CHAPTER 4

Avarice, Emotions, and the Family in Thirteenth-Century Moral Discourse

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The seven deadly sins (or capital vices) have had an important place in the recent attention given to medieval emotions. Much of this historiography has focused on how the septenary can help establish the meaning of specific emotions in the Middle Ages or identify the emotional parameters of this period’s different communities. In her work on early medieval “emotional communities,” Barbara H. Rosenwein has argued that the desert fathers introduced crucial changes to the emotions when they constructed the tradition of the capital vices by turning some emotions found in ancient repertoires into sins.1 Silvana Vecchio has investigated the changing relationship between emotions and passions, on one hand, and the vices and sins on the other, across the Middle Ages.2 Even John H. Arnold’s critique of the history of emotions as a historical project has suggested that the connection between the Western vocabulary of emotion and the medieval language of sin, confession, and penance is of particular interest.3 These and other studies have demonstrated that the scheme

1 Barbara H. Rosenwein, Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 48–49. On the methodological approach to emotional communities, see also her “Worrying about Emotions in History,” American Historical Review 107 (2002): 821–45. There are numerous rich connections explored between anger as a capital vice and anger as an emotion in the essays found in Rosenwein, ed., Anger’s Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). While the term desert fathers (and mothers) refers generally to leading late antique ascetics and monks practicing in the Egyptian desert, for this topic the key individuals were Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian. Cassian himself was instrumental in bringing this tradition to the Latin West.


3 John H. Arnold, “Inside and Outside the Medieval Laity: Some Reflections on the History of Emotions,” in European Religious Cultures: Essays Offered to Christopher Brooke on the
of the capital vices is not only critical for understanding the medieval moral tradition but that its development also constitutes a significant chapter in the history of emotions.\footnote{See also Richard G. Newhauser, “Introduction,” in *Sin in Medieval and Early Modern Culture: The Tradition of the Seven Deadly Sins*, eds. Richard G. Newhauser and Susan J. Ridyard (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2012), 1–16, at 8–9, with useful bibliography.} Although mindful of these studies, in this chapter I will look at another way in which the conceptual histories of the seven deadly sins and of the emotions might be usefully explored in tandem by concentrating on the moral work that emotions accomplish in thirteenth-century pastoral sources addressing the vices. By including moral judgements about emotions in their treatments of the vices, the authors of these sources also made a key contribution to the history of emotions in the Middle Ages.

While emotions appeared in medieval discussions of all of the capital vices, avarice presents a particularly fruitful area for this line of enquiry. Medieval moralists blamed avarice for the corruption of emotional norms, destroying relationships with God, family members, and fellow Christians. The thirteenth century, moreover, was a pivotal moment in the development of this discourse, in the wake of the remarkable commercial growth of the preceding centuries, the intensified concern with lay behaviour that accompanied the Fourth Lateran Council, and the emergence of the mendicant friars as leading administrators of pastoral care. Here I will draw especially from two leading moral treatises from the mid-thirteenth century authored by Dominican friars: the *Summa de vitis* by William Peraldus and the *Tractatus de diversis materiis predicabilibus* by Stephen of Bourbon, although I will supplement them with other important contemporary sources. Both based at their order’s convent in Lyon, William Peraldus and Stephen of Bourbon were deeply versed in the moral tradition and their respective works circulated widely among both learned and lay audiences, disseminating to a broad public the views they expressed about this vice and its debilitating effects on emotional health. While both treatises were intended especially for preachers (and primarily their fellow Dominicans) to draw from when composing sermons, they also reached an audience of university academics (including non-Dominicans).\footnote{For instance, the best extant manuscript copy of Stephen of Bourbon’s *Tractatus* belonged to Peter of Limoges, a secular theologian who donated his impressive library to the College of the Sorbonne upon his death in 1306. On Peter of Limoges and his library, see the introduction to Peter of Limoges, *The Moral Treatise of the Eye*, trans. Richard G. Newhauser (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2012). Parts of Peraldus’s *Summa* (and perhaps the entire text) were available in Paris very early, as I imply in my *Scholarly Community at the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Miri Rubin (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2008), 107–29, at 123.} As a result of this circulation, I contend, the prescriptions found in these works offer