedlessness, under accidie, which I have called sloth.\textsuperscript{61} Jacob's Well groups this type of ignorance under "reccheleshed or neclygence."

Not even the sermon can get the slothful interested in the divine good; it bores him. He would rather listen to the dinner bell than the preaching friar. For the slothful man time always passes fast at play, with talk, or in the alehouse; but of preaching "hym thynketh an hundred yere."\textsuperscript{62} Likewise, as long as the preacher deals with spiritual matters, the community—whether monastic or lay—is drowsy; but what an awakening when res ociosae are mentioned\textsuperscript{63} or the name of King Arthur falls!\textsuperscript{64}

Actual sleep in church is one of the chief characteristics of acedia. Slothful laymen doze off during the sermon or the celebration of the Mass. Monks and nuns, likewise, are prone to fall asleep during their services.\textsuperscript{65} Bonaventure's exemplum of the sleepy frater minor has been mentioned before.\textsuperscript{66} Caesar of Heisterbach, too, gives a number of stories about sinful somnolence. Many of these sleepers

\textsuperscript{61}EETS, 225, pp. 92-93.
\textsuperscript{62}Handlyng Synne, EETS, 119 and 123, line 4534.
\textsuperscript{63}Liber exemplorum, 64.
\textsuperscript{64}Caesarius of Heisterbach, op. cit., IV, 36.
\textsuperscript{65}The Myroure of oure Ladye, EETS, ES, 19, ch. 18.
\textsuperscript{66}See above, ch. II, p. 87.
are cured by a vision of Christ or the Blessed Virgin; others are observed to be approached by a devil in form of a snake or a cat; and one, finally, gets struck by a crucifix and dies. 67

"Also sleuth the maketh a man to make noyse and ianglenge in holy churche"68—which is worse than sleeping, because it disturbs others in their devotions. Mirk's parish priest is to ask his penitents whether they have spoken of harlotry in the sanctuary. 69

But any utterance of idle words during the service is a sign of sloth and a very grave offense. Jacob's Well repeats the widespread tale of the devil who writes all idle words spoken in church on a large scroll; when he lacks space, he has to draw the scroll out with his teeth, whereby he bumps his head rather violently against the wall. 70

The same devil, Tutivillus, records another sin springing from spiritual sloth: the faulty performance of the Mass or other prayers because of haste. According to Jacob's Well (and Jacques de Vitry), a saintly man once saw a fiend in church with a sack full of

67Caesarius of Heisterbach, op. cit., IV, 29-38.

68Ms. Harl. 2398, cit. by Owst, op. cit., p. 437.

69Mirk, Instructions, EETS, 31, lines 1171 f.

70Jacob's Well, EETS, 115, p. 115. This is the famous devil Tutivillus, frequent in medieval sermons and the drama. The exemplum comes from Jacques de Vitry. It appears also in The Book of the Knight of La Tour-Landry, EETS, 33, ch. 29. The bumping is reported only in the latter version.
sylables and words which the priest and the people had skipped.

The Myroure of oure Ladye gives a different exemplum, taken from
Caesar, for the fault of pronouncing only "half words." A third
exemplum appears in the section on "the danger of those who mumble
the psalms negligently" in the Exordium magnum. Here, a cleric who
used to say his office hastily is corrected by a vision of Christ.

Another habit which wars against the right observance of
the Sabbath is whiling away the Sunday with unprofitable pleasures.
To prefer "idle" recreation to spiritual duties, either by neglecting
the latter or by indulging in the former beyond measure, belongs
to the sin of sloth. Such idle recreation includes hunting, hawking,
fowling, fishing, athletic games, chess and other games, dances and
"miracles," and vain talk and gossip. Handlyng Synne gives an
exemplum for this branch of sloth: a minstrel, by the great noise he
made, prevented a bishop from properly saying grace, and was soon
after killed by a falling stone. That this is not an indictment
of music per se is made clear by the example of Robert Grosseteste,

71EEES, ES, 19, ch. 18. Cf. Caesarius of Heisterbach, op. cit.,
XII, 36.

72Exordium magnum cisterciense, V, 16 (PL 185:1165).

73Long listings of idle activities can be found in Jacob's Well,
EEES, 115, p. 105, and Handlyng Synne, EETS, 119 and 123, lines 4571
ff.

74Handlyng Synne, EETS, 119 and 123, lines 4701 ff. The source
is Gregory, Dialogi, I, 9. The famous legend of the Dancers of Kol-
bigk would also belong in this category.
who used harp music in the right way: to confound the fiend and to remind himself of heavenly beauty and joy. 75

Besides Sunday observance another major occasion for the sins of sloth is the practice of confession. The vice, first of all, persuades men to tarry, to postpone confession till the end of Lent and then till the end of life. This is very dangerous, because, "the longer that God abideth the synful, the more felliche he smyt hym . . . , as the archer, the depper that he draweth his bowe, the grettere stroke he geueth." 76 The worst, of course, is to delay until it is too late. Handlyng Synne tells an exemplum of the squire of King Konrad of Mercia who postponed his confession until he died in sin. 77 Another unrepentant rich man is adduced as an example for acedia by Étienne de Bourbon. 78

A second fault committed in "shrift" on account of sloth is an incomplete and negligent confession. Sloth is often responsible for forgetfulness and thereby causes men to receive this sacrament unworthily. Sloth also makes them shun the appointed penance either by delay or neglect:

75 Handlyng Synne, EETS, 119 and 123, lines 4739-75.

76 The Book of Vices and Virtues, EETS, 217, pp. 175-176.

77 Lines 4361 ff.

Hyt ys sloghnes and feyntés
To take penaunce at thy dyuys [device, own will].

This, of course, means disobedience to one's spiritual authority. It is interesting to note that Jacob's Well considers as sinful and part of sloth the disobedience not only to God and the Church, but also to one's sovereign.

Negligence of this sort may occur in many different kinds of spiritual works. Its causes are cowardice and faintheartedness, the dread to undertake something which may be accompanied by hardship or require prolonged efforts. This "unboldness" is frequently a sign of lacking trust in God and His help. Thus, people often abandon the idea of making a pilgrimage in anticipation of sickness and the perils of the way; or they refuse to give alms for fear of becoming impoverished later. Such cowardly behavior the homilists compare to a child's fear of a snail that puts its horns out, or of the geese that hiss on the way. Alan of Lille lists a whole handful of biblical figures and allusions which typify faintheartedness: the man who, in Jesus' words, "having put his hand to the plough, and looking back," is not fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62); Lot's wife, turning back to Sodom; Lot, dreading to ascend the mountain; and

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79 Handlyng Synne, EETS, 119 and 123, lines 11,783-784. Mirk mentions specifically as a fault of sloth the neglect of a pilgrimage which was enjoined, Instructions, EETS, 31, lines 1187-88.

80 EETS, 115, p. 112.
Ruth, unwilling to return to Bethlehem. Caesar of Heisterbach reports six stories of religious persons whom cowardice made delay their "conversion" and the pursuit of the religious life. One of them even grew fainthearted because of the lice which were said to inhabit a certain monastery. Hand in hand with such pusillanimity goes the lack of persistence, which causes people to leave unfinished the work they begin with a good intention.

The same branches of sloth often prevent men from performing good works altogether, especially the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (almsgiving, care of the sick, etc.; praying for the dead); or they lead men to perform good works without joy and devotion. For example, the slothful fast with disgust; they have no sweetness and devotion in God's service, but feel only sadness and anguish, the "heaviness of heart." One exemplum even widens the scope of sinful lack of joy from strictly spiritual goods to any delightful object: in a certain vision a man was seen in purgatory who never in his life rejoiced in the delectabilia huius mundi.

81 Alan of Lille, Summa de arte praedicatoria, 7 (PL 210:126).
83 Mirk, Instructions, EETS, 31, line 1181.
84 "Forma Confitendi," YM, II, 341.
The morbid cheerlessness springing from _acedia_ has a counterpart in what some texts call "yuel discretion" or "fooly brennyng": an exaggerated zeal in good works which, disregarding the limitations of man's nature, may become its opposite: physical sickness and spiritual languor, which rob man's soul of all desire for the _bonum spirituale_. We shall meet this particular form of _acedia_ again in the English mystics, where it is given much attention because it is one of the subtlest and most dangerous temptations. Spiritual indiscretion, as well as other forms of _acedia_, can lead to a gradual diminution of man's love of God. This, in turn, drives many religious men and women to complete weariness of spiritual things and to recreancy. Caesar tells of several monks and nuns whom _acedia_ drives to blasphemy and to "apostasy," i.e., the flight from their monastery. In extreme cases weariness leads to states of utter despondency and the desire for death. Once more, Caesar relates various examples of mental disturbance which, although considered as effects of _acedia_, are really pathological; Caesar himself declares that not all of these extreme forms of "monastic _acedia_" are culpable.

Despondency often induces suicide; both usually rank as the final degrees of sloth. The prime example is, of course, Judas, the

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86 Caesarius of Heisterbach, _op. cit._, IV, 52-53, 55-56.
87 _Ibid._, 39-44.
88 _Ibid._, 44.
ubiquitous type of "wanhope" in medieval works. Another example of this form of sloth is Cain, who appears in Handlyng Synne. It should be added that sentiments of spiritual loss are not the only causes of despair and self-destruction; rejected worldly love and gambling losses may also account for them and are occasionally included in the discussion of acedia.  

Sloth, understood as weariness in the fulfillment of spiritual duties, which we have followed from absence from Mass to despair, has a few ramifications in fields of human activity which are less clearly religious in nature. To acts of spiritual negligence is commonly added the improper or incomplete fulfillment of the duties of one's state. The neglect of pastoral obligations, ranging from the hasty celebration of the Mass to the nepotism of bishops, usually forms part of sloth in devotional literature. These are, of course, faults in one's duties toward God, as is the neglect of parental duties. It is slothful, for example, not to teach one's godchild the Pater Noster and the Creed. Equally, it is a sin of sloth not to chastise unruly children. Handlyng Synne tells two

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89EETS, 119 and 123, lines 12,307 ff.

90Caesarius of Heisterbach, op. cit., IV, 43-44.

91The latter is especially emphasized by Étienne de Bourbon, op. cit., pp. 352-353.

92Mirk, Instructions, EETS, 31, lines 1161-62; Ancrene Riwle, EETS, 225, p. 93.
exempla of disobedient children who, by not being properly chastised, went to ruin. But faults of a less spiritual nature are included in the concept of sloth when, for example, Mirk asks the penitent,

Hast thou slowe and feynt I-be
To helpe thy wyf and thy meyne
Of suche as they hade need to?  

The negligent management of one's household is found among the effects of the deadly sin in a number of texts. Rarer is the enumeration of such specific sins as: the death of the child in the womb through "recheles gouvranice" of his mother; death in childbirth for lack of "cunning"; and "whenne there is no loue in hem that are weddyd."  

In the fourteenth century the Middle English concept of sloth began to cover several forms of negligence which refer decidedly not to spiritual, but to secular, duties. Such aspects of sloth are: the neglect to learn a trade in one's youth; profiting unjustly from other men's labor; negligence in the fulfillment of one's professional duties; and finally, sheer laziness in providing for the

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93EETS, 119 and 123, lines 4863-5044.
94Mirk, Instructions, EETS, 31, lines 1195-97.
95Jacob's Well, EETS, 115, p. 109.
96This occurs in a very early text. The soul confesses: "Hie [sloth] me hausth ofte iden eten othermannes sare swink all un-of-earned," Vices and Virtues, EETS, 89, p. 3.
97This kind of sloth mostly applies to servants. For example, Mirk asks a servant: "Hast thou holde thy covenant? Hast thou be scharpe and bysys To serue thy master trewely? Hast thou trewely by yche way Deseruet thy mete and thy pay?" Instructions, EETS, 31, lines 1200-04.
necessities of life. The inclusion of such failings of a non-spiritual order indicates the change of meaning which the term sloth was then undergoing: from "neglect of spiritual duties" to plain "laziness." More about it will have to be said in chapter V.

Two final aspects of sloth demand our attention: its effects on man's relationships towards his neighbor, and on those towards his own body. Negligence in spiritual matters naturally entails certain faults against charity. Sloth can make a man inconsiderate of his fellow-man's well-being. The slothful person is not scrupulous about forming false opinions, leading others to sin, being untruthful, or giving offense. Moreover, he is liable to get angry easily when someone else gives him good advice or when he is reproved. Sloth may even create in him an attitude of over-sensitivity, of faultfinding with everything, of constant irritability: it "makyth a man to be gretyly greuyd wyth all that men don to hym, or seyn, yif it plese hym nolt."98

Regarding his own person, the slothful bestows too much care upon the welfare of his body. The "tenderness of the flesh" is, indeed, one of the roots of sloth. It engenders dislike of fasting, unsavory food, kneeling, suffering cold, and enduring disease; it makes men prefer soft clothes to the hairshirt and saying their prayers in bed to kneeling on the stone floor. An exaggerated regard

98 *Jacob's Well, EETS*, 115, p. 112.
for bodily comfort destroys all delight in religious exercises and is often the beginning of all the other faults of sloth which we have surveyed.\textsuperscript{99}

The many branches of sloth include, of course, sins which vary considerably in their seriousness, and even attitudes that are not sinful at all. Jacob's Well, therefore, adds to its long progeny a final discussion of how to judge these faults as to their gravity. The author distinguishes between feelings of dislike which come from one's nature and hinder one's devotion without destroying, however, the love of God and of one's neighbor--which is no sin at all; lack of desire for, or aversion to, spiritual works, to which some consent is given--which is a venial sin; and leaving unsaid or undone what is necessary for the salvation of one's soul, or for the salvation of one's neighbor--which is deadly sin; the latter includes despair and suicide.\textsuperscript{100}

Since acedia is only one of man's sinful inclinations, it is natural that sloth should be connected with other vices. One of its chief branches, idleness (in the sense of un-occupation), opens the way to all kinds of temptations. Jacob's Well affirms that, if the devil finds a man "voyde in slowthe," he will enter with all the

\textsuperscript{99} Jacob's Well has an exemplum against the consideration for the body (p. 111).

\textsuperscript{100} Jacob's Well, EETS, 115, p. 114.
seven [!] deadly sins. This theme, as we shall soon see, appears
dramatized in a Middle English moral play. More specifically, sloth
is often brought together with the vices of gluttony and lechery; as
a poem of the fourteenth century says,

We loue so slouthe and harlotrie,
We slepe as swolle swyn in lake.

We shall hear more of this combination later.

The remedies against sloth which Middle English devotional
texts recommend may be divided into general attitudes and special
practices. Aelfric writes that acedia is overcome by anraednisse,
persistence in good works. In later texts, usually "holy bysynes"
is the virtue directly opposed to sloth; it is sometimes even per-
sonified in works that dramatize the battle of vices. A third
general remedy against the vice—quite different from "busyness"—
is spiritual joy. The Ancrene Riwle recommends "gostlich gledsheip,"

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101 Jacob's Well, EETS, 115, pp. 113-114.
102 "Mercy passes all things," lines 163-164, in Carleton Brown
(ed.), Religious Lyrics of the Fourteenth Century, second ed. (Oxford,
103 Second Letter to Wulfstan, 167, ed. Fehr, op. cit.
104 E.g., John Mirk, Festial, ed. Theodor Erbe, EETS, ES, 96
(London, 1905), p. 130; John Audelay, "De septem peccatis mortalibus,"
line 20, in Ella Keats Whiting (ed.), The Poems of John Audelay, EETS,
184 (London, 1931), no. 29; William of Shoreham, "De septem mortalibus
peccatis," st. 94, in M. Konrath, (ed.), The Poems of William of
105 "The Mirror of the Periods of Man's Life," lines 209-224, in
Frederick J. Furnivall (ed.), Hymns to the Virgin and Christ, The Par-
liament of Devils, and Other Religious Poems, EETS, 24 (London, 1867);
The Castle of Perseverance, passim, in F. J. Furnivall and Alfred W.
Pollack (edd.), The Macro Plays, EETS, ES, 91 (London, 1904).
together with cheerful hope, as "accidies salue." "Gostliche gladynge" is also one of the seven virtues that inhabit the Castle of Love and overcome the deadly sins. A different version of Grosseteste's Château d'Amour, however, mentions another enemy of sloth: "The firth gift is gastly strenght, that puttes away slouth." Fortitude, one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, is thus also a remedy against the vice. We shall return to it in connection with the septena tradition.

Specific practices to overcome sloth include all the various religious exercises, from mortification of the body to meditation. The devotional works stress one or the other, according to the audience for whom, or the occasion for which, they were written. The Ancrene Riwle, for example, recommends reading, various kinds of work, and the meditation upon the activity, diligence, and Passion of the Lord as helps in achieving spiritual joy. His Resurrection in the early morning hours of Easter Sunday is a very obvious example He gave for the benefit of the "slowe and slepars." Mirk suggests that the layman should at least recite the Lord's Prayer three times a day. If possible, he should hear Mass daily; but if he cannot, he should

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106 EEVS, 225, p. 129.
pray to God when he hears the bell ring.\textsuperscript{110} In sermons for certain feast days of the Church Mirk also recommends participation in the services on Rogation Days\textsuperscript{111} and devout prayer\textsuperscript{112} against sloth. A sermon (from a different collection) on the feast of Corpus Christi attempts to present physical qualities of the Host as symbols of virtues opposed to the seven sins. Regarding sloth, the homilist comes up with the following:

\begin{quote}
Hit [viz., the Host] is round and liht to throwe, Ageyn Sleuthe, that maketh men slowe.\textsuperscript{113}
\end{quote}

Similarly, the practice of uttering the name of Jesus is recommended because "it doith a-way slowness."\textsuperscript{114} Finally, a charming exemplum of John Herolt's must be mentioned here. An old hermit is asked how he can escape tedium and acedia. He explains that he possesses three letters which he reads over and over: one is black (his own sins), the other red (Christ's Passion), and the third golden (future bliss). By constantly meditating upon these, he is occupied without intermission and, thus, avoids the vice of sloth.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{110}Instructions, EETS, 31, lines 1710-22.
\textsuperscript{111}Festial, EETS, ES, 96, p. 149.
\textsuperscript{112}Ibid., p. 254.
\textsuperscript{113}"De festo corporis cristi," lines 227-228, EETS, 98, p. 178.
\textsuperscript{114}"The Virtues of the Name of Jesus," EETS, 24, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{115}John Herolt, op. cit., "Exempla de A," no. 15.
Herolt provides another exemplum about acedia, in which someone has a vision of an accidiosus who has been sentenced to forty years in purgatory. In the later Middle Ages it was not uncommon to devise specific punishments for each capital sin, in the life after death. Earlier visions of hell had spoken of several torments and occasionally mentioned the seven sins, but the association of each sin with a particular torment appeared rather late. Among the diseases by which the soul is tortured in hell, the vice of sloth—in harmony with its main aspect of slowness and torpor—is frequently punished with palsy or with podagra and the gout. Among the Kalender of Shepherds, which presents elaborate visions of the pains of hell as seen by Lazarus, has the slothful

  tormented with biting and stingings of venomous worms, the which through-pierced them in divers

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116Ibid., no. 14.

117"The XI Pains of Hell" (before 1275), for example, mentions specific punishments for groups of sinners, like the impenitent, unbaptized, adulterers, etc., but not for the conventional seven deadly sins; EETS, 49, pp. 147-155. Cf. Bloomfield, op. cit., pp. 139 and 211.


119E.g., The Pricke of Conscience, ed. R. Morris, The Philological Society's Early English Volume (London, 1863), lines 2992-93; Bromyard explains that acedia is signified by the man with the withered hand (Matt. 12:10 ff.) and that it is like podagra, op. cit., A.VIII, art. 5 and 6.
parts of their bodies, wounding them to the heart with extinguible [inextinguishable?] pain.\textsuperscript{120}

Sloth was also held responsible for \textit{dimeners} of this life: a late fourteenth-century poem considered it as a cause of the plague and earthquake in 1382.\textsuperscript{121} On the other hand, the successful struggle against the vice finds its reward in the future life. Among the joys of heaven will be "lyghtenes with-owtyn slewh."\textsuperscript{122}

The last-mentioned equations of certain joys of heaven and pains of hell with the seven capital sins are examples of a basic trait in medieval mentality: the desire to find correspondences between the components of various theological, moral, and psychological schemes. This resulted in a more or less ingenious correlation of each member of the seven deadly sins with one of the seven virtues, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the seven blessings from the Sermon on the Mount, and the seven petitions of the Pater Noster.\textsuperscript{123} The first attempt to correlate these five \textit{septena} was made by Hugh of St. Victor,\textsuperscript{124} although similar correspondences on a smaller scale

\textsuperscript{120}The Kalender of Shepardes, ch. 8. I have modernized the spelling.

\textsuperscript{121}"A Warning to be ware," EETS, 117, lines 67-72.

\textsuperscript{122}The Mirror of St. Edmund, EETS, 26, p. 40.

\textsuperscript{123}Cf. J. de Ghellinck, \textit{L'Essor de la littérature latine au XII\textsuperscript{e} siècle}, vol. II (Brussels, 1946), p. 11; Dom Odon Lottin, \textit{Psychologie et morale aux XII\textsuperscript{e} et XIII\textsuperscript{e} siècles}, vol. III, part 1 (Louvain, 1949), pp. 434-435.

\textsuperscript{124}De quinque septenis seu septenariis (PL 175:405-414). Hugh claims Scriptural authority for the \textit{septena}, but gives no documentation.
had been established before him.\textsuperscript{125} Not all theologians thought much of such correlations,\textsuperscript{126} but the septena did penetrate into vernacular literature and are even reflected in the structure of Dante's Purgatorio. As to acedia, Hugh correlated the vice with the gift of fortitude and with the prayer for daily bread. The latter connection he explains thus:

\[\text{Acedia} \text{ is the weariness of the soul, coupled with sorrow, when the mind, somewhat weakened and embittered by its imperfection, does not desire the internal goods, nor does it, since all its vigor lies dead, quicken with desire for spiritual nourishment. To cure this disease we must pray God for mercy, so that He in His wonted mildness may provide the mind, which languishes in its weariness, with the food of inner refreshment; for what the mind cannot desire when it is absent, the mind will begin to love once it is perceived by the taste of its presence.}\textsuperscript{127}

The \textit{panem nostrum quotidinanum} is, thus, allegorically explained as the consolations inherent in spiritual goods. Based on this interpretation it is easy for Hugh to bring acedia in connection, not only with the fourth petition of the Our Father, but also with the blessing of those "that hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6) and,

\textsuperscript{125}The Glossa ordinaria, for example, opposes the seven gifts to the seven vices (PL 114:129); Gregory the Great already set the gifts against a series of temptations, which are, however, different from the capital sins (PL 75:592-593).

\textsuperscript{126}E.g., Joscelin de Soisson says these correspondences "do not seem to be very useful for the instruction of the simple-minded," Expositio de oratione dominica, 13 (PL 186:1496).

\textsuperscript{127}De quinque septemis, 4 (PL 175:409). Cf. also \textit{Alleg. in Matt.}, II, 11 (PL 175:782-784).
consequently, with the cardinal virtue of righteousness or justice
(Hugh says, justitiae satietas).

The fondness for such correlations left its traces also
in Middle English literature. For example, the vernacular versions
of The Mirror of St. Edmund—a work apparently much influenced by
Hugh—set "hunger for righteousness against the sin of sloth."
Mirk explains in a sermon on the Lord's Prayer that each petition
"puts away" one of the seven deadly sins; he who prays for daily
bread does away with sloth. The same relation is established in
a sermon of MS. Royal 18 B.XXIII. More common than these isolated
correlations is the opposition of the sins to the seven chief vir-
tues. In Middle English literature sloth is regularly opposed to
fortitude (strength or "prowesse"), and we have seen this virtue
(or gift: strength is also one of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost)
recommended as a remedy against the vice. The seven virtues are
treated in many handbooks, in more or less intimate relation with the
vices, and are often given degrees or branches similar to the progeny

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128 The Mirror of St. Edmund, EETS, 89, p. 247; Hou a man schal
lyue parfytly, ibid., lines 667-670; The Spore of Loue, ibid., lines
423-426. These texts treat the seven gifts, the virtues, and the
Pater Noster, but do not correlate them with the seven sins.


130 EETS, 209, p. 53.

131 The opposition of fortitude to acedia was established long
before the twelfth century. It occurs in Cassian, Coll., V, 23; see
above, ch. I, p. 46, n. 144.
of their opponents. It is noteworthy that The Book of Vices and Virtues mentions as the last degree of "prowess" the hunger and thirst for righteousness.\textsuperscript{132}

This, then, is the picture of Sloth drawn from the devotional literature of medieval England. It betrays, again and again, the fondness which the Middle Ages had for rational systematization and for symbolism. Both tendencies, expressed in the septena and in extended allegories, go ultimately back to the belief in the ordo, the rational order lying behind natural phenomena and by analogy reflecting the order of the supernatural world. At the same time, system and allegory were extremely useful tools for didactic purposes; they proved of immense value for bringing the doctrine of the Church to both clerics and laymen.

Another general remark about the nature of acedia, as it appears in the works analyzed in this chapter, must be made. From reading these texts one may easily get the impression that acedia—sloth referred to numerous faults and omissions stemming from sheer physical laziness. People do not attend Mass because the warm bed gives greater bodily comfort; priests cannot read correctly or do not have much learning because study is a strenuous thing; parents and servants fail to fulfill their duties because of the efforts involved. In contrast to St. Thomas' lofty abstraction it may seem as if the

\textsuperscript{132}EE\textsuperscript{T}S, 225, p. 86.
acedia of popular devotional literature meant only indolence in religious matters, or a series of faults on the lowest level of man's spiritual life. Could it be, then, that in vernacular religious literature the concept had a different meaning from that which we found among the Egyptian monks and in theological works?

This impression is somewhat strengthened by the fact that in Middle English devotional literature acedia-sloth is frequently grouped together with gluttony and lechery as a sin of the body. During the Middle Ages the chief vices and cardinal sins were variously classified according to different principles. Evagrius, Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus, Alcuin, and the scholastics distributed the eight or seven main sins among the Platonic three parts of the soul. Middle English texts, in general, adopted another system of classification, although this, too, had existed before in theological writings. The Ancrene Riwle, for example, distinguishes between "ghostly" and fleshly sins, reckoning sloth among the latter. Still more common than the opposition of spiritual vs. carnal sins is a distinction based upon the biblical three sources of temptation: the world, the flesh, and the devil (I John 1:16). In vernacular texts which use this division acedia is a few times said to be

133 Cassian distinguishes between sins of the spirit and sins of the body, Coll., V, 3. Caesar of Heisterbach, a little differently, distinguishes between sins of the body, sins of the soul, and sins of both, including acedia and avarice, Dialogus, IV, 2.

134 EETS, 225, p. 86.
instigated by the devil, but usually it belongs—together with lust and gluttony—to the temptations coming from the flesh.

The grouping of sloth (in the sense of spiritual indolence) with gluttony and lechery was foreshadowed in St. Paul's "non in comestationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudicitiae . . ." (Rom. 13:13). In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the pattern of the "sins of the flesh" proved very useful to imaginative writers, especially the authors of moral plays and William Langland.

It hardly needs to be said that the close interrelation of the three sins of the flesh is one of the most common of human phenomena. Negligence with regard to spiritual matters is quite frequently the result of fleshly attachments; conversely, boredom with spiritual goods leads most easily to an exaggerated concern for bodily needs, if not to downright temptations of gluttony and lechery, as


137 Cubilibus is interpreted by a Middle English sermon as referring to the sin of sloth: Homily III, Dom. III in adventu, of the Trinity Homilies, ed. R. Morris, Old English Homilies of the Twelfth Century, Second Series, EETS, 53 (London, 1875), p. 11.

138 See below, chapter V.

139 Hence the basic law of spiritual ascent that any progress towards the mystic union with God must be preceded by exercises subduing the desires of the body. This law is also expressed in St. Paul's injunction quoted above, the passage that was crucial in Augustine's conversion.
has been the experience of religious persons from the time of the Egyptian Fathers on. A Middle English text expresses it thus:
through the sin of sloth "it fallyth that a man forsakyth his gost-lyche goedys and desireth fleschlyche lustes . . . ."140

In spite of this emphasis on the connection with fleshly temptations, acedia—in Middle English devotional literature—is never totally equivalent with bodily laziness and is, thus, not essentially different from the scholastic tristitia de bono divino. The "bodily" aspects of acedia may stand very much in the foreground in this type of literature, but the "spiritual" aspects are never completely absent. Comprehensive descriptions of the vice include faults like spiritual torpor, lack of devotion, and despair of God's mercy, and brief definitions given for acedia in sermons and handbooks agree with those found in Latin theological works.141 When popular sermons and manuals for lay instruction, then, deal so extensively with sinful sleep on Sunday morning, with people who gossip and jangle in church, or with priests who hurry through their office thinking of the dinner or the card table, I think we must explain this emphasis as due to the particular purposes of this type of literature. The works we have analyzed, and in which we have found such an insistence on deeds of religious negligence, tried, ultimately, to

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140 Quoted by Owst, op. cit., p. 436.
141 See above, pp. 107-108.
reach the layman, not the theologian. And the medieval average layman could only be instructed by concrete detail, rather than abstract principles. Thus, vernacular devotional literature had to put heavy emphasis on tangible faults rather than wrong attitudes.
CHAPTER FOUR

ACEDIA AND THE MYSTICS

As the preceding investigation has shown, Middle English manuals for confession and other devotional writings primarily addressed to the broad mass of Christian people stressed those aspects of acedia—sloth which regarded the neglect of spiritual duties, exemplified by a great number of faults against Sunday observance and against the correct performance of confession and penance. "Sloth" was looked upon preferably as a sin of the body, originating in the heaviness of the flesh and its opposition to the spirit. We turn now from works written for the instruction of the lay folk to treatises that were directed to religious people, who made it their sole purpose of life to approach the mystic union with God. In analyzing writings by Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, Julian of Norwich, the Cloud of Unknowing, and a few other similar texts from the end of the fourteenth through the beginning of the fifteenth century, I shall point out how acedia appeared in Middle English mystical writings and shall deal with one or two special problems which arise from the analysis, particularly the relationship between acedia and spiritual dryness.
Great mystical writings differ from manuals of instruction by presenting doctrinal matters in a much less schematized form. Consequently, in Hilton or Rolle we do not find carefully structured treatments of sloth and its branches that are in any way comparable to those in The Book of Vices and Virtues or Jacob's Well. Thus, Rolle often speaks of particular aspects of acedia, like "softnes til oure flesche,"¹ or "noy to do gude," and "anger to serue god,"² without mentioning the sin of "sloth."³ Walter Hilton, on the other hand, frequently discusses the whole series of the seven deadly sins as a psychological reality and lists sloth in its usual place. In the Scale of Perfection⁴ he considers the seven vices as black clothes which veil the image of man's soul.⁵ Later he likens sin to an idol, whose members signify the seven sins; "accidye," in accordance

¹The Form of Perfect Living, ch. 2, YW, I, 13.
²Ibid., ch. 6; YW, I, 22.
³Rolle usually employs the word slawnes, ibid., pp. 18, 35; The Commandement of Love to God, YW, I, 68106; Our Daily Work, YW, I, 148.
⁴Unfortunately, this very important document of medieval English mysticism has not yet been critically edited. Even E. Underhill's edition (London, 1923), based on one MS., is partially modernized. I am using her edition for my quotations. It should be noted that the first printed version of the Scale, made by Wynkyn de Worde in 1494, uses the term "accidie" for the sin of sloth.
⁵Scale, I, 52 and 55. The clothes image comes from Gen. 3:21, as Hilton himself acknowledges (I, 84), and was already used for the chief vices by Macarius, Homily 17, in Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian, ed. A. J. Mason (London, 1921).
with medieval conventions, is connected with the feet. Again, the sins are likened to beasts, and "men who are sluggish in God's service and unwilling to help their neighbours are like asses." Similar conventional treatments of aedia within the system of the seven deadly sins occur elsewhere in Hilton and in the Cloud of Unknowing. The Middle English exposition of Psalm 90, attributed to Hilton, in explaining the verse "Cadent a latero tuo mille, et decem milia a dextris tuis" (Ps. 90:7), divides the sins according to the pleasant or unpleasant sensations by which they are accompanied. Sloth ("slouhnesse"), together with anger, envy, and impatience, stands on the left side, among the "sturynges that are bitter and pyeneful.

Whether aedia-sloth is mentioned in a sequence of the seven sins or is dealt with separately, it has the conventional aspects that we have analyzed in previous chapters. The Cloud of Unknowing, for example, defines "slewth" as "a werines and an vnlistiness of any good occupacion, bodily or goostly." But while both

6 Scale, I, 85 and 87.
7 Ibid., II, 14.
8 E.g., The Goad of Love, ed. Clare Kirchberger, Classics of the Contemplative Life (New York, [1952]), ch. 4.
11 EETS, 218, p. 37.
the physical and the spiritual sides of the vice are taken into
account, the mystical writers seem to be more interested in the
effects that sloth has on the mind. Hilton stresses the spiritual
reference when he glosses acedia by "idleness, that a man loseth
affection of charity that he should have to God and to man. And
maketh him hard and unkind, without affection." This loss of
affection and the lack of devotion, so often experienced during
spiritual efforts, are, indeed, the specific aspects of acedia
which in mystical writings occupy a place of chief importance. Hil-
ton makes acedia responsible when a person—religious or lay—finds
no pleasure in prayer and meditation and performs whatever is his
duty according to his state of life with "heaviness or painful bit-
terness." Rolle exhorts the lover of God to shun idleness and
sloth:

Thou also that godis lufar art or with thi hole
mynde dissyrs to be, alway stody als mykyl as thou
may be cristi grace, not to be noyd with irksumnes,
or with ydilnes to be takyn. And if it some-tyme
happyn thate swete esines be not to the in prayng
or gude thinkynge, so that thou be of he mynde be
songe of holy contemplacyon and singe thou may not
as thou was wontt, Cees not yit to rede or pray, or
ellis some oder gude dode inward or outward do, that
not in-to idilnes or sleuyth thou scryth. Many
sothely irksomnes has drawen, to idilnes, and ydilnes
to necligens and wikkydnes.\footnote{Goad, ch. 28. The quoted passage is Hilton's addition to the Latin original, the \textit{Stimulus Amoris}.}

\footnote{Rolle, \textit{Incendium Amoris}, I, 11, in Ralph Harvey (ed.), \textit{The Fire of Love and the Mending of Life or The Rule of Living}. The First}
And the Middle English version of Benjamin states that it is by the meditation on the pains and the joys of after-life that contemplative souls "kyndelen here wille with holy desires, and distroyen theire temptacioun in the beginnyng, er it come to any werynes or heuynes of slewthe."

The expression "werynes or heuynes of slewthe" leads us to a very important aspect of the concept acedia, viz., its relation to the state of spiritual dryness. "Spiritual dryness," as used by mystical writers, designates the psychic state in which the religious person experiences no devotion, no feeling of exaltation or comfort in prayer or meditation; he is, as it were, abandoned by God; his soul, instead of bearing spiritual fruits of love and joy, lies utterly waste. This phenomenon is often designated by metaphors of aridity, bitterness, hardness, coldness, or sterility. Cassian describes the sterilitas mentis in the following way:

As we sat in the cells we were sometimes filled with the utmost gladness of heart ...; and again, ... for no reason we were suddenly filled with the utmost

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English in 1435, from the De Incendio Amoris, the second in 1434, from the De Emandacione Vitae, of Richard Rolle ... by Richard Misyn ..., EETS, 106 (London, 1896).


16Ibid., pp. 24-25.

grief, and weighed down with unreasonable depression [moerore], so that we not only felt as if we ourselves were overcome with such feelings, but also our cell grew dreadful, reading palled upon us, aye and our very prayers were offered up unsteadily and vaguely, and almost as if we were intoxicated: so that while we were groaning and endeavouring to restore ourselves to our former disposition, our mind was unable to do this, and the more earnestly it sought to fix again its gaze upon God, so was it the more vehemently carried away to wandering thoughts ... .

The close similarity of the phenomenon here described to the attacks of the demon of acedia makes it easy to identify acedia with spiritual dryness. In reality, these are two entirely different things. If we may oversimplify matters for a moment, we can say that acedia designates a deadly sin, i.e., a fault on the part of man's will against God's commandment. True dryness, on the other hand, is an effect of God's deliberate working in man's soul which occurs in spite of man's full and strenuous cooperation. The slothful, like the lukewarm, foregoes his spiritual riches and does not really care for them, while the mystic in the state of dryness cares very much and is deeply frustrated by not feeling the presence of God, his lover. St. John of the Cross has given this distinction its classical form:

It is evident that this disgust (sinsabor) and dryness (sequedad) do not come from slackness (floiedad) and tepidity (tibieza); for, tepidity is characterized by not caring much or having an inner solicitude for the things of God. Therefore, there is a great difference between dryness and tepidity. Because the state

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of tepidity implies great negligence and slackness in will and mind, without willingness to serve God; but purgative dryness is accompanied by the usual willingness, with concern and sorrow, as I have said, that one does not serve God.19

What St. John here says of tepidity (tibieza) is true also of acedia, except that the sin of sloth is a more outspoken and conscious form of the spiritual lack of care.20

The distinction between acedia and dryness was, in a way, already formulated by St. Thomas in his treatment of the sin. To the objection that acedia, being the absence of devotion in spiritual works, cannot be sinful because devotion is a free gift of grace, Thomas replies that devotion, indeed, is a gift from God and that, consequently, its lack cannot be a sin; but that true acedia consists in the neglect of whatever man is capable of doing to receive the grace of devotion, and therefore is sinful. In other words, absence

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19Noche Oscura, I, 9, in Obras del Místico Doctor S. Juan de la Cruz, ed. Gerardo de San Juan de la Cruz (Toledo, 1912), vol. II, p. 29.

20Cf. Gonzague Truc, "Les états mystiques négatifs (La tiédeur—l'acédia—la secheresse)," Revue philosophique, LXXIII (1912), 610-628. Truc considers lukewarmness, acedia, and dryness as three steps on a ladder of negative mystical states. From the psychologist's point of view, he argues, the three states differ from one another only as nuances of the same emotional state: the felt absence of grace and spiritual comfort. However, it cannot be overlooked that moral and ascetic theologians do distinguish, at least between acedia and dryness.
of sensible consolation is not the same as acedia, but it may come from it. 21

While Thomas' distinction clearly shows the difference between dryness and sloth, it establishes, at the same time, the affinity of the two states. The relationship is one of possible causality: acedia-sloth may be a cause of spiritual dryness. This insight into the nature and the laws of spiritual progress came—like so many others—from the Desert Fathers. To the question why the monk's soul oscillates between states of joy and dejection, Cassian has Abbas Daniel reply that sterilitas mentis springs from one of three causes: man's negligence, the devil's assault, or God's will and trial.

From carelessness [negligentia] on our part, when through our own faults, coldness has come upon us [nistro vitio tepore praecedente], and we have behaved carelessly and hastily, and owing to slothful idleness [per ignaviam et desidiam22] have fed on bad thoughts, and so make the ground of our heart bring forth thorns and thistles; which spring up in it, and consequently make us sterile, and powerless as regards all spiritual fruit and meditation. 23

21Thomas Aquinas, De malo, qu. XI, a. 1, 7 and ad 7. Similarly, Jacob's Well affirms that the lack of devotion, if it comes from one's nature and does not hinder the love of God and of man, is not sinful; ed. Arthur Brandeis, EETS, 115 (London, 1900), p. 114.

22Both terms, ignavia and desidia, were often used as synonyms for acedia, desidia sometimes even as the technical term for the deadly sin. Cf. above, ch. II, pp. 65-66.

Thus, the absence of joy and exaltation, of God himself from the soul, although it is one of the great means by which God purges man's soul and plants in him the attitude of humility and dependence, can also be the effect of spiritual sloth. But dryness is not identical with sloth, because the withdrawal of consolations may be God's deliberate operation while man is making his best efforts.

These observations have, of course, become commonplaces in Christian mystical theology and, from Cassian's treatises on, are found in numerous medieval writings on the spiritual life. The English mystics, too, followed the traditional doctrines. The author of The Chastising of God's Children, for example, speaks of six causes of God's withdrawing which

bien but for oure profite aftir goddis ordinaunce;  
but other causes ther mowen be for oure owne defaute,  
sumtyme for negligence, and sumtyme for vnkonnyng and vnkyndnesse.  

Rolle describes the effects of such a withdrawal in the following terms:

when he fra the wendis: thi gladdyng wanis, slaw thou waxis and dri and heuy as a stan:  
and the fere ware drawen ther- fra. Bot then nedis the saule to morne sare til he come agayn.

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25Our daily work, YW, I, 148. The passage seems to be a free translation of St. Bernard's sermon on the going and coming of the Word (Sermones in Cantica, 74; PL 182:1142).
Of the various metaphors which Rolle here employs, one contains the term which, in Middle English writings, was most frequently used to designate spiritual dryness: _heuynes_. In Middle English this word could mean both physical and spiritual heaviness, and was thence applied to spiritual sorrow. In several mystical writings it clearly denotes the feeling which the soul experiences when sensible grace is withdrawn. Thus, _The Remedy against the Troubles of Temptations_ speaks of "the tyme of sharpe heuynes whan a soule standeth naked from all ghostly and bodely comforthe." Misyn translates Rolle's description of the sorrow of the mind in its longing for God: "Thus failys my lyfe in heuynes, and my yeris in wamentyng, for fro my lyfe I am put back"; the mystic cries to God: "only thi presens to me is solas and onely thi absence levis me heuy." Julian of Norwich also describes the alternating states of spiritual joy and dryness; during the latter, "I was turned and left to myself in

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26 E.g., Misyn translates Rolle's "carnis gravedinem" by "heuynes of the flesch" (_Fire of Love_, I, 25, EETS, 106).

27 E.g., _The Mirror of St. Edmund_ uses it to translate the Latin torpor; cf. also the quotation from _Our daily work_, above.


29 Iw, II, 119.

30 _The Fire of Love_, II, 8, EETS, 106.

31 _The Mending of Life_, 11, EETS, 106.
heaviness, and weariness of life, and irksomeness of myself, that scarcely I could have patience to live."\(^{32}\)

This "heuynes" we have, in an earlier chapter, found to be among the branches of sloth in vernacular treatments of the seven deadly sins. The word is used to translate the torpor of Gregory's progeny of acedia (or rather, of tristitia).\(^{33}\) The author of Vices and Virtues confesses that "accidia" has made him "heuy and slaw on godes weorkes."\(^{34}\) Ancrene Riwle has among the offspring of the "bear of heavy sloth" one that is called cordis gravitas; this whelp causes one to perform good works only "mid one deade and mid one heuie heortwe."\(^{35}\) The "heaviness of heart" is, finally, a fixed expression for


\(^{33}\) The Mirror of St. Edmund (MS. Vernon), YW, I, 246. It may be mentioned that a different word with the same basic meaning of "heaviness" was used by Aelfric to define accidia: "asolcennyss, thaet is modes swaerniss . . .," Second Letter to Archbishop Wulfstan, in Bernhard Fehr (ed.), Die Hirtenbriefe Aelfrics in altenglischer und lateinischer Fassung, Bibl. d. as. Prosa, vol. IX (Hamburg, 1914). The same term stands for the entire sin of sloth in Dunbar's Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins ("Syne Sweirnes").


the psychic state which hinders men from loving God and from having any joy in His service. It has its firm place in the fully developed progenies of confessional handbooks, where it translates the French pesentume or pesanteur and ranks among the branches of sloth that lead man to an evil beginning. Jacob's Well includes under this category the lack of devotion and spiritual savor. This particular handbook, however, lists "heuynes" a second time among the branches that bring man to a bad end. "Heuynes" is here defined as the sin "that makyth a man to be gretyly greuyn wyth all that men don to hym, or seyn, yif it plese hym noght." This corresponds to "tristesse" in the Somme le Roi and to "anger" or "dreryness" in Middle English progenies which follow the same French model. Does this mean that the author of Jacob's Well realized how easily spiritual

36 Lay Folks' Catechism, lines 531-533, ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth, EETS, 118 (London, 1901).


38 Somme le Roi, in R. Elfreda Fowler, Une source française des poèmes de Gower (Macon, 1905), p. 88.

39 Mirécur du Monde, ibid., p. 88.

40 Jacob's Well, EETS, 115, p. 112.

41 The Book of Vices and Virtues, EETS, 217, p. 29.

42 The Desert of Religion, line 581.
dryness can lead to oversensitivity and "touchiness"? The close relation between acedia, lack of devotion, and irritability had already been experienced by the Desert Fathers. We shall have to return to this peculiar connection when we consider acedia in relation to melancholy.

From this it is clear that "heuynes," the absence of perceptible religious emotion as well as the important mystical state of spiritual dryness, can be caused by acedia-sloth. The term designates one of the branches of sloth as well as the psychic state of the person from whose soul God has withdrawn. Our vernacular texts, therefore, confirm what we observed in the teaching of Cassian, Thomas, and John of the Cross: that spiritual dryness and acedia are not absolutely identical, but that spiritual dryness may be a result of the deadly sin.

Besides acedia other sins or vices can be responsible for "heuynes." The Middle English exposition of Psalm 90 mentions wrath, envy, impatience, and "slouhnesse" as vices that drive a man "to gret heuinesse." Frequently mystical writers attribute dryness to some form or other of pride. Hilton, for example, states that the habit of passing judgment on other men's faults makes a soul empty and void of gladness, "and casteth him into accidie, . . . that a man loseth affection of charity." The Cloud of Unknowing deals with the

\[43\] An Exposition of "Qui habitat," ed. cit.

\[44\] Hilton, Goad, ch. 28.
peculiar temptation of "corioustye," i.e., spiritual affectation and presumption. Sometimes young novices, hearing about the emotions of joy and exaltation which the love of God frequently produces, force themselves to feel the same. But within a short time "thei fallen . . . into werynes and a maner of vnlisty febilnes in bodi and in soule," which, like states of acedia, drive them to seek false comfort in earthly goods.\textsuperscript{45} In a mystical treatise of the same period a similar temptation which results in the lack of devotion and in dryness is attributed to the midday devil who causes religious people to affect false holiness so that, instead of using ascetic practices discreetly according to their individual needs and possibilities, they bind themselves rashly by vows that exceed their strength.\textsuperscript{46}

The occurrence of the daemonium meridianum in relation with "corioustye" and spiritual dryness necessitates a brief review of the history of this concept. We noticed that the Egyptian desert monks frequently equated the eight chief vices with demons, that is, with objective powers who would attack and tempt the solitary monk during his struggle for perfection. The vice of acedia, probably because it was felt most strongly during the hot hours around noon, became

\textsuperscript{45}The Cloud of Unknowing, EETS, 218, ch. 45.

\textsuperscript{46}A Pistle of Discrecioun of Stirings, EETS, 231, pp. 70-71.
identified with the "midday demon" of Psalm 90:6. Over a century later, Evagrius repeated the idea, and Cassian finally introduced it to the Latin West: "There are some of the elders who declare that this [viz., acedia] is the 'midday demon' spoken of in the ninetieth Psalm." 50

R. Caillois, in a very brilliant and elucidating article, studied the midday demon in connection with several classical myths which reflect the belief or experience that the noon-hour is the fated time of the day, at which either a great evil (the demon, or the sirens of Ulysses) or a great good (Plato's grass-hoppers or other phenomena of "nympholepsy") may befall man. 51 The Egyptian monks saw in the noon hour the prime occasion for guilty sadness and for the temptation to "let things go"; 52 they found a good symbol for this in the "midday

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47 The Septuagint calls it literally so, daimónion mesembrinón; likewise the Vulgate, daemonium meridianum. The Hebrew original yašud can mean "he who is powerful" or "he who devastates" and bears a demonic suggestion.

48 Origen, Selecta in Psalmo, Ps. 90 (PG 12:1551).

49 De octo vitiosis cogitationibus, 7 (PG 40:1273); also Pract., 25 (1227).

50 Inst., X, 1.


52 Ibid., CXVI, 172.
demon" of the Psalm. But to commentators who lived in different circumstances this strange being remained a puzzle and had to be explained according to the comprehension of each interpreter. Consequently, medieval commentaries on the Psalms give various interpretations of the daemonium meridianum. St. Jerome interpreted it as the devil transformed into an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14).

"Midday," he argues, signifies perfect knowledge, good works, and open light. But when these apparent signs of sanctity are displayed by heretics, we are in the presence, not of the light of Christ, but of the false light of the daemonium meridianum. The midday demon, in other words, is the power that invests evil, in this case the heretics, with a false splendor. At the same time Jerome argues quite explicitly against the popular belief in the existence of a dangerous noonday devil. This popular opinion is quite facetious, Jerome exclaims, because a demon enters into man's soul whenever he sins, regardless of the time of day. "Midday," on the contrary, signifies light and sanctity. Therefore, the passage in the Psalm must be understood as referring to the devil walking in the false light of holiness.

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53 Ibid., CXVI, 171.

54 Jerome, Breviarium in psalmos (PL 26:1165). This work is apparently a compilation from Jerome's works and is by some scholars thought to be a version of a commentary by Origen. Haymo of Halberstadt seems to have been of the same opinion: "Hieronymus in Originem daemonium meridianum appellat haereses protervitatem" (PL 116:510).

55 Ibid. The same criticism of quidam simplices appears in Gerhoh's commentary (PL 194:558). The midday demon is also interpreted as the heretics by Bruno the Carthusian (PL 152:1127).
A very different interpretation of the verse was given by St. Augustine. The four "enemies" of Psalm 90:6 are four types of temptation; the division of the four into day- and night-time temptations signifies the difference between ignorance and awareness of the temptation in the person who is attacked. The daemonium meridianum, then, stands for the vehement open persecution which the followers of Christ suffer. This interpretation was followed by many commentators during the centuries after Augustine.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, too, adopted the Augustinian exegesis when he applied the four temptations of Psalm 90:6 to the Church. To him, the midday demon is the Antichrist who deceives the faithful by false appearances and persecutes the Church with violence. But Bernard, at the same time, also applies this scheme of temptations specifically to monks. The daemonium meridianum, from this point of view, becomes a very serious temptation which assails perfect souls under the guise of good appearances. Our Lady was afraid of it when she heard the Annunciation. Also the Apostles, when they saw Jesus walking over the water, suspected Him to be the midday demon. The nature of this temptation is to deceive the almost

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56 Enarratio in Psalm, XC, 8 (PL 37:1151).

57 E.g., Cassiodorus (PL 70:652); Bede (dubious, PL 93:972); Remigius. (PL 131:627); Gerhoh (PL 19:1558). Bruno of Siena identifies the demon with the Jews who crucified Christ (PL 164:1054).

58 Sermones in Cantica, 23 (PL 183:951 ff.).
perfect monk with the promise of greater achievements and to lead him to exaggeration in spiritual exercises, which can easily become for him an occasion of falling from his height.

In Middle English literature this dangerous demon appears, though not frequently, in several important writings. These are all works of advice for religious people and follow St. Bernard's interpretation. The Ancrene Riwle interprets the "Demonium meridianum" as the devil tempting monks and nuns under the guise of good counsel and holy thoughts:59 "yet is meste dred of hwon the swike of helle eggeth to one thinge that thuncheth swuthe god mid-alle and is thauh soule bone and wei to deadlich sunne."60 The author gives several examples of this temptation. One person who cannot be tempted by gluttony is led to overmuch fasting until, through fatigue and excessive bodily weakness, his very soul dies. Another religious person is secure against evil thoughts by her strong compassion; but this very compassion becomes a trap when she, out of pity for the poor, organizes welfare activities, grows dedicated to worldly affairs, and finally becomes "a housewife of hell" through her pride. Sometimes the midday demon persuades someone to flee the consolation of

59 In this section the author follows the fourfold division of temptations made by St. Augustine; EETS, 225, pp. 98 ff.

60 Ibid., p. 99.
men and makes him fall "ine deadliche sor that is accidie," or into such a deep thought that he becomes a dotard. 61

Hilton uses the "myddaye fende" according to both Jerome's and Bernard's exegeses. Hypocrites and heretics, he says, may suffer martyrdom like the Apostles and think they do it truly for the love of God. But in reality their apparent good works spring from pride and presumption—these men are deceived by the noonday devil. 62 On the other hand, in Hilton's work this demon is also held responsible for injecting into souls who are still in the very beginning of the spiritual ascent a false intellectual light which deceives them into thinking very highly of themselves and scorning their fellow men. 63

These two faults—spiritual self-conceit and contempt for others—, are by the Middle English exposition of Psalm 90 (attributed to Hilton) likened to two black clouds between which the false light of the "midday fend" shines. His temptation is the most secret, subtle, and dangerous of those mentioned in Psalm 90:6. 64 He comes shining like an angel,

61 Ibid., p. 100.
62 Hilton, Scale, II, 38.
63 Ibid., II, 26.
64 The Middle English exposition of Qui Habitat divides Ps. 90:6 into five temptations instead of the usual four, separating the incursus ("In-Rennyng") from the daemonium meridianum ("midday fend").
schewynde to a soule the heignesse of hit-self and of his staat of liuinge with a blynd pruide, and bringeth in-to the soule wonderful knowyng and sin-guler conceites that serue ful trewe, and maketh a soule to wenen that he is him-self in the hignes of contemplacion and in the perfeccion of loue heig aboue al the comuyn liuing of othur goode men.

Moreover, a person thus tempted believes that the sins of other people cannot touch him, and even that, if he were to commit them, for him they would not be sinful. This "false light," therefore, often causes errors and heresies, and to distinguish it from the true light of God is most difficult.

Similar thoughts are expressed in A Pistle of Discrecioun of Stirings. Again, the "midday deuel" is responsible for a kind of temptation which is difficult to discriminate from effects of grace. In contrast—and almost in opposition—to the exposition of Psalm 90, the author of A Pistle charges the midday devil with moving religious souls by the false religious zeal of binding themselves by vows to rigid external observances like silence and fasting, thus destroying their own spiritual freedom and preventing themselves from obeying the impulses of grace. This subtle form of pride in contemplative men is called "coriuste," which we have already noticed to be one of the possible causes of spiritual weariness and dryness.66

66 EETS, 231, pp. 70-71.
The concept of "heuynesse," then, has led us to a very subtle and tenuous connection, in the later Middle Ages, between acedia and the daemonium meridianum. The Egyptian monks' attribution of sloth to the agency of an objective evil spirit had long since given way to a more rational interpretation of the demon, an allegorical exegesis of the four "threats" of Psalm 90:6 as different kinds of temptation. The reappearance of the midday demon, in mystical texts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in connection with "heuynes"—a branch of acedia—, is, I believe, rather fortuitous. And yet, one might speculate that Cassian's conception was perhaps still present to the minds of Hilton or the unknown author of A Pistle of Discrecioun.
Although the concept of acedia had been conceived by monks and reared by theologians and preachers, it did not—throughout the Middle Ages—live exclusively in cell or pulpit. If we desire to obtain a complete view of the meaning which acedia had for the medieval mind, it is necessary to look beyond the realm of "devotional" literature and analyze the concept as it appears in medieval works that were not written for those doctrinary or didactic purposes which shaped the literature surveyed in our preceding chapters. I will here examine what features acedia-sloth bears in medieval non-devotional literature, including Middle English drama and lyrical poetry, Chaucer, Dante, Gower, Langland, and Lydgate.

The investigation of acedia in "imaginative literature" will be guided by two or three speculative questions. First, since we are dealing with men like Dante, Chaucer, and Langland, who—although

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1 The term "imaginative literature" seems a little inadequate in this context, because what distinguishes the subject of the present chapter from that of previous ones is not the presence of creative imagination. Devotional works like Jacob's Well and The Desert of Religion, too, reflect a great amount of artistic imagination. The literature studied here is, therefore, better characterized as "non-devotional" or "belles-lettres."
formed by Christian beliefs and doctrines—did not write for the Church and remained more or less detached from its official teaching, we may ask whether in their works the concept of acedia shows any traces that enrich the picture we have gathered so far, and whether there are any emphases or developments in the meaning of that already complex idea.

Second, we may consider the manner in which the concept was used. Did it ever—in non-devotional literature—have thematic or structural functions? Since acedia was a key term in medieval psychology and moral theology, we might expect it to underlie the organization of literary works. Indeed, we shall find one Middle English morality play (Mankind) in which the hero's spiritual degeneration follows the psychological sequence and increasing seriousness of the states of sloth as they were described in devotional works. More frequently, however, it is the entire scheme of the seven deadly sins which furnishes the framework of a poem, as in Dante's Purgatorio and Gower's Confessio Amantis. Here, of course, acedia plays only a subordinate structural role.

In a different way, acedia could have been used as the subject-matter or the theme of a poem. Coming to medieval poetry with eyes accustomed to the lines of Baudelaire or T. S. Eliot, the reader would expect to find many a moving expression of taedium vitae, of the monastic acedia, or of wanhope. Such expectations will soon be frustrated. Lyrical expressions of individual despair, dejection, or melancholy were extremely rare in the Middle Ages. Moreover, what we
have already observed in the writings of Jerome, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Guigo is true also of vernacular works: quite often the most interesting descriptions of what looks very much like acedia do not use this word. Since the object of my study is to determine the full meaning of the term acedia in the Middle Ages, I must—however unwillingly—exclude such texts from my present investigation. Thus, for instance, I have to forego discussion of the Pearl poem.  

With these general considerations in mind I will now analyze a few outstanding works of medieval imaginative literature, chiefly from the English scene.

One of the most important rhetorical figures which, in the Middle Ages, was common to both devotional and non-devotional literature, is the personification of the vices. The personified figure of Sloth in the allegory of the daughters of the devil has been mentioned previously.  

A more realistic personification of the vice is achieved in the Treatise on the Ten Commandments (1420-34), where Sloth enters a tavern with her sisters and persuades everybody to sit still and drink without interruption.  

The initial sentiment of the dreamer is one of grief ("dele," line 51), not the "heuynes" or "langure" usually connected with sloth. Besides, the dreamer seems to remain conscious of the consolations which come to him from Christ (lines 55-56), while true acedia takes away all spiritual comfort.


Ed. James Finch Royster, in SP, VI (1910).
Mirror of the Periods of Man's Life (before 1450) adds an almost
dramatic dialogue in the form of a debate. Man is presented at dif-
ferent ages, and at each stage of his life several sins approach him
and bring forth their arguments. Sloth is with Man from early youth
to old age, tempting him to take life easy, to tarry in the fulfill-
ment of his religious duties, and to disregard people who try to
Teach him good. The vice is answered by "Business," who presents
counter-arguments. When Man is eighty, Sloth appears, finally, as
Overhope and Wanhope (i.e., despair).

Although this poem has several dramatic touches, it still
lacks a true inner action: its hero never makes any real decision.
The developed attack of evil powers, together with man's reaction, is
more fully dramatized in several Middle English moralities. A separate
play on "Accidie," or perhaps part of a Pater Noster play, has unfor-
tunately been lost. But Sloth forms part of the crowd of sins which
attack Man in The Castle of Perseverance. Here the vice appears
under the leadership of Caro, or Syr Flesch, in accordance with the

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5The Mirror of the Periods of Man's Life, lines 125-126, in Freder-
rick J. Furnivall (ed.), Hymns to the Virgin and Christ, EETS, 24
(London, 1867).

6Lines 217-224.

7Lines 505 ff.

8Cf. E. K. Chambers, English Literature at the Close of the Middle

9F. J. Furnivall and Alfred W. Pollard (edd.), The Macro Plays,
EETS, ES, 91 (London, 1904).
conventional reckoning of *acedia* among the sins of the flesh. It gives a general "character" of its nature (st. 84) and successfully persuades Mankind to stay in bed "whanne the messe-belle goth" and to "take a swet" (i.e., sweat; lines 1215, 1218). When later Confession tries to convert Man, the latter refers to Sloth and wants to delay. Finally, the vice is beaten and driven back by Besynes (or Solicitudo) and cries out:

\[
yene qwene, with hyr pytyr-patyrr,
\text{hath al to-dayschyd my skallyd skulle (lines 2399 ff.)}.
\]

Despite such refreshing touches, the personification of the vices is rather mechanically done; and the dramatic action is more a battle between vices and virtues and, in the end, a debate between the Four Daughters of God, than a conflict within the hero. The play of *Mary Magdalen*, part I,\(^1\) is a much superior dramatic achievement. But here the heroine's chief antagonist is Lechery, while Slowth (again subject to the King of Flesh) and the other sins are introduced only incidentally. It is in the morality of *Mankind* (1461-85) that the vice becomes credible as a trait of character and as an agent in the dramatic action.\(^1\) Sloth is not personified at all, but motivates the action as the hero's frailty—we may almost say, his *hamartia*—which triggers his fall. At first, Mankind easily drives the three


\(^1\)EETS, ES, 91.
tempters (New-guise, Nowadays, and Nought) away, as they approach in open daylight. But then Tutivillus comes and plays a trick, calculated to tempt Mankind by "irksomeness"; he buries a plank where Mankind is digging the ground. When Man's shovel hits the obstacle, he thinks the soil is too hard and gives up his labor. He is irked indeed. Yet he is not defeated: he can still kneel down and pray. But Tutivillus turns up again and whispers in his ear that, since Mankind has to satisfy an urge of his nature, a short prayer will do. Mankind interrupts his devotion. When he returns, his character has degenerated. He voices his weariness, saying that even-song is too long "by a mile," and continues:

Of labure and preyer, I am nere yrke of both
    . . . . . . . . . . .
My hedey very heuy, I telle yow for soth;
I xall slepe, full my bely . . . (lines 578, 580-581)

It is, indeed, the acedia of Evagrius rising in an English villein. And the consequences of giving in to weariness are as grave as they were with the Egyptian monks: sleep opens Man's mind to evil suggestions which lead him to lechery, to the company of the three tempters, to crimes, and finally to abandoning his hope of salvation (by parting fellowship with Mercy).

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This dramatic use of the idea of acedia, however, is unique in Middle English drama. More commonly the vice appears personified and merely as one of the seven deadly sins. The collective treatment is also characteristic of Middle English lyrical poetry. In a number of penitential lyrics sloth appears in the company of the other sins and is, apparently, never made the single theme of an entire poem. "Penitential lyrics," in general, are more or less extensive poems which express sentiments of repentance and the desire for forgiveness and amendment. Many of them list the seven deadly sins in forms which may range from mere mechanical enumeration to elaborate and artistic descriptions of each individual vice. Examples of the most perfunctory treatment are "A confession to Jhesu crist," Audelay's "De septem peccatis mortalibus," and Dunbar's "The Tabill of Confession."

Of greater value are a few penitential lyrics where the sins are portrayed in more detail. Here the vice of sloth bears features which, to us, are already familiar from devotional works. "An

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13A convenient collection of penitential lyrics appears in Frank Allen Patterson, The Middle English Penitential Lyric (New York, 1911). Sloth is treated in nos. 3, 4, 5 (containing only the aspects of recklessness and wanhope), and 8.


Exortacion to auoyde and to put awey the seuyn synnes" speaks under "Contra Accidiam" of those who

be dullyd with slouthe or slogardy,
And set awey so ferre fro democioune

and prays for the grace of remembering Christ's Passion as a remedy against such languor. 17 The poem, "Jhesu, for thi precious blod,"18 affirms that good works and the love of God and the Church are opposed to sloth, and desires mercy for the sake of the blood which ran from Christ's feet.19 Finally, "As I walkyd vppone a day,"20 of greater artistic achievement than the rest, calls "Accidia . . . a sowkyng blayne" which "bollith and bladdirith with-yn my bowre." The symptoms of the vice are faintness of "flessh and vayne" and the desire to stay in bed. As remedy the poet recommends the double flower of vigilate et orate. Dunbar's Dance of the Sevin Deidy Synnis, though not a penitential poem, can be mentioned here, too. The sin of sloth ("swéirnes") is likened to a sow and bears the conventional features of somnolence, slovenliness, and torpor.21


19Each of the sins is brought in relation with some wound of Christ. Acedia is also connected with the feet in other contexts; cf. gout and palsy as its punishments in hell, or Dante's slothful being chastised by running.


In contrast to these lyrics which present no new aspects of the vice, the poem "Jesu, that wolde for vs dye" adds to the neglect of spiritual duties the negligence and carelessness in one's profession as a distinctive characteristic of "sleuthe." The expression which characterizes such neglect—"forsleuthe his werk"—occurs also in *Piers Plowman*, where we will consider the neglect of secular work more closely.

The most widely known Middle English treatment of *acedia* occurs not in lyrical poetry, but in the *Parson's Tale*. It is through Chaucer's work that the common reader of English literature usually becomes acquainted with the word "accidie" and the medieval concept of sloth. During the long sermon on penance with which the Parson is supposed to entertain his fellow pilgrims, he gives a rather lengthy account of the seven deadly sins. Based on the material contained in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century handbooks, but lacking the

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22W. Heuser (ed.), *Die Kildare-Gedichte*, Bonner Beiträge zur Anglistik, no. XIV (Bonn, 1904), pp. 185-197.

23Ibid., p. 196.


25Kate Oelzner Petersen, *The Sources of the Parson's Tale*, Radcliffe College Monographs, no. XII (Boston, 1901); W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (edd.), *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales"* (New York, 1941); F. N. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 766.
structural clarity and order of Handlyng Synne or Jacob's Well, and devoid of the imagery which usually adorns fourteenth-century sermon material, Chaucer's account presents an utterly conventional and dry picture of "Accidie," unrelieved by poetic touches and partially obscure in its organization. The chapter "de Accidia" seems to be divided into a long definition of the vice and its nature, and something like a discussion of its progeny. To it is then added, in accordance with the plan of this section of the Parson's Tale, a discussion of the remedy against acedia, which is "fortitudo or strenthe."

Following earlier models in the deadly-sin tradition, Chaucer connects acedia with the vices that precede in the list of sins: envy and wrath. These two cause bitterness in man's heart, and "bitternesse is mooder of Accidie, and bynymeth hym the love of alle goodnesse." Hence, the slothful does everything with annoyance, irritation, slackness, excuses, idleness, and disgust. Acedia is, thus, the enemy of man in any of the three spiritual states here on earth: innocence, sin, and grace. But the vice is likewise an enemy to the welfare of the body, because it leads to carelessness in temporal matters.

The Parson then names and describes a series of vices which spring from Accidie. They are: annoyance towards doing good works;

26 Part of the obscurity is due to the paragraph division in the F. N. Robinson edition. Logically, there should be a new paragraph at 686 (beginning with "Of Accidie comth first . . ."), and no paragraph at 711 (beginning with "Of the remedie of thise two synnes . . ."), ed. cit., p. 250.
"Sloute, that wol nat suffre noon hardnesse ne non penaunce" (tenderness?); pusillanimit; "wanhope"; "somnolence"; "necligence, or reccheleesnesse"; "ydelnesse"; *tarditas* (delay); "lachesse" (slackness); "cooldnesse"; "undevocioun"; inclination to hatred and envy; and "worldly sorwe, . . . tristicia." Although Chaucer here, as in the whole Tale, obviously follows hackneyed conventions, it is impossible to show his direct source. The branches of *acedia* in the Parson's Tale differ from the models which have been suggested as Chaucer's sources both in number and in order. To mention only one instance: *Wanhope* (despair) in Chaucer appears as the fourth in a series of thirteen branches; in the Latin and French models of Middle English handbooks 28 *desperatio* usually closes the series of sixteen or eighteen branches, which follow one another in some kind of psychological order. Nevertheless, despite this difference, Chaucer has added nothing to the material contained in the Middle English handbooks for lay instruction, as a comparison with Jacob's

27 Scholars believe the remote source of Chaucer's section on the seven deadly sins to be Guilielmus Peraldus. But although Peraldus' treatment of the sins is thirteen times longer than Chaucer's, the Parson's Tale draws only very little of its material from Peraldus. About the intervening tradition between Peraldus and Chaucer only general and tentative statements can be made. Cf. Bryan-Dempster, *op. cit.*, pp. 724-725.

Well, for example, easily shows. Indeed, the treatment of acedia in the Parson's Tale is one of the least original and interesting of Chaucer's writings.

Outside this conventional and uninspired treatise on the seven deadly sins the concept of sloth appears in several isolated passages in Chaucer which will gain our attention later on. For the moment, I should like to turn from medieval England to Italy and examine how acedia appears in Dante, who also adopted the scheme of the seven chief vices and—more fortunately than Chaucer—used it as a structural principle of the Divine Comedy.

When the poet on his way through the otherworldly realms ascends the mount of Purgatory, he passes through seven terraces, in each of which souls are purged of one of the seven deadly sins. The arrangement of these terraces corresponds to the conventional order of the chief sins (SIIAAGL), except that acedia and avarice are interchanged. This shift is not without precedence in theological writers and is actually required by the rationale which Dante gives for the scheme of the deadly sins. In canto XVII, as the oncoming

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29 See above, ch. III, pp. 103 ff.

30 "Conventional" is to be understood cum grano salis. The order SIIAAGL, which is Gregory's, became generally accepted in the Middle Ages, but the exceptions are numerous. Cf. Morton W. Bloomfield, The Seven Deadly Sins ([East Lansing], 1952), pp. 72-73, 86, and passim.

31 For example, in Conrad of Saxony's (?) Speculum Beatae Mariae Virginis, sometimes attributed to Bonaventure.
night forces the wanderers to rest, Virgil explains the organization of Purgatory and its terraces in terms of misdirected love. Love, he says, is the source of both virtues and vices (lines 104-105); it errs, and therefore becomes sinful, when it is directed to a bad object, or when it is directed toward a good object with too little or too much force. To love a "bad object" can only mean to desire some harm of one's neighbor. Dante divides this kind of erring love into three parts: first, the love of one's excellence which is accompanied by the desire to suppress one's neighbor (pride); second, the love of excellence which causes fear that one may lose power, grace, fame, etc., by someone else's ascendancy (envy); and third, the love of excellence which, when put to shame by some act of injustice, desires to avenge itself (wrath). The second type of erring love—unorderly affection for some good—is then divided into the insufficiently strong love of good (sloth), and the immoderately great love of goods which cannot provide ultimate happiness (avarice, gluttony, and lust).

From these seven types of erring love the souls in Purgatory are purified in ascending order. Acedia, the "lento amore" in

Francis Fergusson, in his interesting attempt to interpret the Divine Comedy in terms of modern anthropology (Dante's Drama of the Mind, a Modern Reading of the "Purgatorio," Princeton, 1953), considers the scheme of Purgatory the "family-tree" of "human-love-in-the-clay" (pp. 86-89). This view seems to assume a radical difference between a "human love" and a "divine love," rather than only one human faculty which may be misguided or applied with undue measure. The former sharp distinction is not medieval and scholastic. Fergusson's view seems further to be based on the idea that the penitent souls in Purgatorio re-live different aspects of mental and moral life ("those who
The vision of, or the quest for, the true good (XVII, 130-131), is purged on the fourth cornice. When the pilgrims arrive there, Virgil explains

"Love of the good," said he, "that once let slide Its proper duties, is restored up there; There once again the slackened oar is plied." (XVII, 85-87)

The penance by which the souls are purified of their evil inclinations is contrary in nature to the vice. Thus, the slothful appear running in great hurry along the cornice; their zeal in Purgatory is the reparation for their negligence and torpor in life. They rush past the poet, unwilling to stop in their eagerness to perform the deeds of love which they missed in this world:

"Quick, quick! let not the precious time be lost For lack of love!" the others cried, pursuing; "In good works strive, till grace revive from dust!" (XVIII, 105-105)

Only one soul responds to Virgil's injunction to point out to the poets the way they have to follow. It is a twelfth-century abbot of

are resuffering the evil motivations which moved them on earth," (p. 54), instead of doing penance in various forms that are directly contrary to the passions that ruled them in life. It is certainly incorrect to say that the pilgrim of Purgatorio participates in the re-living of sloth when, upon entering the fourth cornice, he is weary and unable to move. The impossibility of motion is an effect of the oncoming night, in accordance with the laws of the Mount (Purg. VII, 44-69), and not necessarily symbolic of the vice of sloth, however fitting such symbolism may appear.

I am using Dorothy L. Sayers' translation of the Divine Comedy (Harmondsworth, 1949 ff.). Other references to the text are given according to the revised edition by C. H. Grandgent (Boston, 1953).
San Zeno, about whom nothing more is known today. He has enough breath left, however, to tell of his successor, whose investiture was a clear case of nepotism—a sin which we have observed as occasionally listed among the branches of acedia.

Following the general plan of the Purgatorio, Dante lets his two pilgrims perceive examples of sloth and of the opposite virtue. The poets hear some voices from the onrushing crowd proclaim the Virgin and Caesar as examples of virtuous zeal:

"Mary ran to the hills in haste!" and then:
"Caesar, to subjugate Ilerda, thrust
Hard at Marseilles and raced on into Spain!"

(XVIII, 100-102)

In similar fashion two examples of vicious sloth are alluded to: the Hebrews who, on account of their murmuring, were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, and Aeneas' companions who, weary of the prolonged hardships, remained behind and forfeited the glory of conquering a new realm. What is noteworthy in these examples is the fact that Dante parallels exemplary figures taken from Scripture with others from the realm of pagan history, literature, or mythology. In strictly spiritual or ecclesiastical writings up to the fifteenth century, the use of pagan figures as illustrations of spiritual

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35For example, Étienne de Bourbon, Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues, ed. A. Lecoy de la Marche (Paris, 1877), pp. 352-353.
truths is extremely rare. Quotations from pagan philosophers and poets, however, have always been used by Christian writers from St. Paul on. In the fourteenth century sentences culled from Seneca or Cicero began to crop up even in treatises which expounded doctrinal material. But it is in the secular literature of that period that pagan lore was used more and more profusely to illustrate Christian concepts and that writers began to fuse ideas which came from different origins and often jarred with each other. As far as the concept of acedia is concerned, such attempts at harmonization had to result either in interpreting originally non-spiritual attitudes as spiritual and Christian, or in extending the meaning of the term to states which no longer were strictly spiritual and sinful, but belonged to the realm of worldly morals. Dante's two examples of sloth furnish a good illustration of the latter tendency: while the Hebrews lost zeal and trust and, thereby, sinned against God's command, Aeneas' companions neglected the quest for mere worldly fame and glory. A few works of Virgil's, in the Inferno, also bring the

36 E. g., in Bromyard's Summa Praedicantium, see below, p. 197.

37 This practice did, of course, not begin with the later Middle Ages, but is at least as old as the Alexandrian Fathers' attempts to combine Greek wisdom with revealed truth.

38 I am, of course, fully aware of the fact that Aeneas' quest for the new city was a religious act and was interpreted allegorically, by medieval thinkers, as man's search for eternal happiness. Ultimately, only such an allegorical exegesis could, for any profound medieval mind, warrant the parallel between Aeneas and Moses, or Mary and Caesar. But such comparisons undoubtedly opened the door to developments which I have indicated above, developments that actually took place in the fourteenth and the following centuries.
precept to avoid sloth into connection with the quest for \textit{fama} in this world: the imagery and diction of this passage suggest that Dante had the concept of acedia in mind when he wrote these tercets.\footnote{See above, ch. III, pp. 127 ff.}

It is true that the words are spoken by the heathen poet, who is excluded from the full attainment of man's complete happiness. But in the \textit{Divine Comedy}, Virgil and what he stands for are not set in sharp contrast to the Christian existence (as Kierkegaard might have done it), but form the highest achievement of man's "natural" character which, though unenlightened by Revelation, possesses its own value in Creation. And for Dante, so it seems, the concept of \textit{acedia} extended into the order of nature. Similar "extensions" of the concept will be found in the works of other fourteenth- and fifteenth-century writers and will be mentioned presently.

In the two cantos of the \textit{Purgatorio} which we have considered, then, \textit{acedia} is presented as deficiency in the love of the good. Beyond this general definition sloth here takes the specific form of unwillingness to sustain pain, which is evidenced by Dante's choice of the beatitude "\textit{Beati qui lugent}" (XIX, 50). In contrast to the usual connection of \textit{acedia} with the blessing of those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, which we have observed in the \textit{septem}.\footnote{"Omai convien che tu cosi ti spoltre," Disse 'l maestro, "ch`e seppendo in piuma\nIn \textit{fama} non si vien, no \textit{sotto coltre},
Sanz\`a la qual chi sua vita consuma,\nCotal vestigio in terra di s\`e lascia,\nQual fummo in aere ed in acqua la schiuma.\n\textit{Inf.}, XXIV, 46-51; the italics are mine.}
Dante relates sloth to the benediction of those "that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matt. 5:5). He thus stresses an aspect of acedia—the shrinking from the pains that accompany the pursuit of virtue and of spiritual goods—which St. Thomas had considered as not essential to this vice.\(^4\)

Outside the presentation of sloth on the fourth cornice, acedia and closely related states also appear in several shorter passages scattered throughout the poem. In Purgatory the Roman poet Statius reports that he had to do penance for sloth because of his "tepidezza": he had out of fear concealed his faith in Christ, even after his baptism (Purg., XXII, 90-93). Similar cases of spiritual negligence are punished by delayed admission to the Mount of Purgatory. In canto IV, for example, the pilgrims meet souls who postponed repentance. Their chief representative is Belacqua, who squats at the foot of the Mount like a negligent person (Purg., IV, 105), and whom Dante charges with "pigrizia" (laziness, Purg., IV, 111). The same faults are also reflected in the order of Paradise, where those religious who were somewhat negligent and slow in the fulfillment of their vows are placed in the sphere of the moon, "la spera più tarda" (Par., III, 51) and the lowest rank among the blissful.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) *Summa theologica, II-II, qu. 35, a. 2.*

\(^4\) In medieval literature the moon is frequently considered as the slowest planet and used as a symbol for slowness. Bonaventure once interpreted the moon allegorically as the object of worship of "pigri et accidiosi," *Commentum in Sapientiam*, 13 (Opera, ed. Quaracchi, vol. VI, p. 193). In Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, IV, 348-355,
lukewarmness, however, which results in the total lack of care for spiritual goods is punished in fore-hell (Inf., III, 34 ff.): the miserable souls who lived neither in virtue nor in crime are rejected by heaven and hell alike.\footnote{The text itself does not make it clear that Dante is thinking of acedia here. Because of the controversy about Inf. VII (see below) many scholars have thought it necessary to locate the slothful in fore-hell rather than in the fifth circle.}

There remains the question whether we also find acedia among the sins punished in hell. In the fifth circle Dante and Virgil arrive at the swamp Styx, where they see muddy people, naked and with "sembiante offeso" ("looks of savage discontent"), who tear their own flesh to pieces (Inf., VII, 106 ff.). Virgil explains that they are the souls of those who were vanquished by wrath. He then calls Dante's attention to other souls who lie under the slimy water which bubbles with their sighs. Embedded in the mud they speak:

"Sullen were we—we took
No joy of the pleasant air, no joy of the good Sun; our hearts smouldered with a sulky smoke;

Sullen we lie here now in the black mud."
This hymn they gurgle in their throats, for whole Words they can nowise frame.

(Inf., VII, 121-126)

The dictio and imagery of this passage immediately suggest that these souls are being punished for acedia. First of all, Dante

\footnote{The text itself does not make it clear that Dante is thinking of acedia here. Because of the controversy about Inf. VII (see below) many scholars have thought it necessary to locate the slothful in fore-hell rather than in the fifth circle.}

the song in the sphere of the moon is slack and less sonorous than in the other parts of heaven; Alain de Lille, Anticleudianus, ed. R. Bossuat, Textes philosophiques du moyen age, no. I (Paris, 1955), p. 117.
uses the highly technical term accidioso (line 123). Moreover, their crime was sadness in their lifetime ("tristi fummo"), which we have seen to have been synonymous with acedia ever since Gregory the Great. Finally, the impossibility of speaking clearly is frequently connected by Dante scholars with the vice of spiritual sloth; it is thought of as a characteristic symptom of the vice, used by Dante symbolically for the punishment of the crime in hell.\footnote{The basis for this interpretation is a strange inconsistency in St. Thomas. Of the four Nemesian species of tristitia discussed in ch. II Thomas equates achthos (the tristitia aggravans) with acedia, in Summa theologica, II-II, qu. 35, a. 1, arg. 1, and in De veritate, qu. 26, a. 4, ad 6. But in I-II, qu. 35, a. 8 he equates acedia with aches, the tristitia vocem amputans (also, perhaps, in Sent. lib. III, dist. 26, qu. 1, a. 3). This false identification is then attributed to "Gregory," i.e., Nemesius. Did Thomas blunder here, or was he using a different translation?}

But against the interpretation of these souls as representatives of acedia a serious objection has been raised. By placing two different deadly sins (wrath and sloth) in one circle Dante would have deviated from the scheme he adopted in the higher circles (where he has the lechers, the gluttons, and the covetous punished successively). This objection assumes that the poet used the scheme of the seven deadly sins as the structural principle not only of Purgatory, but also of Hell. But from canto VIII on obviously such an organization is abandoned; it gives way to a division of sins which Dante took from Aristotle.\footnote{Parallel to the whirlwind of lust or the mad rush of the misers and the prodigal.}

\footnote{The general structure of hell is outlined in Inf. XI.}
by a break in the composition of the Inferno: after canto VII Dante is said to have interrupted his work for some time and, when he resumed composition, to have adopted a different structural principle. Whether one accepts this hypothesis or not, it is evident that the structure of the Inferno is modeled upon various patterns and lacks the unequivocal simplicity of the Purgatorio.

Once it is established that the circles of hell do not clearly correspond to the conventional seven sins, the interpretation of the punishment in the fifth circle is open to debate. The souls under water may, then, very well be the slothful; but it is equally conceivable that Dante did not think of giving sloth a particular position in hell at all. Indeed, the majority of Dante scholars prefer to consider the fifth circle as inhabited only by the angry. In Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas anger was divided into three classes: violent anger which quickly rises and dies

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47 The suggestion of a break comes from a story transmitted by Boccaccio.


49 Nicomachean Ethics, IV, 5.

50 Summa theologica, II-II, qu. 158, a. 5; and I-II, qu. 46, a. 8.
sullenness, which is anger buried in the breast and
smoldering for a long time (iracundia amari); and bad temper, which is
anger concealed and nourished until it can be appeased by revenge
(iracundia difficiles). In the Inferno, then, these three categories
are supposedly divided between the two groups of sinners in the fifth
circle, whereby some scholars relegate both amari and difficiles to
the souls under water, while others affirm that Dante omitted the
difficiles.

This interpretation, however, has been felt to be unsatisfactory because it does not account for Dante's verbal reference to
acedia. Several scholars have, therefore, attempted to see in Dante
a connection between acedia and some form of wrath. Grandgent, for
example, claims that Dante identified sullenness (the amari) with
acedia, and is followed by more recent commentators. Grandgent's
claim is based on Brunetto Latini's Tesoretto, in which "accidia" is
said to be born of "ira," of the inability to take revenge quickly
and the ensuing hatred and inner torment. But this argument is
weakened by the fact that in Brunetto all the deadly sins are pre-
sented in a genetic chain, in which each link springs from the

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51 La Divina Commedia, rev. ed. (Boston, 1933), p. 68.
53 Brunetto Latini, Il Tesoretto, ed. Giovanni Batista Zannoni
(Florence, 1824), ch. 21, lines 145 ff.
Brunetto’s phrase "In ira nasce, e posa / Accidia niquitosa" and the ensuing elaboration on the genetic relationship may be nothing but a strange attempt to interlink the two sins. In any case, Brunetto does not connect the sin of sloth with the passion of anger.

A different, and I believe altogether more satisfactory, solution to this problem was given by a man who lived in the same intellectual atmosphere as our poet: Boccaccio. He explains the unmistakable relation between acedia and anger in the Inferno by interpreting the souls under water not as one of Aristotle's three species of violent anger (viz., the sulky), but as those who suffered from a deficiency of this passion. In other words, according to Boccaccio the fifth circle would contain souls who misused the passion of anger either by indulging too much (the violently wrathful) or too little in it (the slothful). This pattern corresponds exactly to the fourth circle, where Dante has the misuse of man's desire for possessions punished: here, too, both extremes of this "virtue" are included, viz., the misers and the prodigal.

54 Brunetto uses the same metaphor of "nasce" for three other sins besides accidia: invidia from orgoglio (lines 91-92), ira from invidia (lines 123-124), and convotisa from negghienza (lines 205-206). We found a similar genetic relation in the Parson's Tale.


56 H. Gmelin also recognizes this: "Nach dem aus Aristoteles geschöpften ethischen System der Sünden und Strafen bei Dante entsprechen einander aber, analog den Geizigen und den Verschwendern im Bereich der avaritia, auch im Bereich der iracundia ein zuviel und ein
of acedia with Aristotle's passion of anger—in contrast to Thomas' distinction of acedia as a species of tristitia—opens an entirely new horizon of fourteenth-century thought, which I will explore later in this chapter. It is enough at the moment to state that in Dante, evidently, the phenomenon of acedia is reflected in the regions of eternal punishment and that it extends to the quest for non-spiritual fame, as we have observed above. It is an aspect of human nature and of the moral life in its totality, not only of man's religious or, even more narrowly, his mystical activity.

From considering the seven deadly sins and acedia as an integral element in Dante's poetic summa of medieval thought, we now turn back to the English scene in order to analyze the idea of sloth in several poetic works which are less comprehensive in scope, but which indicate various important changes in the meaning and significance of the concept. Two of the three extensive poems by Gower use the scheme of the seven deadly sins for their principle of organization. In the Mirour de l'omme the scheme is used for a long drawn-out allegory of the marriage of World with the seven deadly sins and of the strife of evil against man's soul. At this marriage the seven sins come riding onto the scene in a picturesque pageant. Acedia

zuwenig der gleichen Leidenschaft"; but then he equates the "too much," and the "too little" with two of Aristotle's kinds of violent anger (i.e., with two species of the too much): "der active, nach aussen tobende Zorn und der gleichsam passive, nach innen sich verzehrende, die Verdrossenheit." Op. cit., vol. I, p. 149.
(Accidie or Accide) sits on a slow-moving ass and holds an owl on her fist. She carries a soft couch at her side, but apparently she has not slept enough, because her face has a rather dull appearance. From her marriage with World come five children: Somnolence (including Tenderness), Laziness ("Peresce," including Vain Hope, Vain Belief, Cowardice, Inconstancy, Desire to possess things without work, and Pusillanimity), Slackness (including Sorrow and Obstinacy), Idleness, and Negligence (including Ignorance and Forgetfulness). This offspring is described with great detail, in precisely the same fashion as the branches of sloth in Middle English manuals for confession like Handlyng Synne and Jacob's Well. Gower uses not only the traditional system and its divisions, but also incorporates numerous examples, similes, images, and Scriptural quotations which were the traditional stock-in-trade of medieval sermons and handbooks. But along with these conventions the Mirour contains a few traces of new developments which will be mentioned together with identical features in Piers Plowman.

Gower is much more original, however, in his English work, the Confessio Amantis. Here again the seven deadly sins furnish

58 The progeny of Accidie is treated in lines 5125-6180.
59 He also deals with the seven virtues, as remedies against the sins. To Accidie is opposed Prouesce (Strength) with five daughters, cf. lines 14,101-15,180.
the frame for a long narrative poem, but this time the doctrinal system serves as a mere scaffolding to hold a large number of stories together and provide some form of rational order. The poem is a dream vision in which the dreamer is "shriven" by Genius, the priest of Venus. This confessor presents the penitent dreamer with a regular Beichtspiegel: he expounds the nature of each of the seven sins and of their offspring, tells several exempla, and leads the dreamer to his confession regarding each particular sin. But this Beichtspiegel is transposed into the courtly-love tradition. The literary use of Church institutions and rites, of theological concepts and devotional practices for the expression of ideals and sentiments of courtly-love began at least as early as the twelfth century and flourished among secular poets of the later Middle Ages. The transfer of a manual for confession to this convention, however, is the particular achievement of John Gower. In the Confessio Amantis, then, Gower treats Pride, Wrath, Sloth, etc., as sins against the ideals of courtly love and, consequently, draws his exempla from the rich treasures of secular story telling in the Middle Ages.  

61 It is customary to speak of a "Church of Love" as a parallel to, or a parody of, the Christian Church. In Middle English there is even a "Venus Mass" of the fourteenth century, perhaps by Lydgate, which parodies parts of the Roman Mass; cf. Thomas Frederick Simmons, (ed.), The Lay Folks Mass Book, EETS, 71 (London, 1879), p. 391; Eleanor Prescott Hammond, English Verse between Chaucer and Surrey (Durham, 1927), pp. 207 ff.

62 He uses tales not only from Scripture and the Church Fathers (Jerome, Augustine, Isidore), but also from ancient pagan writers (Ovid mostly) as well as medieval romances, histories, and story
Sloth\textsuperscript{63} appears with seven conventional branches: Lachesce, Pusillanimity, Forgetfulness, Negligence, Idleness, Somnolence, and Tristesce. But "lachesce" here means slackness in \textit{Frauendienst} and is exemplified by Aeneas, whose sloth in his love for Dido brought death upon the queen (lines 1-146), contrasting with Ulysses' prompt return to Penelope upon receipt of a letter from her (lines 147-233). Similarly, pusillanimity stands for timid, fainthearted, or unsteadfast craving for the lady's affection (lines 313 ff.). The dreamer, however, has not been too slothful in his love; when he is questioned about somnolence, for example, he states that the service of his lady banishes drowsiness, and that even when he sleeps at night his heart continues to worship: he dreams only of her (lines 2848 ff.).

The wholesale transposition of an item of religious doctrine into the realm of secular, amatory poetry shows, if nothing more, the intimate and continuous presence of this scheme and of the concept of sloth to medieval minds, and its continued validity as a thought pattern. At the same time one wonders how seriously Gower took the idea of sin and the attempt to categorize the roots of vice and crime. Even the readiness of the modern critic to grant the \textit{Confessio Amantis} a moral value beyond its technical skill of

\textsuperscript{63}Book IV.
narration\textsuperscript{64} cannot quench one's suspicion that for Gower the seven deadly sins were nothing more than a convenient means to achieve some sort of artistic order. There remains, however, the fact that such a "secularization" of religious doctrines is indicative of a gradual change in the meaning and significance of \textit{acedia}. What we have remarked in our analysis of Dante, is here brought out more strongly: the concept of \textit{acedia} or sloth, in its beginnings exclusively connected with spiritual duties or states, widens its reference more and more to secular pursuits.

Before we follow this secularizing trend and similar developments in the history of the term, I wish to investigate the meaning of \textit{acedia}-sloth in a literary work which aims at the solution of strictly spiritual problems and breathes, so to speak, an exclusively religious and Christian atmosphere: Langland's \textit{Piers Plowman}.

The sin of sloth is discussed by Langland in several passages.\textsuperscript{65} It is first described with much detail in the great Confession scene.\textsuperscript{66} Later, when Haukyn, the active man, appears, sloth is again mentioned and its branches are listed.\textsuperscript{67} The vice turns up

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64} E.g., C. S. Lewis, \textit{The Allegory of Love} (Oxford, 1936), pp. 198 ff.
\item \textsuperscript{65} I use the three-text edition by Walter W. Skeat (Oxford, 1886).
\item \textsuperscript{66} A V, 223-241; B V, 392-468 ("Accidia"); C VIII, 1-69 ("Confessio Accidie"), followed by the list of the branches, lines 70-119.
\item \textsuperscript{67} B XIII, 407-421; in C the branches are added to the Confession of Sloth; see the preceding note.
\end{itemize}
once more in a list of the seven deadly sins, as they are discussed with reference to Poverty. And finally, the dreamer sees an allegorical figure of Sloth, the child of Life and Fortune, who is wedded to Despair and wields a stone-sling by which he casts dread and despair about him.

In the great Confession of the people the personified figure of Sleuth comes to Repentance as the last of the seven sins. It appears first as a layman, or a common Christian, then as a priest, and finally again as a layman, perhaps a landlord. In accord with these shifting aspects of Sleuth the confession centers upon three different components of the vice. There are, first, sins of neglect of religious duties common to all states of life: ignorance of the Pater Noster and of religious knowledge; breaking of vows through forgetfulness; negligence in performing penance; praying with disgust or inattention; preference for hearing "idle tales" over religious meditation; neglect of the deeds of bodily mercy; inobservance of fast-days and of Lent; lateness at Mass; and negligence in confession. These sins are followed by others which are proper to "prest and parsoun": they are cases of ignorance, of the inability

68B XIV, 253 ff.; C XVII, 95 ff.

69B XX, 155 ff.; C XXIII, 156 ff.

70I follow the B version. C has only minor divergences in the description of Sloth, while A presents a considerably shorter "confession."
to read the psalter and canon law. To these examples of spiritual negligence Langland adds a third group of sins of sloth, which regard exclusively "worldly" obligations and social duties: wilful neglect in meeting one's financial obligations; unpunctual and unwilling payment of servants; ingratitude toward kind services rendered by others; the waste of goods through carelessness; and the misuse of one's youth out of idleness.

After Sleuthe has confessed his sins, he repents and promises amendment and satisfaction. This sequel to the confession has given rise to a long debate over the poem and its authorship.\(^1\) The original stumbling-block—the supposed break between lines 235 and 236 of Passus V in the A-text—actually does not exist if one considers (a) that in the teaching of the Church restitution is an essential part required for complete satisfaction, the third element in a valid confession; and (b) that Sloth, especially its branches of negligence and forgetfulness, comprises sins that demand restitution, such as the withholding of wages or the neglect of returning borrowed things.\(^2\) The real difficulty is the addition of Robert the

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\(^2\) Although I have not found withholding of wages or delay in returning borrowed goods directly mentioned as effects of sloth in Middle English manuals for confession, both Jacob's Well and Mirk's Instructions contain terms which are general enough to include such sins. However, these works seem to lay the stress on the neglect of neighborly love and aid, rather than on the non-fulfillment of a legal obligation.
Robber, a personification of avarice, to the confession of Sleuthe. But R. W. Chambers has been able to show rather convincingly\textsuperscript{73} that the "Robert's man" was a composite character made out of the vices of gluttony, lechery, avarice, and sloth, and that therefore this figure was at least not "an unfit sequel to the confession of Sloth."\textsuperscript{74}

Still, this supposedly fitting connection of covetousness with sloth remains somewhat tenuous. I believe a different interpretation is possible, and, on the whole, more satisfactory. The Robert passage, which follows the confession of Sleuthe in A and B, speaks of a penitent thief who cannot make the required restitution, without which the sacrament of penance would be void. Now, instead of despairing of salvation he expresses his trust in Christ's mercy, which was exemplified for all times by the reassurance He gave to the repentant thief on the cross. As far as the composition of \textit{Piers} is concerned, this can mean two things. Either the Robert passage is a treatment of despair, the ultimate effect of acedia-sloth, and Langland's choice of the figure of a thief was suggested by the biblical "good thief," who is throughout the Middle Ages the conventional exemplary figure of the attitude that is opposed to the sin of


despair. Or Robert is a comprehensive character who, at the end of
the confession of the seven (or six, if A is complete) deadly sins,
stands for all these sins and tries to master the temptation to de­
spair. The choice of a robber would agree with Langland's stress on
the connection between avarice, gluttony, lechery, and idleness, and
would fall in with the general preoccupation with social justice that
penetrates the poem.

When the poet of Piers Plowman, thus, groups acedia togeth­
er with lechery and gluttony, he follows—as we have seen earlier—an
established tradition and contemporary homiletic practices. In the
Confession of Gluttony Langland has created a lively fusion of these
vices, which appear as typical "week-end sins." Glotoun, on his way
to church, cannot quite overcome the magnetic attraction of the
tavern. The result is a long carousal with wine, song, and women,
and some less agreeable after-effects. Finally,

With al the wo of this worlde his wyf and his wenche
Baren hym home to his bedde and brougte hym therinne.
And after al this excesse he had an accidie,
That he slepe Saturday and Sunday til sonne yede to reste.
(B v, 364-367)

The traits of sloth itself, as they appear in the confes­
sion, are, of course, made up of conventional material and follow the

75 See above, ch. III, pp. 131 ff. Langland lets sloth follow
gluttony in B II, 92-100 (C II, 97-104). It is the cause of lechery
(evidenced by the men of Sodom) in B XIV, 74-76. For the connection
of sloth with night-watches at the tavern, cf. R. Morris (ed.), Old
English Homilies of the Twelfth Century, Second Series, EETS, 53 (Lon­
don, 1875), p. 11; John Mirk, Festial, ed. Theodor Erbe, EETS, ES, 96
(London, 1905), p. 63; Pierce the Ploughmans Crede, ed. Walter W.
Skeat, EETS, 50 (London, 1867), lines 91-93.
model of many works of "devotional literature." What distinguishes the Confession of Sleuthe in Piers Plowman from manuals of confession, however, is the threefold division of the aspects of the vice and the large emphasis given to the neglect of social obligations, which is in fact equal in proportion to the neglect of general religious duties. On several previous occasions we have noticed the inclusion of such aspects of sloth in various works, mostly dating from the second half of the fourteenth century. But if the devotional literature before that time showed very little of this tendency, and St. Thomas' discussion of acedia excluded the neglect of work altogether, in Langland and his contemporaries the concept of sloth is evidently widened in its scope to give non-spiritual obligations an equal amount of attention. This raises the question of the relationship between acedia-sloth and work.

In ascetic writings of the early Fathers we noticed that work—in the sense of manual labor—among those who strove after spiritual perfection (and among whom the concept of acedia originated) had three functions: to supply the monks with the necessities of life; to provide means for practicing charity; and to keep the monk's mind and body occupied during the hours when the concentration on

76 The same is true of the branches of sloth listed in Piers; cf. above, p. 183, n. 67. In them, slothful neglect of secular duties is not mentioned or specified.

77 See above, ch. III, pp. 119-120; ch. V, p. 183.
spiritual matters would flag. In later centuries, however, after spiritual guidance had to be extended to men living in the world, the evaluation of work was based upon a much broader foundation.

The necessity of labor, so we are told by fourteenth-century vernacular documents, is essential to human nature: "we er kyndely borne for to swink / Als the foughel is kindly born for to flægh." Consequently, the neglect of work is a very great sin, indeed, because it prevents man from fulfilling one of the most basic demands of his existence.

Now, for medieval men "labor" had a much larger meaning than for us. It virtually included all forms of human activity.

Petrus Cantor, for example, divided it into work within the order of nature (including bodily and mental activities), work within the order of grace (including penance, ascetic practices, and deeds of mercy), and the work of sin. According to Catholic teaching, the

78 See above, ch. I, p. 37. The third purpose of work was still stressed by Pockham: "Labor principaliter inventus est pro otio ex­cluendo," De paupertate, ch. 9, quoted in Hammond, op. cit., p. 527.

79 Lay Folks' Catechism, ed. Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth, EETS, 118 (London, 1901), lines 537-538. This passage occurs in the treatment of sloth. Similarly in Dan John Gay­tryge's Sermon, EETS, 26, p. 14. Alan of Lille says that stars, animals, and all nature fulfill their officia; only man deviates from his desidia; Summa de arte praedicatoria, VII (PL 210:127).

80 Cf. Petrus Cantor: "pigritia maximum est peccatum," Verbum abbreviatum, 81 (PL 205:246). Mirk says that the man who wants to be saved "most travayl his body yn good werkes, and gete his lyfe wyth swynke, and put away all ydylnes and sleuth," Festial, EETS, ES, 96, p. 2.

81 Verbum abbreviatum, 81 (PL 205:246-250).
order of nature and the order of grace are not absolutely separate and opposed, but rather, the former can be raised to the plane of the latter by means of the "good intention." With respect to the sin of acedia this would mean that neglect in works on the level of grace would also be reflected in the order of nature. As our investigation has shown so far, acedia, from Evagrius to St. Thomas, meant primarily boredom with and neglect of spiritual work. In the fourteenth century, however, it came to include more and more neglect of "natural" work, that is, of secular activities.\textsuperscript{52} We can, already at this point, predict that in this development there would come a moment when acedia would break loose from its spiritual reference and become totally "secularized."

The growing inclusion of secular work among the things which the slothful neglect is well exemplified in Gower's Mirour de l'omme. When Gower discusses the daughters of Accidie, he frequently shows their effects in works of the body as well as the soul. For example, all five daughters have such a disposition

\textsuperscript{52}This, of course, does not mean that religious duties were now excluded from the concept of sloth. On the contrary, sometimes "sloth" is defined as the excessive attachment to worldly occupations which leads to the neglect of spiritual goods, as in a sermon from the end of the fourteenth century: "this synne of slowth stendith in this, that a man goueth hym in is occupacion velnyg all to the world and lytill or els nothinge to-Godward." Woodburn O. Ross (ed.), Middle English Sermons, EETS, 209 (London, 1940), p. 53.
Que pour labour du camp ne vine
A nul temps serront travailléz,
Ne se serront abandonnez
A les prières ordeinez,
Comme sont precept du loy divine.

The same division appears again and again in the description of the daughters. And when the poet recommends Solicitude as a remedy against Idleness, he refers to the biblical commandment to work in the sweat of one's brow:

Auci qant dieus ot entredit
Au primer homme et contredit
Son paradis, lors commenda
Q'au labourer en terre irra
Et en suour pourchacera
Le pain, dont chascun homme vit:
Dont m'est avis, cil qui serra
Solicitous molt luy valdra,
Car corps et aime en ont proufit.

The interest of these passages lies, of course, not in their commonplace thought, but in the fact that they occur in the discussion of acedia.

Gower includes among the followers of Sloth false beggars:

Dame Oedivesce meine et guie
Ceaux qui par faignte truandie,
Quant sont a labourer puissant,
Se vont oiceps au beggerie. (Lines 5797-5800)

Langland, too, criticizes able-bodied beggars in several passages. However, he does not present them as clear-cut representatives of

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83 Tendresce (5353-64), Peresce (5533-39), Lachesce (5590-92, 96-97, 5615-16), Oedivesce (5773-84, 5816-17).
the slothful; they are gluttons and lechers as well. When the
dreamer surveys the field full of people, hediscerns "bidders and
beggars," who go to bed in gluttony and rise with ribaldry, and
"Sleep and sleughe the suweth hem evere" (A Prol., 45). In B VI
their "sleuthe" consists of unwillingness to perform bodily work in
the field: "In lecherye and in losengerye ye lyuen, and in sleuthe"
(B VI, 145). In general, false beggars are not included in late
medieval treatments of the sin of sloth, in contrast to neglectful
servants. The condemnation of able-bodied beggars in the four-
teenth century, as it is reflected in Piers, seems not to be based
on spiritual motives (because they committed a deadly sin), but on
political and economic reasons: the increase in number of migrants
and the shortage of man-power after the Black Death were serious
problems for the government.

Similarly, the consequent condemnation of giving alms to
false beggars, as it was decreed by the Ordinance of Labourers of
1349 and later statutes, was a political measure rather than a
moral or religious directive. I have not found, in the treatments
of sloth, any indication that this type of almsgiving was considered

84A good example of a manual which considers lazy and neglectful
servants as men who sin through sloth is Jacob's Well, under "Faylyng." Servants who grow slack in their work "arn vnworthy to haue ony

85See E. M. Leonard, The Early History of English Poor Relief
(Cambridge, Eng., 1900), pp. 5-6; Brian Tierney, Medieval Poor Law
(Berkeley, 1959).
morally wrong because it was an incentive to sloth. The Book of Vices and Virtues condemns supporting harlots and minstrels, because they seduce people to idleness and malice. But while rewarding jugglers and mimes was frequently considered harmful, the support of false beggars did not enter the discussion of acedia.

In this respect, then, Gower and Langland show an advance over strictly doctrinal literature insofar as they are aware of contemporary social problems which they try to measure in terms of the moral system of their time. From the late fourteenth century on, innovations in the history of the concept acedia take place, in general, not in theological writings, but in secular literature. This becomes evident when we examine the vice or attitude which directly opposes labor: idleness.

Otium had been connected with acedia ever since the time of the Egyptian Fathers. We noticed the emphasis which Cassian laid on it in his Institutiones. Cassian also included otiositas in his progeny of the vice, and from then on idleness formed a standard branch of the deadly sin. Although it was not included in Gregory's list, it is omnipresent in the progenies of acedia during the later Middle

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Ages. Especially the Middle English handbooks (e.g., *The Book of Vices and Virtues*, *Avenbite of Inwit*, *Jacob’s Well*), following Latin and French models, include and describe it, but shorter lists of the branches of sloth also mention it again and again. Here, idleness is clearly an effect of the distaste for spiritual things, which shows itself in the unwillingness to be occupied with (spiritual or secular) work.

Idleness, of course, always loomed large as a major theme in religious literature, even outside the treatment of acedia. A *locus classicus* is Jerome’s letter to Rusticus, “On the solitary life,” where he recommends manual labor for ascetic purposes: “Always have some work on hand, that the devil may find you busy.” Idleness opens the door to the fiend and becomes, thus, the occasion for all vices. Idleness as the "mother of vices" is a topos which continues through the whole Middle Ages; the Egyptian monks already knew it, and Chaucer’s Second Nun begins her Prologue with

The ministre and the noircse unto vices,
Which that men clepe in Englishsh ydlenes. (Lines 1-2)

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89 *Abbas Isaias, Oratio* 17 (PG 40:1148); Evagrius, *Capita par-aenetica*, 95 (PG 79:1257).
In a different metaphor with the same import, idleness is the porter or the gate to all vices:

Of slouthe at morowe and slombrynge ydelnesse
whiche all vyces is chefe porteresse ...  

Chaucer's Parson, too, calls it "the yate of alle harmes" (Parson's Tale, 214).  

Similar metaphors for idleness appear frequently in devotional literature among the progeny of acedia-sloth. Henry of Lancaster's Livre de seyntz medicines, for example, elaborates the image of sloth (Peresce) as the mother-hen of all other sins. In treatments of sloth dating from the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, idleness with its traditional aspects tends to occupy more and more space. Bromyard gives, under Accidia, several examples of sheer laziness and inactivity: he speaks of the man who prays to God for help to get his cart out of the mud, but who is too lazy to put his own hands to the wheel; or the cat that wants to catch fish, but is unwilling to wet his feet. Another aspect of sloth which now

90 The Kalender of Shepardses ([1518?]), ch. 30.
91 The figure of Idleness the Porter comes from the Roman de la Rose, where Dame Oiseuse receives the dreamer at the gate of the garden. See also Second Nun's Prologue, line 3, and Knight's Tale, I, 1940.
94 Summa Predicantium ([Basel, 1484]), A VIII, art. 5.
appears frequently is the waste of time which this sin leads to. Lost silver and similar things can be easily recovered, so warns Bromyard again, but not the time one has wasted in vain deeds: "Tempus semel amissum irrecuperabilis est thesaurus." Such themes and examples, which were the common stock of the fourteenth-century preacher, indicate clearly the growing application of "sloth" to non-religious attitudes and morals.

Together with the tenets of worldly wisdom, which many examples from Bromyard and other spiritual writers imply, the authority of classical sources is frequently used in the discussion of sloth. From the epistles of St. Paul on, pagan auctores were, to a varying extent, pillaged of their treasure of imagery and wisdom. Classical ideas and ideals always continued to live, however scantily, side by side with Christian teaching and views throughout the whole Middle Ages. With them a certain amount of secular wisdom remained alive. Here is not the place to review the history of classical education in the Middle Ages, but with regard to acedia it

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95 Ibid., "Negligentia," art. 1. Cf. Chaucer, M.L.Tale, 25-32. Étienne de Bourbon also speaks of otium, which robs a man of his time, and gives the exemplum of a young man who, by meditating on the swift passage of time, is suddenly converted; op. cit., pp. 345-346.

96 Other exempla of the same nature are: the slumbering Virgil, who is wakened by a fly (Bromyard); the sleeping man who gets burned because he is too lazy to move away from the fire (Barclay); the tale of Emperor Polonius, who gives his realm to whoever of his three sons proves the most slothful (Gesta Romanorum, Bromyard).
must be said that, while up to the thirteenth century very little classical material was used in describing the vice, from the fourteenth century on quotations and examples from classical authors become frequent. This is true not only of an imaginative poem like Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, but also of a doctrinal handbook like Bromyard's *Summa Praedicantium*. In particular, it is Seneca who furnishes a good number of sentences for the description of sloth; and it is especially idleness, *otium*, that forms the bridge between Stoic wisdom and the teaching of the Church.

When Bromyard, for example, defines *acedia*, he uses quotations from St. Bernard, Seneca, John of Damascus, St. Thomas, and John Cassian. From the Roman moral philosopher he gets this definition: "Vitam in odium ocium adducere solet."<sup>97</sup> Seneca's authority is expected to substantiate the fact that *acedia* makes man "lose and dislike all spiritual taste in the things that belong to God."<sup>98</sup>

Obviously, for Bromyard idleness (*oticum*) and *acedia* refer to the same psychic state. A similar identification occurs in a sermon from the time of the Great Schism, where it is said that "a slouthefull man makes idelnesse is god."<sup>99</sup> This equation of idleness with sloth in spiritual authors themselves is apparently one of the causes which

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<sup>97</sup>Bromyard, *op. cit.*, A VIII, art. 1.
<sup>99</sup>*EETS*, 209, p. 22, lines 24-25.
account for the later change in the meaning of sloth. In religious writings "idleness" still refers predominantly to spiritual occupations, as is clearly shown by Bromyard's treatise. The unwavering inclusion of "idleness" in discussions of sloth and the strong emphasis it receives there even tend to raise what is fundamentally a "humanistic" vice\(^{100}\) to the status of a sin.\(^{101}\) But in secular literature, conversely, the marriage of the two concepts causes "sloth" to become secularized and, finally, to acquire its modern meaning of indolence and sluggishness without the original reference to spiritual goods.

It may be asked whether the Middle English word "sloth" did not always have the general meaning of indolence and was used for the vice of acedia only with restrictive qualifications. It is true that the deadly sin was occasionally termed "sloth in God's service,"\(^{102}\) but this phrase seems to be limited to what Horstmann has called "Yorkshire Writers." On the other hand, even the Surtees

\(^{100}\) By "humanistic" vice I intend to indicate no more than the fact that the idea of idleness being a vice, an obstacle on man's way to perfection, originated not in theological thought, but in the moral wisdom of "pagan" philosophers, perhaps the Stoics (if it is at all possible to pinpoint the origin of a maxim of common-sense). I merely want to stress that idleness per se is not a theological concept like acedia.

\(^{101}\) Cf. the word pair "ydylnes and sleuth" in Mirk's Festial, EETS, ES, 96, p. 2; see above, p. 189, n. 80.

Psalter, which was perhaps written by Rolle, translates the biblical *locus classicus* of the vice of *acedia* ("dormitavit anima mea prae taedio," *Ps. 118:28*) simply with "sleue" or "sleuth." And all other Middle English documents from which we have studied the concept of *acedia*-sloth use the word "sloth" without modification for the deadly sin.

The "secularization" of "sloth" can be observed in imaginative literature from the late fourteenth century on. Langland, for example, once uses "sloth" in a paraphrase of *ociositas*:

> For the meschief and the meschaunce amonges men of Sodome<br>Wex thorw plente of payn and of pure sleuthes;<br>Occositas et habundancia panis ... ...<br>

(B XIV, 75-77)

We find "sloth" denoting mere idleness more frequently in the works of Chaucer. Lucrece, in the *Legend of Good Women*, is pictured sitting in her chamber and spinning, "to kepen hire from slouth and idlenesse" (line 1722). In "Gentilesse" Chaucer affirms that the "firs te stok" was righteous, true to its word, sober, piteous, noble, of a clean mind, "and loved besinesse / Against the vyce of slouthe, in honestee." Constance "was so diligent, withouten slouthe" (ML

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103 In the versions of MS. Vesp. D VII and MS. Harl. 1770; *YW*, II, 252.

104 In MS. Egerton 614, *ibid.*

105 Several of Chaucer's good women are always busy in order to avoid sloth and idleness: Constance (*MLTale*, 550-531), Griseldis (*Clerk'sT*, 217), May (*Physician'sT*, 55-57), and Lucrece.
Tale, 530), and Eolus is bidden to take his trumpet "withouten slouthe" (HF, III, 1764). "Sloth" also stands for negligence in non-religious activities. So Aurelius asks his magician helper to make speed:

But looketh now, for no negligence or slouthe
Ye tarie us here no longer than to-morwe.

(FranklT, 1232-33)

And of John of Gaunt it is said that he did his love-service "withoute feynynge outher slouthe" (BD, 1100).

Sloth is sometimes bitterly blamed for causing man to neglect the strive for fame and earthly glory. When Lady Fame is approached by the seventh crowd—those who have done nothing in life to merit fame—, she scolds them:

Ye masty swyn, ye ydel wrecches,
Ful of roten, slowe techches!
What? false theves! wher ye wolde
Be famous good, and nothing nolde
Deserve why, ne never ye roughte?

For ye be lyke the sweynte cat.

(HF, 1777 ff.)

The "sweynte cat," as we noticed above, is one of the stock examples for acedia in fourteenth-century preaching. Sloth is a blemish ("tecche") also in Troilus' character (Troilus, III, 935), at least to Pandarus' eyes. Pandarus calls it "slouthe" not to grasp the "goodly aventure" which chance or Fortune has offered his friend; such inaction is highly blameworthy.

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106 Bromyard gives this example. See above, p. 195.
107 Troilus and Criseyde, II, 281 ff.; also: II, 959, 1008, 1500; III, 935; V, 1584.
These examples, I believe, indicate that by the second half of the fourteenth century "sloth" has gained a new dimension, that of inactivity per se. It is the same as idleness, which—according to Dame Prudence—was condemned as a dangerous vice by Cicero, Salomon, Cato, and St. Jerome (Tale of Melibee, lines 1586 ff.). We have noticed this stretching of the concept's meaning in many instances, notably in Dante, and shall soon see how, towards the end of the Middle Ages, this new dimension becomes an undisputed aspect of acedia.

Part of this new tendency is the inclusion of "humanistic" studies, of reading and writing, among the remedies for the vice of sloth. In connection with the dispute about Tupper's theory that the Canterbury Tales are a kind of allegory or exemplification of the seven deadly sins, scholars have collected a number of prologues to books and poems in which the author—like Chaucer in the Second Nun's Prologue—justifies his writing by the argument that

\[\text{Again, the basis for this inclusion is "idleness";}\]
\[\text{cf. Seneca's "otium sine litteris mors est, et hominis vivi sepultura."}\]

literary activity puts "us fro swich ydelenesse." Although the majority of such "idleness-prologues" date from the later Middle Ages, it is to be noted that they were also used by a few earlier writers who preserved, or nourished, a taste for the classical auctores. The unknown author of the tenth-century (?) Ecbasis captivi, for example, justifies his making verses because it is partly a remedy against torpor; the question whether to take this remark as autobiography or as mere literary convention is still undecided. In the twelfth century Giraldus Cambrensis similarly justifies his prolonged studies and his writing, "ne forte quiete torpescerem aut desidia." A more spiritual hue is given to the same justification by Peter Damian. He tells his bishops that he


has written his *opuscula* because, not being able to bear the boredom of idleness and his solitary cell, and not being capable of hard manual work either, he took to writing so that he could "discipline his wandering mind with the bridle of meditation and drive away more easily the tumult of onrushing thoughts and the presence of *acedia* which was stealing upon him."\(^\text{113}\)

Literary studies and occupation with the sciences are, together with work in the fields, the great divisions of "busyness," the virtue opposed to idleness, which Gower establishes in his treatment of sloth in the *Confessio Amantis* (IV, 2363 ff.). Later, in Lydgate, we find literary activities and the pursuit of earthly fame directly opposed to the vice of sloth. He states as his reason for writing: "Dull slouth to eschew, my selFE to exercise."\(^\text{114}\) He also praises his noble patrons for their literary pursuits which kept them out of sloth. Of the Duke of Gloucester Lydgate says:

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Duc of Gloucestre    men this prince calle
And natwithstandyng  his staat and dignyte
His corage neuer     coth appalle
To studie in bookis   off antiquite
Therin he hath       so gret felicite
Vertuousli           hym silff to ocupie
Off vicious slouth    to haue the maistrie.
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(Fall of Princes, General Prologue, st. 57)\(^\text{115}\)


\(^\text{114}\) Prologue to the *Eclogues*, line 51, in Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

\(^\text{115}\) Similarly, *The Fall of Princes*, st. 60; *Epithalamium for Gloucester*, st. 21 (both in Hammond, *op. cit.*, pp. 163 and 148).
Lydgate's long allegory *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* (1426), an adaptation of Deguileville's *Pelerinage de la vie humaine* (1330 and 1355), shows the concept of *acedia* in all the complexity it has acquired by the fifteenth century. The pilgrim meets first Dame Idleness and Labour, between whom he has to choose. Idleness here bears characteristic traits of Oiseuse from the *Roman de la Rose*. After the pilgrim has learned his lesson, he encounters the seven deadly sins. Among them is Sloth, an old hag with an axe under her arm, leading beasts bound with ropes behind her. She ties the pilgrim's feet together. Then she describes her own nature. Her main characteristic is idleness:

> And, ther-fore, Slouthe ys my name,  
> Off custom callyd "Ydlenesse".  
> (Lines 13,828-829)

She induces people to sleep and keeps the sailor slumbering until his ship sinks; she causes brambles and nettles to grow in the garden and sings the raven's song, "craas, craas." But besides procrastination and indolence in work, her nature also includes continuous dissatisfaction: she may be called "hevynesse" and resembles a mill that always turns but grinds nothing, "save waste upon myn owne thouht" (lines 13,834-836). Finally, Sloth is weariness of one's life and envy (lines 13,837-842). The ropes she carries betoken strictly

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neglect of various religious obligations, such as delay of confession and spiritual despair.

Lydgate's figure of Sloth, then, sums up the various ingredients of the vice which we have seen manifested in secular and religious literature through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, in his *Pilgrimage* the figure of Idleness remains a separate character and indicates, thus, the provenance of this "enemy of man's soul" from a tradition outside the seven-deadly-sin scheme. At the same time, when Sloth introduces herself she states that customarily she is known as Idleness. This unresolved inconsistency in the relationship between the two abstractions may be considered as symbolic of the conflict between various thought patterns and moral "systems" which, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, struggled for primacy or entered into different mixtures. Acedia, as we have seen, belonged strictly to the theological scheme of the seven deadly sins, while idleness may be considered a basic obstacle in the pursuit of secular wisdom or perfection, a vice in the system of "humanistic" ethics. Both in religious writings and in the secular literature from, at least, Chaucer onwards, the two ideas became more and more identified, as is evidenced by word-pairs like "slothful and idle" or "slothful and negligent" in Chaucer and Lydgate.

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117 Idleness is called *inimica animae* in Benedict's *Rule*, ch. 48.
The examination of several literary key figures of medieval England, then, has shown that towards the end of the Middle Ages the concept of acedia-sloth underwent a process of "secularization." This process had at least two component tendencies: first, the inclusion of the neglect of secular, non-spiritual work under the sin of sloth; and second, the growing identification of sloth with idleness. While in works with a religious or didactic purpose the concept of sloth never completely lost its primary reference to spiritual matters, it covered many attitudes which betray indolence and sheer laziness with regard to non-religious activities. In secular works the latter aspect of "sloth" came to predominate.

The widening of the concept acedia in the direction of worldly wisdom is well shown in Boccaccio's commentary to the Inferno. Boccaccio divides the vice into "atti morali" and "atti spirituali." Concerning moral acts he says:

The management of household affairs grows worse and worse in his [the slothful person's] hands; he does not look after, nor is he interested in, his possessions, his workers, or his servants; if the production of his estate decreases, he does not care because of his negligence. He would never burn with zeal for public affairs. . . . His bed, prolonged nights, and equally long sleep are for him the most pleasing and desirable good: he prefers solitude, darkness, and silence to any kind of delightful company.

And in spiritual matters the slothful sins because he does not visit the sick and the imprisoned; does not help with his advice those who need it; does not visit the church, does not confess in time, does not receive the sacraments, and does not put in order what belongs to the soul, nor what belongs to the body.
The effects of acedia are poverty, want, and misery, in which one becomes scabby, weak, "melancholy," and ragged; affliction of the mind, self-hatred, and boredom of life; ignorance of God, contempt for virtue, loss of fame; a multitude of idle thoughts; lukewarmness of mind, delay of one's works, general disgust with everything that is good; "and ultimately, after a sad life, eternal perdition of the soul."  

Barclay, in his *Ship of Fools*, stresses the "secular" aspects of sloth still more. He speaks of the lazy servants who sleep continually and are "voyde of dilygence"; he gives an example of the lazy sleeper who would rather get burned than move away from the fire; he shows how unprofitable sloth is and how it leads to poverty; and finally, Barclay brings some historical examples of how idleness has led men into the loss of virtue (David) and the loss of fame and national greatness (the Roman Empire).

What has caused these changes in the meaning of acedia—sloth is a matter for speculation. Undoubtedly the semantic changes reflect new social and economic conditions, whose analysis would lead us too far afield here. But the changing conditions are also mirrored in theoretical cogitations. I believe that at the root of the semantic widening lies a new conception of the vice, differing from Thomas and his intellectual cosmos. While Thomas, in summing

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up the thinking of centuries, explained acedia as a species of sorrow and referred it exclusively to the bonum spirituale, Boccaccio identifies the vice with the lack of the passion that man has to overcome obstacles: acedia is the "vizio opposito all'iracundia"—in modern terms, the accidioso has "no go." Although I am at the moment unable to prove it, I suppose that this interpretation of the vice is not restricted to Boccaccio, but comes out of the "new" analysis and interpretation of Aristotle's Ethics in the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. However this may be, Boccaccio's interpretation can easily be taken as an instance of the attempt to harmonize Aristotelian ethics with a traditional doctrine of the medieval Church. The result is a concept which, still called acedia, spans both the disgust and boredom with spiritual goods, and the neglect of actualizing man's potentialities in the world.

CHAPTER VI

ACEDIA AND MELANCHOLY

The preceding chapter has dealt with several changes in the concept of acedia-sloth during the later Middle Ages. We turn now to a hypothetical climax in the history of the concept, the point at which it is supposed to have turned into modern melancholy.\(^1\) The chief evidence for this transformation is a passage on accidia in Petrarch's *Secretum*. Though Petrarch is considered the great intermediary between two epochs, or even worlds, the precise nature of this particular transformation has not been sufficiently clarified, nor has it been shown in exactly what way Petrarch's accidia may be thought of as connecting medieval acedia with melancholy. It is with these matters that the present chapter is concerned.

In the second discourse of Petrarch's book of confessions\(^2\) the two speakers, Franciscus and Augustinus, examine Franciscus' moral life and turn, near the end, to the vice of "accidia," which

\(^1\) See Introduction, pp. 7 ff.

\(^2\) *Secretum*, ed. Enrico Carrara, in *Francesco Petrarca, Prose*, ed. G. Martellotti et al. (Milan, [1955]).
besets him heavily. Franciscus gives a detailed description of this moral disease, and both he and Augustinus discuss its causes and remedies. What is called "accidia" in this treatise, however, seems to bear very little resemblance to the vice we know from Cassian, St. Thomas, or St. Bonaventure. Rather, the psychological state described by Franciscus looks much like nineteenth-century melancholy and is, therefore, in modern translations rendered as "melancholy" or Weltschmerz. Consequently, numerous modern Petrarch scholars, from the late nineteenth century on, have claimed that Petrarch somehow transformed the medieval concept of acedia into the modern sentiment of melancholy or that through Petrarch's personal experience the idea of acedia reached its latest, its modern form.

This assertion goes back to the works of G. Koerting and L. Geiger. Geiger, for example, speaks of three phases of acedia: first being a "monastic disease" (Klosterkrankheit), it was changed

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\[^{3}\text{My references are to the Carrara edition, which contains also an Italian translation. An English translation is William H. Draper's Petarch's Secret, or The Soul's Conflict with Passion (London, 1911). German translation: Hermann Hefele, Francesco Petrarca, Brief an die Nachwelt--Gespräche über die Weltverachtung--Von seiner und vieler Leute Unwissenheit, in Das Zeitalter der Renaissance, ed. Marie Herzfeld, I. Serie, Bd. 2. (Jena, 1910).}\]


\[^{5}\text{Ludwig Geiger, Renaissance und Humanismus in Italien und Deutschland (Berlin, 1882), pp. 26-27.}\]
by Dante into a "secular disease," only to be elevated, by Petrarch, to a philosophical predicament:

Now it is no longer a spiritual sin which would exclude the faithful from eternal bliss, nor is it a secular malady that bans the useful members of society from the company of joyful human beings; rather, it becomes a genuinely human suffering which visits especially the best (Tuchtigsten), i.e., the struggle between appearance and reality, the effort to fill the wasteland of everydayness with philosophic thought.6

Zöckler likewise sees in this change an idealization of "the ancient monastic vice of indolent dullness" to "noble melancholy or Weitschmerz."7 Similarly, Dilthey says, "it is the old monastic disease in a new form."8 A more recent scholar, Hugo Friedrich, distinguishes between Dante's and Petrarch's accidia, claiming that Petrarch made it into "a positive value, viz., the condition for the contemplative life" and thus began "the modern cult of melancholy."9

Other scholars are more cautious and abstain from considering Petrarch's term as the more advanced point on a straight line of development which the concept acedia supposedly underwent. Realizing


7Otto Zöckler, Die Tugendlehre des Christentums geschichtlich dargestellt in der Entwicklung ihrer Lehrformen (Gutersloh, 1904), p. 279.


the difference between Petrarch's *accidia* and the medieval vice, Voigt declares Petrarch's use of the word as "totally unfitting" and excuses the slip by citing Petrarch's ignorance of etymology and scorn for the schoolmen. In a very similar fashion, Tatham is puzzled by the problem of where Petrarch got the term and surmises that the source was Dante, whose vice of *accidia* Petrarch modified under the influence of Cicero and Seneca. Panofsky, finally, whose thought on the subject will have to be analyzed at some length later, believes that "accidia" was the only term available to Petrarch for his peculiar sentiment—a sentiment very familiar to Renaissance humanists, who called it "melancholy." A third position is taken by scholars who consider Petrarch's *accidia* not as *Weltenschmerz*, the "gloomy brooding and indolent sorrow at the badness of the world," but rather as the true medieval vice.14

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This disagreement among Petrarch scholars makes it necessary to analyze Petrarch's treatise and his description of "accidia" in the light of the present study, and to see in what relation Petrarch's concept stands to the deadly sin I have described. I abstain from making a detailed survey of the entire Secretum, which can be found elsewhere, and will, instead, consider the elements of the dialogue which are directly relevant to such an analysis.

The initial proposition of the Secretum—springing from Franciscus' meditations on the origin and end of life, which are interrupted by the appearance of Lady Veritas and St. Augustine—is that unhappiness depends entirely on man's free will. Franciscus questions this principle by reference to his personal experience: he has felt his own misery and wept over it, but has not become happy. Augustinus charges him with not making a serious effort of the will, which would quench all desires for inferior goods and which can be achieved by an intense meditation upon man's mortality. Franciscus has, it appears, already engaged in such an exercise, but without success. Then, Augustinus concludes, his mind is enslaved by the four passions which distract and disturb him. Hence Franciscus' inner split, his dissatisfaction with being imperfect and his impotence in the face of it. To settle this internal war Franciscus has to begin with an accurate examination of his moral life.

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16"Illa intestina discordia," p. 68. Similarly in the section on accidia: "intestinus tumultus tue mentis," p. 120.
Throughout the entire second discourse, then, Augustinus and Franciscus analyze the latter's character step by step with reference to the seven deadly sins. This examination of conscience is carried over into the third discourse, where Augustinus singles out the two deepest and most serious wounds of Franciscus' soul: his desire for love and for glory. At this point Franciscus protests very strongly Augustinus' verdict; to him these desires are not sinful, but rather the nobilissimi affectus of his soul. Franciscus' opposition makes for a lively, argumentative debate, but he is finally convinced of the folly of his craving for literary fame and for the love of an unattainable woman. After discussing various remedies for such psychic maladies, Franciscus appears to be full of good intentions. But he will first attend to his earthly business and only after that devote himself to higher tasks. Augustinus realizes that the discussion has returned to where it started: "You speak of the impossible, where only your good will is lacking." 

It has long been recognized that the Augustinus of the dialogue is not the Church Father who advises Petrarch with authority, nor a representative of medieval Christianity who debates with the representative of modern humanism, but that both speakers are parts

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17Pp. 132 and 144.
18P. 214.
of the same mind. The Secretum, therefore, not only has illa intestina discordia for its theme but uses it as its structural principle. It dramatizes, in other words, the dialogue of the mind with itself.

Most important for our purposes is the fact that the examination of Franciscus' moral behavior proceeds according to the pattern of the seven deadly sins. The two speakers analyze Franciscus' life with respect to pride (superbia), envy (invidia), avarice, gluttony (gula), wrath (ira), lechery (luxuria), and sloth (accidia). The sequence of the sins (SIAGILA) does not follow the more common schemes (SIIAAGL or SALIGIA), but we know that throughout the Middle Ages the order of the sins was never unchangingly fixed. It is worth noting that, as soon as Augustinus proposes to show Franciscus the host of spiritual enemies around him, he thinks of, and organizes, these "enemies" in terms of the seven deadly sins. Franciscus, likewise, follows the same pattern when, for example, he turns from discussing superbia to invidia. It is

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19 This does not preclude, of course, the possibility that within the same mind Christianity is debating against humanism; cf. Tatham, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 233 and 239.

20 This vice is introduced as "rerum temporaliu m appetitus" and includes ambition.

21 Cf. Morton W. Bloomfield, The Seven Deadly Sins ([East Lansing], 1952), passim.
clear that both speakers presuppose as a matter of course that an examination of conscience has to be made in terms of the seven chief vices.

Adherence to the conventional scheme, however, does not lead Petrarch to a mechanical treatment of the vices. What has been said of numerous medieval "confessions"—that they are wholesale self-accusations of guilt in all the sins and, thus, devoid of personal, autobiographic reference—does not apply to the Secretum. The "psychograph" which emerges at the end of the second dialogue is that of an individual who is much plagued by some, and totally free from other defects. Moreover, the vices are applied to Franciscus' particular character and his individual form of existence. When Augustinus and Franciscus discuss superbia, for example, they speak about the scholar's pride in knowledge, eloquence, and physical appearance. Similarly, avarice appears in the form of the bustling activity of the humanist, who claims that he has to be busy for the sake of his friends and in order to earn his living, but who is finally convinced that the motives of his constant busyness are ambition and desire of fame. The application of the sin scheme to

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22Cf. the vernacular penitential lyrics, in which the speaker confesses himself guilty of all possible sins and crimes (see above, chapter V, p. 162) and Georg Misch, Geschichteder Autobiographie, vol. II, part 1, second half (Frankfurt, 1955), pp. 483 ff.

23Franciscus is free from envy, gluttony, and wrath.
an individual character and his behavior becomes most personal in the third discourse, where no longer *Everyman's* vices are discussed, but Petrarch's hunger for *amor et gloria*.

These aspects of seriousness, individuality, and personal experience which characterize Petrarch's use of the pattern of the seven sins are, of course, also reflected in the last vice of the second discourse: *accidia*. Franciscus confesses that he has been often and heavily tormented by this "pest," so that he shudders at the mere mention of its name. It is a sadness (*tristitia*) which makes everything appear hard, miserable, and horrible and which leads souls to despair and perdition. While other vices may attack frequently, but only for a short time, *accidia* is a "tenacious plague" that keeps people in its grip for entire days and nights. But the peak of its wickedness is that the sufferer feeds with a dark craving upon his tears and pains; he relishes *accidia* so much that he is loath to leave it.

Augustinus asks what causes such sorrow—the passing of temporal things, the suffering of the body, or an injury from bitter Fortune? Franciscus replies that his *accidia* is not caused by any single stroke of Fortune but is the result of a concurrence of several mishaps. It springs from the cumulative discouragement which the consideration of the present miseries of life, the remembrance of past labors, and the fear of the future jointly produce. This depression leads to a general "hatred and contempt for the human
Franciscus suffers from a total lack of joy; everything displeases him, his own good as much as that of others. **Accidemia, therefore, means, first of all, dissatisfaction with Fortune.** Augustinus counsels Franciscus to look at others who are less fortunate than he and to consider the drawbacks of an advanced position. Franciscus agrees and promises to be humble, even though his modesty might be mistaken by his contemporaries for indolence and cowardice. The subject touched upon here—the moral evaluation of the pursuit of fame—is left for discussion in the following discourse. Franciscus' **accidemia** is not really sadness about other people's better fortune; rather, it is the sadness caused by his own mishaps, by fear about the future, and by the necessity to live for others—all of which keep him from ever enjoying "the sweetness derived from the gifts of Fortune." 25

Augustinus points out the childishness of complaining in this way at conditions which, after all, are universal and inalterable. Franciscus accepts this rebuke. He passes lightly over the sorrow that may arise from contemplating mortality and the heaviness of the body. But then he lingers on the boredom of his life (vite meetaedia) and his daily disgust with the ugliness and noise of the city. 26 Everything there nauseates him: the stinking streets full of dirty

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24p. 108.


26p. 120.
pigs and wild dogs; the clanging of wheels that shakes the walls; the spectacle of people of all descriptions, bartering and begging with shouts. If God would only save him from this shipwreck, because it is like hell . . . . Augustinus drily remarks that his complaint is levelled against living in a spot unfit for studies. Franciscus' mind could not be moved by outward disturbances if he had peace within him. To achieve this, he should read treatises on peace of mind\(^{27}\) and take notes as spiritual medicine against all vices, particularly against accidia.\(^{28}\)

At first sight, of course, this accidia and its cure are very different from the vice described by Evagrius, Thomas, or handbooks for confession. But several facets of Petrarch's accidia are very similar to, and even verbally identical with, branches of accidia as we have seen them develop in Latin and vernacular treatments of the sins from the thirteenth century on. The phenomena of sorrow (tristitia, pp. 106 and 126), depression, boredom and disgust with life (tedia, fastidium, p. 120), general dissatisfaction and joylessness ("tua omnia tibi dissplicent," pp. 110 and 116), and the tendency to despair ("sempor ad desperationem via," p. 106), are common to both. The difference lies in the fact that Petrarch conceives of

\(^{27}\) Augustinus refers to Seneca's Ep. ad Lucilium, [56], and De tranquillitate animi, and to Cicero's Third Tuscan Disputation, p. 120.

\(^{28}\) A fine parallel, in the realm of humanistic or secular ethics, to Evagrius' \(\text{logoi pseumati}koi\); cf. ch. I, pp. 36-37.
these states in terms of "the human condition": Franciscus is saddened by the many blows Fortuna has given him and by the niggardly treatment he receives from her; his anxiety is caused by the instability of life and the uncertainty of the future; and he grumbles at not being able to pursue his studies in silence and unperturbed leisure. We may well sneer at this man for his touchiness which makes a molehill of a personal grudge into a mountain of a universal evil. What matters is that Petrarch's oversensitivity—another aspect also of the deadly sin—chafes against conditions incompatible with his existence as a scholar and man of letters. The difference between Petrarchian and the common medieval accidia, therefore, lies not in the actual mental states or psychological characteristics of this vice, but in their causes.

Before pursuing this idea any further, we must look at Petrarch's supposedly "humanistic" conception of the vice. The discussion of accidia, in the Secretum, begins with the phrase: "... quaedam pestis animi, quam accidia jm moderni, veteres egritudinem dixerunt." In other words, Franciscus identifies the medieval vice with the passion of aegritudo (distress, sorrow, or pain), one of the four principal affects of the soul in Stoic thought. Cicero, the

29 In Middle English progenies of sloth this branch goes by different names (anger, dreyness, heuyness); cf. above, ch. III, pp. 104 and 121, and ch. IV, pp. 146-147.
30 P. 106.
31 The doctrine of the four principal affects, a major element in Stoic teaching, has sometimes been connected with the genesis of the
main mediator of Stoic teaching to the Romans, discussed extensively both the doctrine of the four affects and, especially, aegritudo in his third Tusculan disputation. In Christian literature this principal affect came to be called tristitia, at least from Augustine on. The confused relationships between the affect tristitia, the Evagrian-Cassianic vice tristitia, and acedia have been discussed earlier. We observed that for Thomas Aquinas acedia clearly was a species of the affect tristitia, and that Thomas followed a tradition of Stoic origin, too. Petrarch's equation of accidia with aegritudo is, therefore, a good medieval tradition, except for his use of the Ciceronian term.

This amounts to affirming the absolutely "medieval" basis for Petrarch's accidia. Philosophically, the "malady" is firmly anchored in the conventional scholastic context of the passions. As a matter of fact, in this respect Petrarch is much less "modern" than Boccaccio, whose combining of acedia with the Aristotelian idea of anger diverges widely from Thomas and popular teaching. On the other hand, the psychological phenomena covered by Petrarch's accidia can also, as I have shown, be found among the conventional branches of the scheme of the eight principal vices among the Desert Fathers; cf. ch. I, p. 32.


33Cf. ch. II, pp. 54 ff.
sin of acedia. Where Petrarch differs from conventional teaching is in the factors that cause those phenomena. The deadly sin of sloth comes from the flesh or the devil; its ultimate roots are the lack of felt religious emotion, the feeling that one makes no progress in the spiritual life, and the boredom with the monotony of prayer, meditation, or attendance at Mass as soon as these practices fail to lift one's heart. In Petrarch, acedia is the sorrow which originates in the consideration of the miseries of "the human condition," both personal and universal, and in the meditation on the instability of life seen under the rule of fickle Fortune. We are, I believe, not guilty of distorting Petrarch's thought or underestimating his originality when we consider his concept of acedia merely another secularized form of the medieval vice. However, in contrast to Gower or Lydgate, Petrarch's conception of acedia possesses the force which comes from a unified and personal view. It is not the playful adaptation of a theological concept to the game of courtly love, but the sincere and serious attempt to measure personal experience and sentiment with the help of a conventional concept and a fixed pattern of

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34 P. 108. It should be noted that mortality occupies a very minor place among the causes of Petrarch's sorrow. On the contrary, Augustinus recommends the thought of death as a strong remedy against Franciscus' wounds, including acedia (pp. 48 and 206 ff.), and Franciscus himself is familiar with this conventional religious exercise (p. 58). In comparing Petrarch's acedia with Renaissance melancholy and nineteenth-century Weltschmerz this observation is of importance.
thought. That the concept breaks and becomes, as it were, liquefied is evidence of the power contained in Petrarch's individual experience.

I think, therefore, that scholars err when they speak of Petrarch's "idealizing" the medieval concept of acedia. Surely, acedia in the Secretum is consistently treated as an enemy of the soul and not, as Friedrich will have it, as a "condition for contemplation." It would, indeed, be a grave misunderstanding of the text to see in Petrarch's examination of conscience a glorification of humanistic sentiment. Petrarch may not speak of his love of Laura and of fame, his ambition and his acedia as deadly sins; but they certainly are for him (or at least for the medieval half of his mind, if we can make this distinction), vices, that is, forces which disturb his inner calm and keep him from reaching the actualization of his highest potentialities. To think of Petrarch's acedia as an "idealization" of the medieval vice seems, therefore, to miss the intention of the Secretum and also to misunderstand the nature of the medieval acedia rather badly. Indeed, scholars who have written in these terms betray a very lopsided knowledge of what acedia meant to medieval man. In Thomas as well as popular catechisms the vice is

35E.g., Zöckler, loc. cit.
36Cf. pp. 68 ff.
37Friedrich, op. cit., p. 174.
certainly not merely a "gloomy brooding"\(^{38}\) or "indolent dullness";\(^{39}\) such terms carry strong connotations of innate stupidity and laziness, and the quoted scholars give the impression that they believe the monastic life presented no challenge to man's mental activity--that it led to fruitless brooding and laziness naturally, so to speak. The medieval acedia endangered the attainment of the noblest and highest values in man's spiritual life, just as Petrarch's accidia was an impediment to the humanist's noble and fruitful work of self-development and of self-expression.

What scholars have seen rightly, however, is the newness of the sentiment. The identity of many aspects in Petrarch's accidia with branches of the vice acedia-sloth must not deceive us so as to postulate the full identity of the two concepts. Petrarch's accidia is no longer a theological term, is no longer the deadly sin. It stands for the humanist's distress about the unstable conditions of life, his disgust with the ugly and the common, his social and personal frustrations. It may, ultimately, include the sadness of being unable to calm the "inner war" by concentration and thought.\(^{40}\) This sadness, however, must not be confused with the intestina discordia

\(^{38}\)Voigt, \textit{op. cit.}, vol. I, p. 140.

\(^{39}\)Zöckler, \textit{loc. cit.}

\(^{40}\)Augustinus counsels: "... precipueque adversus hanc, de qua multa iam diu loquimur, pestem, aliquid semper excogita," \textit{Secretum}, p. 126.
its elf, with the split in Petrarch's character. The "inner war," as the topic of the entire treatise, constitutes Petrarch's total sentiment, of which accidia is only a part. Petrarch's experience of the "inner war" resembles strongly what St. Paul and St. Augustine have said of the struggle within them. But if we compare the three men, we find confirmed, in a larger context, what we have said before of Petrarch's accidia: Petrarch's view of the intestina discordia was not theological, but humanistic.

I am, therefore, inclined to see in Petrarch's accidia a very personal, secularized, and humanistic form of what fundamentally still is the medieval vice. Its discussion within the framework of the seven deadly sins, its conventional connection with the affect of aegritudo or tristitia, and the verbal identity of its symptoms with branches of sloth convince me that Petrarch had, indeed, the medieval acedia in mind when he wrote his Confessions.

After postulating such a close affinity for Petrarch's accidia with the conventional concept of the vice, I turn now to the second half of my question, in what way Petrarch's accidia may be considered as a transitional stage between the deadly sin and

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42 Rom. 7:14 ff., and Confessiones, VIII, 10.

melancholy. Panofsky, in his famous study of Dürer's *Melencolia I*, 44 has claimed that Petrarch "felt himself as a melancholy type," but that he still called his melancholy *accidia* because the humor had not yet reached the noble position it was to hold with the humanists. 45 This assumes, of course, a certain identification of the vice with the humor—at least in Petrarch's subconscious—and leads us to inquire into the nature of that possible relationship.

In Greek antiquity "melancholy" designated one of the humors of the body, black bile, which—differently from blood—was considered to be a rather unfortunate admixture in man's nature, causing various diseases and, at its worst, insanity. But already Aristotle distinguished between melancholy as a cause of disease and as the basis of a temper. In the latter case, melancholy is responsible for great and noble human characters, such as artists, philosophers, and statesmen. 46 But this effect occurs only when the humor of melancholy exists in the right, well-balanced proportion. Too much or too little of it produces either insanity or depression. The idea that all great men were of melancholy temper was repeated by Cicero 47 and is present in the writings of several medieval

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46 Problemata, 30, 1.

authors. However, for the medieval physician melancholy continued to be a disease, and this evil side of the humor seems to have been more prominent in the popular eye of the Middle Ages. In fifteenth-century almanacs, for example, the melancholic complexion is like earth, autumn, and old age, and produces timidity, indolence, sadness, forgetfulness, sexual frigidity, and other defects of human nature. But about the same time the Italian humanists discovered in Aristotle that melancholy disposes men to a peculiar excitability and forms, thus, the complexion of most great men. The Florentine Neoplatonists, then, identified the furor melancholicus with Plato's furor divinus and finally equated melancholy with genius. Ficino was a key figure in this development, and through his works Düer became acquainted with the new, humanistic conception of melancholy, which underlies his representation of the "humor" in his famous engraving. Renaissance melancholy is, therefore, the old temperament based upon the prevalence

48 Panofsky-Saxl, op. cit., p. 20, cite Albertus Magnus, Alexander Neckham, and William of Auvergne.

49 St. Jerome, also, considers melancholia more as a disease than as a mental or spiritual disturbance, in his advice about false monks, Ep. 125, 16 (PL 22:1082).

50 Panofsky-Saxl, op. cit., pp. 23-24. The authors quote from a German almanac of 1495.


52 Melencolia I, of 1514.
of black bile in the body but now positively evaluated as the disposition of great and noble men.\textsuperscript{53}

This "heroicization"\textsuperscript{54} of melancholy would, of course, have affected the sin of acedia, too, had acedia, in the Middle Ages, been closely connected with the pre-humanistic melancholy. Such does not seem to have been the case. On the contrary, when the four humors are discussed in relation to the seven deadly sins, quite different connections are made. Most commonly, the melancholy humor is held responsible for the sin of wrath. The Book of Vices and Virtues, in describing the deadly sins among the four complexions, states that the melancholy person is most open to attacks of envy and "anger of herte."\textsuperscript{55} Similarly, The remedy ayenst the troubles of temptacyons, a treatise by Rolle or a member of his school, says: "For there as he [the devil] fyndeth a man full of malencoly\textsuperscript{56} he tempteth hym moost with ghostly temptacyons of Ire."\textsuperscript{57} While the melancholy complexion is sometimes said to make a man slow and "heavy," I have found

\textsuperscript{53}For the history of melancholy see, besides Panofsky's two works, Lawrence Babb, The Elizabethan Malady. A Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642 (East Lansing, 1951).

\textsuperscript{54}Panofsky-Saxl, op. cit., p. 32.

\textsuperscript{55}The Book of Vices and Virtues, ed. W. Nelson Francis, EETS, 217 (London, 1942), 156.

\textsuperscript{56}MS. Harl. 1706 has, ". . . of humorys of malencoly . . . ."

\textsuperscript{57}The remedy ayenst the troubles of temptacyons, ed. Wynkyn de Worde (1508, 1519), YW, II, 109. In other texts the humor of melancholy is also responsible for other vices, such as covetousness, malice, "heaviness," and envy.
no text that would make it responsible for the sin of sloth. In contrast, acedia-sloth (along with gluttony) is the proper sin of the phlegmatic temperament.58

Moreover, the same relation between melancholy and anger is made in treatments of the deadly sins. In Middle English texts "melancoly" is frequently a species or branch of wrath. This seems to be a late development. Peraldus' Summa Vitiorum does not mention melancholia among the offspring of ira, nor does Frère Lorens' Somme le Roi; neither do we find this branch in their Middle English successors, Avenbite of Inwit, The Book of Vices and Virtues,59 and Jacob's Well. But Handlyng Synne, following a different tradition, mentions "malyncoly" as a light form of anger (lines 3709-14), and Gower's Mirour de l'omme presents Malencolie as the first branch of Ira, giving it the servants Offense, Impacience, Irritation, and Provocation (lines 3853 ff.). The Confessio Amantis likewise lists


59 In this tradition the idea that intellectuals are melancholy seems to have been known. The Book of Vices and Virtues, for example, condemns "many sotile men and curious and malencolious" for indulging in vain rational inquiries; EETS, 217, p. 280.
Malencolie as the first species of Ire or Wrathe, which "wol as an angre beste loure."  

The use of "malencolie" as a branch or form of wrath is also quite frequent among the English mystics of the fourteenth century and almost seems characteristic of their writings. The Chastising of God's Children, for example, when treating the seven deadly sins, says: "Ayens wrathe and maloncolie or spices therof ..." Hilton particularly connects "melancholy" several times with anger and envy: for example, Love "has great power to destroy anger, envy, melancholy, and all the passions that come in their train." Wrath and melancholy are frequently juxtaposed: "thou shalt no more be stirred by it [a harmful word or deed] to wrath or melancholy. ..."  

The evidence which I have been able to collect from vernacular texts shows that during the Middle Ages the term "melancholy" was not directly related to, or even identified with, acedia and sloth. Yet, when we come to the end of the medieval period we notice

60 Confessio Amantis, III, 27 ff.
a peculiar overlapping of the semantic fields of the two concepts. This can be easily demonstrated by juxtaposing Boccaccio's description of *acedia* with a passage from the *Kalender of Shepherds*. Boccaccio's "acidia," we saw, had included many wrong attitudes in man's social and business life which might lead a modern reader to think of melancholy (especially the branches of *acidia* concerning the *atti morali*⁶⁴). On the other hand, the following "character" of the melancholy complexion might, for a medieval reader, have easily evoked the picture of Sloth:

> The melancholy hath nature of erthe / colde and drye / he is heue / couetous / bacbyter / malcyous / and slowe. His wyne is of the hogge / for whan he is dronken / he desyreth slepe / and to lye downe / and he loueth clothe of blacke colour.⁶⁵

In the later Middle Ages, therefore, the dividing lines between the two "diseases" are very blurred. *Acedia* and melancholy possessed many symptoms in common, both physiological and psychological.

This overlapping of the concepts is still more pronounced in respect to two peculiar details. For one thing, both were connected with the same planet, Saturn. Already in the (possibly Gnostic) myth of the descent of the human soul through the planet spheres, in each of which the soul receives a particular vice,⁶⁶

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⁶⁵The *Kalender of Shepards* [1518], ch. 41.

⁶⁶See above, ch. I, p. 32.
Saturn contributes sloth. 67 This effect of the planet on man's moral disposition was common lore in the later Middle Ages. The Middle English treatise Templum Domini, for example, states that each sin has a planet "to help hym ay" and links Sloth to Saturn. 68 The parallel connection of the planet with melancholy is well known from Dürer's engraving and Panofsky's study of its history. 69

Another point of close contact between acedia and melancholy is their iconography. In interpreting Dürer's Melencolia I, Panofsky has shown that the posture of the personified mood is modeled after characteristic representations of Acedia or Sloth dating from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Both abstractions are personified as a female figure in a sitting position with her head resting on her hand. Panofsky explains this connection by pointing out that the fourteenth-century artist who wanted to depict the four temperaments had no direct iconographic tradition to work with and turned to the only form of graphic representation of human characters then in existence—the seven deadly sins. 70

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67 Servius' commentary to Virgil's Aeneid, VI, 714: "torporem Saturni."


pictures of the vices he took, as his model for Melancholy, the representation of Sloth, because "the main characteristic of the melancholy man in popular medieval writing was glumness and drowsiness." Consequently, the typical fourteenth-century representation of Melancholy is that of a person indulging in sinful sleep. 71

We are faced, therefore, with the curious situation that in the later Middle Ages the concept of melancholy touches that of acedia in many places; the concepts even overlap in several respects. Yet we cannot say—as I have argued earlier—that they were directly connected with each other or even identified. How can we, then, picture to ourselves the relationship between the two? Rather than imagining a gradual change of the vice into the shape of the humanist's humor, I believe we should think of the two concepts as elements in two different patterns of thought that were used for similar purposes. Panofsky finally conceived of acedia and melancholy—or better, of the slothful and the melancholy man—as parts of two entirely different systems of classifying human types. The slothful belonged to the system which categorized sinful human behavior in terms of moral theology: the seven deadly sins; while the melancholy person was part of a new attempt to classify human characters on the basis of physiological and psychological traits, disregarding moral evaluation: the scheme of the four humors. By the sixteenth century

71 Ibid., p. 160.
the new characterological pattern had triumphed over the moral-theological system. This development is, of course, only one aspect of the momentous change in the intellectual history of Europe which we call the Renaissance. It may, among other things, have been responsible for the disappearance of the concept acedia after, approximately, 1500.

I believe that Panofsky's idea throws much light upon late medieval thought and what might have been the relation between acedia and melancholy. Obviously, many aspects of the medieval vice were contained within, or passed into, the complexion. But this continuity was at best partial and should by no means be thought of as a wholesale absorption of the vice into the humor. Least of all should one think of a mere change of names for what essentially remained the same concept. Acedia (even in Petrarch's secularized form) and Renaissance melancholia are quite different things, in spite of the various points of contact and similarities. It is easy to detect the common aspects, such as glumness, inactivity, or boredom with life.

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73 A complete study of the relations between acedia and melancholia would call for a careful analysis of symptoms common to both "diseases." But the symptoms of humanistic melancholy are, by the very nature of the humor, so confusingly manifold and antithetical—as any reader of Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy will readily concede—that a comparison of the two based on common symptoms is rather futile.
Yet in the totality of each concept these aspects have their own flavor and, when seen within their proper context, build up two very different ideas.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The foregoing investigation of Petrarch's accidia answers in part my original question about the precise nature of the relationship between acedia and modern melancholy which is so often affirmed. The philological analysis of the terms reveals that a straight development of the concept of acedia via Petrarch's accidia and Renaissance melancholia to nineteenth-century Weltschmerz cannot be demonstrated. But perhaps it is possible to show that these various terms ultimately are related in so far as they refer to concepts which reflect some kind of common experience. In this concluding chapter I will, after summing up the results of my study of the concept acedia in the Middle Ages, make a few suggestions concerning the possible connections between the medieval vice and modern sentiments of melancholy.

The concept of acedia, as the sin of spiritual sloth, was formed among the Egyptian desert monks during the third or fourth century. Although the term can be found in classical Greek authors and the Septuagint, its meaning there is general and has no direct reference to a moral fault. It is only in patristic writings which collect the experience and wisdom of those who, for the love of God,
had withdrawn to the monastic colonies around Thebes and in the
mountains of Nitria and Scete, that **acedia** appears as the temptation
of spiritual torpor. The picture we have gathered from various his-
tories and sayings of the Desert Fathers and from the works of
Evagrius Ponticus is rich and complex. It already contains all the
aspects that characterize **acedia** through the entire Middle Ages:
**acedia** is a member of the series of chief vices by which man is
tempted and hindered on his way to spiritual perfection; it is,
fundamentally, weariness and boredom with religious exercises and,
thus, affects both body and mind; and it leads to despair and the
abandonment of one's highest goals. Spiritual weariness is the root
of many evil fruits; already in Evagrius we find a great variety of
symptoms of this vice, to which the later Middle Ages added little
that was substantially new.

The concept, then, did not undergo any essential develop-
ment or transformation in the medieval period. Yet it remained
alive as a category in the classification and evaluation of human
behavior. Until the end of the fifteenth century, **acedia** continued
to be thought about and to be adapted, with more or less success, to
new situations. Gregory the Great's exclusion of **acedia** from the
list of sins may represent a doubt in his mind as to the adaptability
of the term to non-monastic behavior. But following centuries must
have realized that the essence of **acedia** applied to all states of
life and that the concept was extremely useful for moral théogy.
Consequently, from Cassian on we witness many attempts to adapt, to systematize, and to secularize it.

The living conditions among hermits and cenobites of the Egyptian desert had been very different from those of Benedictine monks and—even more radically—from those of Christian lay folk. As moral direction had gradually to be given to a wider variety of men, distinguished by professional, social, and educational differences, the concept of acedia began to include a progressively greater variety of forms of spiritual negligence. The multitude of possible phenomena, then, had to be systematized and arranged in a form which could be easily remembered by the preacher and without difficulty grasped by the common layman. The use of fixed schemes and allegory helped greatly when acedia became an element in widespread popular instruction. Finally, with the birth—or, perhaps, better, the increased assertion—of moral thought outside Christian theology, the concept and the system to which it belonged were tentatively adapted to not exclusively religious or spiritual faults (Langland, Boccaccio, Petrarch) or were playfully transposed into an entirely different code of behavior (Gower).

These changes and adaptations consisted, as I have tried to show, not in absolutely original innovations, but only in a partial widening of meaning or in differences of emphasis. Likewise, the different views we have gained of the concept from considering different literary forms do not show marked contrasts in the idea of
acedia, but rather a variety of aspects which, in the works we have analyzed, received greater or lesser emphasis. This wide variety, of course, reveals the great complexity of the term. Medieval acedia embraced a bewildering number of faults and wrong attitudes, ranging from sheer laziness to spiritual dryness and loss of faith. I am stressing this point so much because, in the past, scholars and critics have frequently overlooked the complexity and have proposed, instead, a rather one-sided and narrow conception of acedia. But it is incorrect, for example, to consider acedia merely as a physical malaise, brought on by hunger, heat, and a depressing landscape.\(^1\) Of course, spiritual weariness and boredom can have their causes in physiological malfunctions or simple physical strain. But medieval authors were frequently very careful to distinguish acedia from normal exhaustion.\(^2\) Similarly, acedia is sometimes verbally equated with laziness (pigritia), but full treatments of the vice make it clear beyond doubt that for the medieval mind acedia was much more than

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\(^1\) Calliois, for example, comes very close to this position when he compares the physical effects of acedia to sunstroke; "Les demons de midi," *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, CXVI (1937), 81 ff.

\(^2\) E.g., Thomas Aquinas, Caesar of Heisterbach, and Jacob's Well; see above, ch. II, p. 78, and ch. III, p. 122.
plain indolence or "lack of business enterprise." On the other
hand, it is equally wrong to consider acedia exclusively as the oc-
cupational disease of the monk, as the temptation of the solitary
life par excellence. True, the concept was born among solitaries
and continued to refer to temptations that were characteristic of
the monastic life, especially when acedia is described in writings
directed to monks and nuns. But in more general works—both the
Summa of St. Thomas and works for popular instruction—acedia covers
spiritual dryness and boredom of the cell side by side with the
neglect of attending Mass on Sunday. It was a common temptation of
monk and peasant, of bishop, feudal lord, and kitchen-maid. Before
acedia all men were equal.

The inclusion of such extreme phenomena as sluggishness on
the one hand and spiritual dryness on the other—both effects of the
same vice of sloth—reflects the doctrine of the three stages on
man's ascetic and mystic way. On the lowest level, that of purifi-
cation, acedia appears as the temptation not to fulfill what is de-
manded by God and the Church: attendance at Mass, confession, prayer,

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3 Johannes Haessle, Das Arbeitsethos der Kirche nach Thomas von
Aquín and Leo XIII (Freiburg, 1925), p. 31; quoted by Josef Pieper,

4 So L. Bourgain: "L'acedia demeure solitaire . . . ce drame
intérieure se passe dans le silence de la cellule." La Chaire
344.
penance, good works, etc. In contrast, on the two higher planes (illumination and union) acedia takes on the subtler forms of lack of devotion and "heuynesse." This explains why different aspects are emphasized in the different contexts we have examined. "Devotional" literature, directed to lay people, would naturally place those aspects of acedia in the foreground by which the average Christian breaks a commandment. Mystical treatises, on the other hand, would speak of branches of acedia which hinder the spiritually more advanced person from fulfilling the precepts. But in both cases the same temptation is at work, or—to use psychological-allegorical terms—the same root-sin sprouts.

In the fourteenth century this clearly defined idea in Christian moral theology began to be secularized. Several of its phenomena were extended to non-religious behavior. The neglect of spiritual duties, for example, began to include secular duties, and in Petrarch the absence of spiritual joy became the incapacity to enjoy anything, especially the gifts of Fortune. In view of these developments the imposing question arises why, after approximately the middle of the fifteenth century, the concept was not further secularized and adapted to new philosophical and moral attitudes and beliefs. With the Renaissance the term acedia disappeared almost completely. Today it lives only in Latin catechisms and a few essays of literary critics. What accounts for its death?

In catechisms of modern European languages the (seventh) deadly sin is designated by terms that are not related to acedia, such as: sloth, Tragheit, paresse (and other forms derived from Latin pigritia).
I believe the answer lies in the fact that acedia was so firmly anchored in the scheme of the seven deadly sins. When we examined various types of medieval literature, we were repeatedly compelled to observe that acedia occurs predominantly in treatments or lists of the seven cardinal sins. This is true from Evagrius to St. Thomas, and from Dante to Chaucer, Dunbar, and Lydgate. Indeed, the passages where acedia alone is mentioned by name and described at some length are extremely rare. Often, behavior and attitudes are depicted which appear to be very similar to acedia, but the authors do not use this term. This can only mean that throughout the Middle Ages acedia was a highly technical term, an element in moral theology, closely linked to the scheme of the deadly sins.

Consequently, the term referred to a cardinal sin and carried with it a strongly negative moral-theological evaluation. The word acedia, so to speak, was not merely a descriptive, but an evaluative noun. With the gradual supplanting, in Western Europe, of Christian theology by other systems of thought and belief, the term acedia also had to go because of its strong connotations. Attitudes that had been summarized under acedia were now considered as separate entities, not stemming from the same root (laziness, boredom, dryness), and many of these phenomena were no longer evaluated as evil, but as morally indifferent or even as positive states (especially so the pensive sadness of melancholy).
The fact that the medieval concept of acedia drew its life from moral theology and the system of the seven cardinal sins is of prime importance in appraising its relationship with melancholy. In the following paragraphs I will focus upon a few major aspects of the modern concept of melancholy and try to distinguish it from medieval acedia.

In the last chapter we observed that, although both acedia and Renaissance melancholia referred to similar states of sadness and depression, melancholia belonged to an entirely different system of classifying human behavior and types. It was part of the characterological approach, based on the idea that "typical" attitudes and forms of behavior were conditioned by the prevalence of certain humors of the body. Physical and psychological typology is still flourishing in our own century, as the works of E. Spranger, Kretschmer, and Jung show. In Kretschmer's system, for example, melancholy is the typical malady of the manic-depressive temperament, or the cyclothymic character. A modern textbook of psychiatry considers melancholy as one of the alternating forms of the manic-depressive psychosis; the latter is an endogenous disease and is based upon the hereditary labile equilibrium between the sympathetic and the parasympathetic


7Gottfried Ewald, Neurologie and Psychiatrie, third ed. (Munich, 1954).
nervous systems. Its symptoms are: depressive states (sadness, anxiety); diminution of self-confidence with feelings of inferiority; inability to make decisions; decrease of the instinctual life so that the drive for self-preservation turns into a drive for suicide; insomnia, obstipation, and other phenomena of vegetative malfunction; easy fatigue. Modern psychopathology has, thus, restricted the term melancholy to the negative side of the manic-depressive psychosis, while the Renaissance melancholia seems to have included states of elation as well as depression. Both cases, however, are distinguished from medieval acedia in that they are pathological, based upon the structure of the human body, and excluding moral evaluation.

But "melancholy" represents more to the twentieth-century mind than a term from medical or psychological handbooks. It belongs as much, if not more, to the fields of literature and intellectual history. Melancholy has been one of the main constituents of romantic feeling and literature and has become one of the most important factors in man's attitude toward life, the world, and himself, throughout the nineteenth and in our own century. This concept is so complex and many-colored that a comprehensive analysis is out of

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8Ibid., pp. 431-432.

9Ibid., p. 435. It should be noted that Ewald distinguishes from this "endogenous psychosis" what he calls "psychogenic depressions," that is, states of dejection and sorrow which have no physiological cause but spring from mental or emotional factors, "experiences," pp. 303-304.
the question here. I will, in order to have some basis for a comparison with acedia, limit myself to considering modern melancholy in three very specific, yet representative contexts.

Keats's famous Ode, written in 1819, presents melancholy as the sublime lyrical sentiment of the "romantic" poet. The experience of sorrow, of "the wakeful anguish of the soul," is here considered—in opposition to Burton, whom Keats was reading when he composed his ode—not as something negative which ought to be fled or drowned, but as a positive emotion which should be embraced and indulged in to the highest degree of man's capability. Melancholy is an emotion accessible only to the highly sensitive individual, to the most refined taste. And it is engendered by the enjoyment of beauty—"Beauty that must die." It is, in other words, the sorrow at the passing of beauty and the transitoriness of all joy, but a sorrow which the romantic enjoys for its own sake. The positive evaluation of this sentiment alone puts it in sharp contrast to the medieval acedia. Moreover, the person suffering from acedia had no appreciation for beauty and was absolutely joyless, according to the definitions by St. Thomas, Dante, and John Herolt.10 Even Petrarch's accidia, often declared to anticipate romantic melancholy, is directly opposed to Keats's sentiment. At the end of the third discourse in the Secretum, Augustinus recommends meditations on the mortality of

man and the beauties of Creation (including the setting stars and
the decay of palaces) as the most powerful remedy against accidia!

Very different from this lyrical sentiment of romantic
poets is the form of "modern" melancholy which is born of philosophi-
cal doubt. Max Weber, in his epoch-making essay, "The Protestant
Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,"¹¹ defended the thesis that the
great scientific and social changes since the Renaissance are par-
tially rooted in a new attitude toward work, and that this attitude
is a direct outcome of Protestant ethics. Calvin's doctrine of pre-
destination led to the corollary that success in the world might be
taken as evidence—as the only possible evidence here on earth—
whether an individual was "chosen" or not. On the other hand, as
Scheler suggested,¹² Calvin's doctrine deprived man of any coopera-
tion in the shaping of his eternal destiny. Man was, consequently,
free to direct his energies to secular work, since "working for hea-
ven" was pointless. Work in the world, then, became the object of
life. At the same time, devotion to secular work could act as a narcot-
ic to soften the individual's constant doubt about his salvation.¹³

¹¹Trans. Talcott Parsons (New York, 1930). The essay appeared
originally in the Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik
for 1904-05.

¹²Max Scheler, "Der Bourgeois und die religiösen Mächte," Vom
283-317.

¹³Ibid., pp. 314-317. Cf. also Walter Benjamin, Ursprung des
deutschen Trauerspiels (Berlin, 1928), pp. 154-154.
But what would happen if the drug no longer proved potent? Certainly, man would be suddenly faced with the purposelessness of life and be driven to listless inactivity. This state, indeed, resembles the listlessness and indolence of the slothful very closely. But we must not overlook that the negative value inherent in the concept acedia presupposes faith in the spiritual validity of human effort. The medieval churchmen had taught that, as a bird is born to fly, so man is born to work, implying as a matter of course that the fulfillment of religious and secular duties would earn man eternal bliss. Acedia hindered man in fulfilling the fundamental purpose of his being and, thus, kept him from being what he was created for. In contrast, the form of melancholy which grieves at the purposelessness of life is based upon doubt of the validity of one's striving. "Cui bono?" becomes, so to speak, the categorical question of all human action and behavior and receives no answer but a tearful shrug.

Sadness born from scepticism toward the value of human enterprise can, finally, assume larger metaphysical proportions and turn into a despairing inability to accept any religious or philosophical belief in some purposive order of the universe. This sentiment is well known to the general reader from the lives and works of men like Tennyson, Leopardi, Matthew Arnold, and numerous others.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}}\text{Cf. Pieper, op. cit., p. 49.}\]
William James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, called it "religious melancholy" and demonstrated it with material from Tolstoy's *Confession*. From this angle, melancholy appears as the absolute disenchantment with life; it is a profound sorrow born of the conviction that life is meaningless and absurd. Not only is the individual's salvation questionable, but the idea of an ordered and teleological cosmos has become doubtful. This extreme form of modern melancholy shows best, I think, the enormous contrast with acedia: the latter refers to a theologically negative force in a meaningful Creation; melancholy designates the sentiment of despair at metaphysical meaninglessness. While the acediosus was driven to despair of his reaching a (spiritual) goal, the sufferer from modern melancholy doubts the very existence of such a goal.

And yet, after distinguishing so sharply between the two concepts, one may wonder if the respective states do not have, after all, much in common. Julian of Norwich writes in one place: "I was turned and left to myself in heaviness, and weariness of my life, and irksomeness of myself, that I scarcely could have patience to live." The three terms employed here— heaviness, weariness of life, and irksomeness—are important branches in the popular discussions of

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acedia; they also correspond closely with main aspects of Petrarch's accidia; and they have counterparts in modern melancholy: grief and sadness, tedium and boredom of life (Leopardi's noia, Baudelaire's ennui), and the feeling of being a burden to oneself. Yet, Julian's words refer to spiritual dryness. Could we, then, say that, looked at from a certain distance, the dividing lines between acedia, spiritual dryness, and melancholy disappear? I believe the answer is in the affirmative. The three concepts portray the same experience, but interpret it in different ways.

The common experience can be described in psychological terms as slackening of the psychic tension. Around noon, the Egyptian monks became spiritually exhausted from fasting and praying and fell into a deep boredom with their cell. Petrarch noticed the flagging of his mental concentration due to worrying about the strokes of Fortune and being repulsed by the ugly surroundings in which he lived; the result was a general hatred against life and the "human condition." The modern thinker or poet also may experience a slackening of his mental and creative tonus when the idea of life's absurdity suggests itself. In all three cases the experience of psychic atony leads to depression and despair. Beyond this common psychological, or even physiological, basis, however, I do not think the three phenomena are identical, nor do I want to suggest that demonic temptation, the withdrawal of God, or philosophical Welt­schmerz are merely forms of rationalizing one's sleepiness.
It seems, rather, that the concepts of acedia and melancholy are different ways of coming to grips with, or interpreting the significance of, some basic spiritual experience of man. The differences are due to the cultural, philosophical, and religious orientation of the individual. The common experience consists ultimately, I believe, in the felt incongruity between the existence of some perfect state, some higher reality one believes in or hopes for, and the failure to attain it. If the insight into this split produces sorrow and the desire to give up, man is faced with acedia or melancholy. In the case of acedia, the "higher reality" is man's union with God; slackness in striving for it, in loving and searching for the divine good is considered to be man's own failure. Conversely, for romantic and philosophical melancholy the incongruity lies perhaps not so much in man as in nature or the universe. The romantic grieves that the perfect state of the permanence of beauty and pleasure is unrealizable. The nostalgically desired "higher reality" expressed in Nietzsche's lines

Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit—
—will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit! 17

cannot be achieved, and the sensitive seeker is plunged into the deepest night of sorrow. Philosophical or "religious" melancholy, finally, arises when the rational and teleological order of life and the cosmos, as it is demanded by human reason, proves to be lacking. The universe becomes meaningless and even farcical.

17From "Das trunkne Lied" in Also sprach Zarathustra.
From this it is clear that both acedia and melancholy are significant phenomena of human experience only to the mind that, ultimately, believes in the existence of what I have vaguely called a "higher reality." Both states reflect the chasm between the ideal and reality, or the inner split between rational desire and one's capability of achievement. Victor Hugo was not totally wrong when he claimed that melancholie was born with the advent of Christianity.\(^\text{18}\)

Acedia and melancholy are integral parts in the conviction that behind all phenomena some true reality exists. They are, furthermore, specific elements in the general idea that man is a sick being\(^\text{19}\) who needs spiritual cure (whereby acedia is a spiritual disease\(^\text{20}\)) or some form of cultural or social advancement.

The idea that man—especially twentieth-century man—is old, spiritually diseased, or impotent is a commonplace in the literature of our age. Thomas Mann's Zauberberg is a case in point. In this


\(^{20}\)P. Alphandéry, op. cit., noticed that Cassian repeatedly called acedia a morbus and took this as evidence that acedia was mostly a physical ailment. But in patristic and later theological literature morbus was quite often used to designate spiritual wounds or, more concretely, the passions. The metaphor corresponds to Christ's comparing Himself to a medicus (Matt. 9:12) and to the frequent representation of St. Paul as the spiritual physician (cf. Cassian, Inst., X, 7). Already in Stoic writings the passions had been commonly called morbi animi. Cf. Johannes Stelzenberger, Die Beziehungen der frühchristlichen Sittenlehre zur Ethik der Stoa (Munich, 1933), p. 269.
novel Settembrini collaborates in the compilation of an encyclopedia on "Social Pathology," which rests on Rousseau's hypothesis that all human suffering has its causes in society. If one adopted a broader view and were to write a "Spiritual Pathology" of the same scope, based on the idea that man is in essence ontologically imperfect or "diseased," the concepts of acedia and melancholy would certainly occupy large sections of primary importance. Such a study would also have to reveal how, in contemporary literature, the temptation to neglect the pursuit of spiritual duties and ideals, whatever they are, has persisted and what metamorphoses it has undergone. That the phenomenon of acedia survives in modern life and literature can here not be stated as a matter of proof, but only as a final suggestion. What else than the temptation to spiritual sleep is it that, for example, Tarrou, in Camus' The Plague, speaks about in his confession to Dr. Rieux?

I know, ... that each of us has the plague within him; no one, no one on earth is free from it. And I know, too, that we must keep endless watch on ourselves lest in a careless moment we breathe in somebody's face and fasten the infection on him. What's natural is the microbe. All the rest—health, integrity, purity (if you like)—is a product of the human will, of a vigilance that must


22 Dorothy L. Sayers suggested a series of modern equivalents to medieval acedia, such as tolerance of evil, disillusionment, escapism, etc., in her translation of Dante's Purgatory (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1955), p. 209.
never falter. The good man, the man who infects hardly anyone, is the man who has the fewest lapses of attention. And it needs tremendous willpower, a never ending tension of the mind, to avoid such lapses.  

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I, Siegfried Wenzel, was born in Bernsdorf, Germany, on August 20, 1928. I received my secondary education at the Ober­schule für Jungen in Chemnitz, Germany, and my undergraduate training in English and German languages and literatures at the University of Paraná in Curitiba, Brazil, which granted me the Bachelor of Arts in 1952 and the Teachers' Diploma in 1953. After having taught in high schools and at the University of Paraná I came to the United States in 1955 on a scholarship from Ohio University, where I received the Master of Arts degree in 1956. From 1956 to 1960 I was enrolled at The Ohio State University, where I held teaching positions in the English department as a graduate assistant, assistant instructor, and instructor while completing the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy. During 1958-59 I held a graduate fellowship.