

The invention of Ante-Purgatory: sluggards and excommunicates in Dante's "Hopeful limbo" (*Purgatorio* i-ix)

George Corbett

Date of deposit	2 June 2022
Document version	Author's accepted manuscript
Access rights	Copyright © 2022 Fabrizio Serra Editore. This work has been made available online in accordance with the publisher's policies. This is the author created, accepted version manuscript following peer review and may differ slightly from the final published version.
Citation for published version	Corbett, G. (2023). The invention of Ante-Purgatory: sluggards and excommunicates in Dante's "Hopeful limbo" (<i>Purgatorio</i> i-ix). <i>Le Tre Corone</i> , X, 41-65.
Link to published version	https://doi.org/10.19272/202312101003

Full metadata for this item is available in St Andrews Research Repository at: <https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>



University of
St Andrews | FOUNDED
1413 |

THE INVENTION OF ANTE-PURGATORY:

SLUGGARDS AND EXCOMMUNICATES IN DANTE'S "HOPEFUL LIMBO" (*PURGATORIO* I-IX)¹

In *The Birth of Purgatory*, Jacques Le Goff entitles his chapter on Dante «the poetic triumph», claiming that «Dante more than anyone else made Purgatory the intermediate region of the other world».² Liberating Purgatory from a subterranean section of Hell, Dante gave it a precise geographical location – in the southern hemisphere at the antipodes of Jerusalem – and a defined moral topography – divided into seven terraces corresponding to the seven capital vices.³ And yet, despite these innovations, Dante's Purgatory is in other respects highly conventional. At a doctrinal level, the souls in Dante's Purgatory temporarily experience the *poena damni* (the absence of the beatific vision); they also suffer the *poena sensus* (the pain of sense) as intensely as their debt of temporal punishment, and for as long as the vices remain rooted in them.⁴ Moreover, most of the moral content of Dante's Purgatory is found in preaching and penitential materials of his time,⁵ while even key topographical elements may

¹ I would like to thank Zygmunt G. Barański, Theodore J. Cachey, and David Lummus for the invitation to contribute to a University of Notre Dame online seminar on Dante's Ante-Purgatory (2020-2022), and to the participants of the seminar for their responses to this paper in an earlier form. I am also grateful to the peer reviewers of *Le tre corone* for their enthusiastic endorsement of this research, and for a list of constructive suggestions.

² JACQUES LE GOFF, *The Poetic Triumph: The Divina Commedia*, in IDEM, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 334-55. Jeffrey Schnapp is similarly enthusiastic about Dante's originality, claiming that the doctrine of Purgatory prior to Dante was «little more than a theologian's abstraction» (JEFFREY T. SCHNAPP, *Introduction to Purgatorio*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 92. See also, for a brief overview, PETER ARMOUR, *Purgatory*, in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. by Richard Lansing, New York, Routledge, 2000, pp. 728-31.

³ Purgatory was conventionally represented as a subterranean of Hell rather than, as in Dante, a luminous mountain. If taken literally, Dante's apparent suggestion (*Purg.* VII 4-6) that souls only entered Purgatory *after* Christ's descent into Hell clearly opposes orthodox teaching on Purgatory (see ALFONSO DE SALVIO, *Dante and Heresy*, New York, Plainview, 1975; first published 1936, pp. 81-82).

⁴ See, for example, AQUINAS, *Questio de Purgatorio* 8, p. 521b, in IDEM, *Summa theologiae*, 5 vols, ed. by Institutum Studiorum, Ottawa, 1945, V, *Supplementum tertiae partis*: «dicendum quod acerbitas poenae proprie respondet quantitati culpae; sed diuturnitas respondet radicationi culpae in subiecto». It is misleading to maintain that, prior to Dante, the «idea of moral discipline is inapplicable to the afterlife» (RONALD L. MARTINEZ and ROBERT M. DURLING, *Introduction*, in *Purgatorio*, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 10), as the author of the *Supplementum* explicitly leaves scope not only for «temporal punishment» but for curative moral discipline so that the stain and root of vice are removed. Although Dante may appear to underplay penal satisfaction and to focus, instead, on purification from vice, and although he does not emphasise the pain of the souls in Purgatory to the degree common in medieval theologians (for whom even the «the least pain in Purgatory exceeds the greatest pain of this life»), these are differing points of emphasis rather than doctrinal divergences.

⁵ See, most recently, ZANE D.R. MACKIN, *Dante Praedicator: Sermons and Preaching Culture in the Commedia* [doctoral thesis, Columbia University, 2013]; NICOLÒ MALDINA, *In pro del mondo: Dante, la predicazione e i generi della letteratura religiosa medievale*, Rome, Salerno, 2017; and GEORGE CORBETT, *Dante's Christian Ethics: Purgatory and Its Moral Contexts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

be found in other visions of the afterlife.⁶ This emphasis by Le Goff and others on the originality of Dante's Purgatory as a whole, then, has distracted scholarly attention from what is its most peculiar and surprising feature: namely, that Purgatory should have an ante-chamber (conventionally called Ante-Purgatory) where souls, although saved, are neither in Purgatory (undergoing purgation) nor in Heaven (in possession of the beatific vision); rather, deprived of the *poena sensus*, they are given "extra time", their only punishment being to wait, an eschatological innovation which is indeed entirely Dante's own invention.⁷ Why, then, did Dante decide to invent the unprecedented region of Ante-Purgatory?

In this article, I uncover the ethical purposes and sources which underlie, in my view, Dante's invention of Ante-Purgatory, paying particular attention – for the first time – to the influence of William Peraldus's treatise *De vitiis et virtutibus* on this section of the poem (*Purg.* I-IX).⁸ I first examine Ante-Purgatory in relation to two other strange groups of souls in Dante's vision of the afterlife: the neutral souls despised by God and Satan (*Inferno* III) and the virtuous pagans in limbo (*Inf.* IV), two groups which reside in a kind of ante-chamber to Hell (or Ante-Hell). I show that Dante's purpose in depicting both Ante-Hell and Ante-Purgatory is ethical

⁶ See ALESSANDRO SCAFI, *Mapping Paradise: A History of Heaven on Earth*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2006. Scafi emphasises that Dante's originality lies more in the manner of his material's elaboration than in the material itself: «the poem voiced the geographical and cosmographical knowledge of his age, even though Dante elaborated it in a strikingly original manner» (p. 182). See also, more recently, *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. by Richard Matthew Pollard, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020.

⁷ The term "Ante-Purgatory" was introduced by the very first commentators on the poem. See, for example, BENVENUTO DA IMOLA, gloss to *Purg.* I "Introductory Note": «divido in tres partes integrales, quarum primam voco antipurgatorium, secundam purgatorium, tertiam vero postpurgatorium». Unless otherwise noted, references to commentaries of the poem are cited according to the *Dartmouth Dante Project*, <http://dartmouth.edu> [accessed 15 September 2021], in the form "name of commentator", gloss to *cantica*, "canto", "line".

⁸ I demonstrated the significant influence of Peraldus's treatise on the material (as well as the rationale) of Dante's Purgatory (*Purgatorio* X-XXVII) in CORBETT, *Dante's Christian Ethics*, chapters 3-7, pp. 65-203. However, as far as I am aware, Peraldus's treatise has not been drawn upon heretofore as a gloss for Dante's Ante-Purgatory (*Purgatorio* I-IX). Siegfried Wenzel was the first to draw attention to Peraldus as a source for the moral rationale for Dante's Purgatory (WENZEL, *Dante's Rationale for the Seven Deadly Sins (Purgatorio XVII)*, «Modern Language Review», 60, 1965, pp. 529-33). For other previous partial studies of Dante and Peraldus, see also FRANCO MANCINI, *Un auctoritas di Dante*, «Studi danteschi», 45, 1968, pp. 95-119 (pp. 101-02); CARLO DELCORNO, *Dante e Peraldo*, in *Exemplum e letteratura tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, Bologna, Mulino, 1989, pp. 195-227; LUCA AZZETTA, *Vizi e virtù nella Firenze del Trecento (con un nuovo autografo del Lancia e una postilla sull' "Ottimo Commento")*, «Rivista di Studi Danteschi», 8: 1, 2008, pp. 101-42. The relative dearth of critical attention to Peraldus may be due to the lack of a critical edition (a semi-critical edition of the text in three volumes has been underway for a number of years. See the Peraldus Project: «<http://www.public.asu.edu/~rnewhaus/peraldus/>»). As there is currently no critical edition, my references to Peraldus' *De vitiis* are to WILLIAM PERALDUS, *Summae virtutum ac vitiorum*, ed. by Rodolpus Clutius, Paris, 1629, 2 vols. In this edition, the treatise on the virtues is printed first (as volume 1) and the treatise on the vices second (as volume 2) whereas, in thirteenth-century manuscripts, the order is the reverse. I refer simply to Peraldus, *De vitiis*, and page references will be to the second volume of the Clutius edition. For ease of reference to other editions, I give references to the treatise [t.], part [pa.], and, where applicable, chapter [c.] of *De vitiis*, as well as to the pagination in this edition.

rather than eschatological: in other words, Dante invents these eschatological regions in order to represent particular moral states. In the second section, I demonstrate that Dante seeks to explore specific sub-vices of sloth through the five groups of souls in Ante-Purgatory, a narrative exploration not possible on the terrace of sloth itself (*Purgatorio* XVII-XIX), where the souls flash past, zealously making up for lost time. Using Peraldus as a privileged gloss, I focus in detail on two of the five groups of souls in Ante-Purgatory: the sluggards (*Purgatorio* IV) and the excommunicates (*Purgatorio* III). In the third section, I argue that Dante represents through the figure of Belacqua the «negligence and delay» caused by sloth, and common to all the souls in Ante-Purgatory, as well as, more specifically, the slothful sub-vice of laziness («pigrizia»). In the fourth and final section, I argue that Dante explores through the figure of Manfred the relationship between pride, heresy, and excommunication, and also the relationship between sloth and the diffusion of heresy. As I demonstrate throughout, to understand why Dante invented Ante-Purgatory, one must examine the particular moral purposes and contexts which inform it.

1. ANTE-PURGATORY (*PURGATORIO* I-IX) AND ANTE-HELL (*INFERNO* III-IV)

Dante projects ethical material on the seven capital vices, their numerous sub-vices, and opposing virtues onto his seven terraces of Purgatory. At a literal level, Dante's Purgatory depicts the unfulfilled penance (punitive) and purification from vice (purgative) of saved souls after death; at a figurative or allegorical level, it represents the journey of penance and moral purgation that Christian sinners should undergo in this life.⁹ Why, then, the need for an ante-chamber to Purgatory? After all, Dante could have made the first terrace of Purgatory, the terrace of pride, the shore upon which the souls arrive. Why does he delay the entrance into Purgatory-proper, and devote nine cantos to this liminal region? There is no reason from the point of view of eschatology. In the medieval period, there are typically only four regions of the afterlife depicted in popular visions, or discussed in theology: Hell, Limbo, Purgatory, and Paradise. Ante-Purgatory simply does not fit. The souls here are not in Hell, and they are not yet in Purgatory, let alone in Paradise. Nor are they in the traditional limbo — occupied by unbaptised children and, prior to Christ's descent into Hell, by the faithful Jews.

⁹ See, for example, PIETRO ALIGHIERI [3], gloss to *Purg.* I "Introductory Note": «Nam interdum de ipso Purgatorio tractabit sub sensu tropologico, idest morali, accipiendo ipsum Purgatorium pro statu illorum qui in hoc mundo purgando se a vitiosa vita ad virtuosam ire disponuntur et laborant».

Intriguingly, though, Dante’s Ante-Purgatory does resemble, as we shall see, his adaption of and addition to the traditional limbo — the limbo of the virtuous pagans (*Inferno* IV) — as well as his invention of another liminal region, the region of the “neutral” angels and men despised by God and Satan alike (*Inferno* III). Some commentators, indeed, have spoken of an Ante-Hell comprising these two regions divided by the river Acheron: the baptised who failed to do good (the neutrals) before the river, and the non-baptised pagans who were nonetheless exemplary in doing the good (the virtuous pagans) on the far side of the river.¹⁰ In both cases, these souls sinned through omission: the former knew, but uselessly, the virtue of the cross; the latter knew only the virtue of the Eagle.¹¹ Let me discuss first, then, these two other non-standard regions of Dante’s afterlife, in this “Ante-Hell”, in relation to Dante’s rationale for Ante-Purgatory.

Limbo might seem a footnote in Dante’s eschatology, if considered simply in terms of the narrative space allocated to it (limbo gets just one canto, while the other three traditional regions of the medieval afterlife get a whole canticle). However, Dante finds many ways to give limbo, the fourth region of the medieval afterlife, prominence in his poem. First, in the opening canto, Virgil distinguishes the region of limbo (where «you will see the ancient sorrowful spirits»; *Inf.* I 116) in his metonymic introduction to the regions of the afterlife.¹² Virgil’s topographical outline is dominated, moreover, by the emphasis on his own tragic

¹⁰ See, for example, ERNEST TRUCCHI, gloss to *Inf.* IV 22-24: «Tanto che alcuni commentatori, come il Valli, parlano di un secondo antinferno, o d’un’altra regione del vestibolo infernale, divisa dalla prima per mezzo dell’Acheronte: prima del fiume stanno coloro che ebbero il battesimo, ma non operarono il bene; subito dopo coloro che operarono il bene, ma che non ebbero il battesimo».

¹¹ TRUCCHI, gloss to *Inf.* IV 22-24: «Gli uni e gli altri possiamo dire col Berthier che peccassero *di omissione*: quelli conobbero la virtù della Croce, ma inutilmente; questi non conobbero che la virtù dell’Aquila. Gli Ignavi sono più disprezzati perchè per loro era più facile il salvarsi».

¹² Hell-proper is «ove udirai le disperate strida» (*Inf.* I 115); the limbo of the virtuous pagans is where «vedrai li antichi spiriti dolenti» (116); Purgatory is where «vedrai color che son contenti / nel foco» (118-19); Paradise is the seat of «le beati genti» (120). Dante typically uses the term «li antichi» to refer to the ancients (for example, *Conv.* II.5.2-3: «li antichi la veritate non videro»). For an example of this interpretation, see FILIPPO VILLANI, *Inf.* I 115-17: «Vedrai, oculo interiori hominis, scilicet intellectuali, per collationem temporis ire ad tempus gratie, *li antichi spiriti dolenti*. Differentiam, ut vides, facit inter desperatos stridores, quos damnat in Herebo, et antiquos spiritus dolentes, quos suspendit in limbo: et tales sunt spiritus Gentilium decedentium in statu innocentie cum originali culpa, et activorum et speculativorum spiritus illustres, sola damni pena cruciati in limbo que nil aliud est quam privatio visionis Dei». Some commentators, however, interpret «li antichi spiriti dolenti» more generally to refer to sinners as a whole («ancient» being understood as «from the beginning of the world»; see, for example, BENVENUTO DA IMOLA, gloss to *Inf.* I 115-17) or to the most famous amongst them (see, for example, NICOLA FOSCA, gloss to *Inf.* I 113-17). Unless otherwise stated, the editions of Dante’s works cited may be found in *Le Opere di Dante*, ed. by F. Brambilla Ageno, G. Contini, D. De Robertis, G. Gorni, F. Mazzoni, R. Migliorini Fissi, P.V. Mengaldo, G. Petrocchi, E. Pistelli, P. Shaw, and rev. by D. De Robertis and G. Breschi, Florence, Polistampa, 2012. English translations of the *Commedia* are adapted from the literal translation by Robert M. Durling (*The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling; with introduction and notes by Ronald L. Martinez and Robert M. Durling, 3 vols, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996-2011).

predicament in limbo, as an exile from the city of God (*that* emperor who reigns on high).¹³ Second, limbo is the first circle of Dante's Hell; consequently, it is the largest circle of Hell by diameter. Third, limbo contains just over a sixth of the named characters in the poem (51 of 300).¹⁴ Fourth, although the description of Dante-character's passage through limbo in *Inferno* IV is relatively short, the reflection on this region compasses the entire poem (with particular sections providing extended discourses on limbo and its inhabitants).¹⁵ Fifth, as an inhabitant of limbo, Virgil's very presence as guide through Hell and Purgatory synecdochically (as individual for group) keeps the region of limbo ever before our eyes.¹⁶

Although Dante does not allocate a canticle to limbo, he does therefore give the limbo of the virtuous pagans (his innovative addition to this region) a place of cardinal importance in his otherworldly poem. Why is this? To understand, we must first consider ethics and the poem's allegorical meaning (what is signified by this region) rather than eschatology and the literal sense of the poem (the region itself). In the *Commedia*, Dante attempts to convey an ethical-political vision through a fictional depiction of the afterlife. In so doing, he encountered a problem and paradox. According to Dante, man has two ethical goals, and the first of these goals is set squarely in this world («beatitudinem scilicet huius vite»; *Mon.*, III.16.7): the human flourishing attainable by following the teachings of philosophy. How, then, do you represent in the afterlife a this-worldly happiness? The limbo of the virtuous pagans is Dante's ingenious solution to this paradox. At a moral level, the virtuous pagan figuratively represents secular human flourishing in a poem which literally depicts the afterlife. At a literal level, the apparently unjustified damnation of the virtuous pagans — a burning soteriological issue for Dante-character throughout the poem's journey — drives home the Christian reality that moral and intellectual virtue do not, of themselves, merit salvation; only by undergoing penance and purgation (represented in the seven terraces of Purgatory) can souls merit their supernatural goal of beatitude («beatitudinem vite eterne»; *Mon.*, III.16.7). At a theoretical level, Dante's

¹³ *Inf.* I 121-23: «ché quello Imperador che là sù regna, / perch' i' fu' ribellante a la sua legge, / non vuol che 'n sua città per me si vegna».

¹⁴ For a calculation of the number of named characters in the poem, see ALISON MORGAN, *Dante and the Medieval Other World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 51-83: «it proves to be the case that exactly 300 people, excluding “staff” and symbolic figures, are said to inhabit Hell, Purgatory and Paradise» (p. 55); «Most of Dante's eighty-four classical inhabitants of the other world are located in Limbo (fifty-one); twenty-nine suffer torment in the rest of Hell, and of the remaining four, Cato and Statius are seen in Purgatory, Trajan and Ripheus in Paradise» (p. 58).

¹⁵ These include Ante-Purgatory (*Purg.* I-IX), as we shall see, but also Virgil's dialogue with Statius in Purgatory, in which eighteen more inhabitants of limbo are named (*Purg.* XXII), and the Heavens of Jupiter and Saturn (*Par.* XVIII-XXII), where the miraculous salvation of Ripheus and Trajan forms part of an extended reflection on the justice of the damnation of pagans and the unbaptised infants.

¹⁶ In a parallel way, Dante (as individual for group) is, of course, the presence of this world in the otherworld.

eschatological innovation also allows him to represent figuratively the autonomy of philosophy in relation to theology (institutionalised in the thirteenth-century faculties of arts and theology); it permits Dante to distinguish reason from faith, nature from grace, the natural from the supernatural order.¹⁷

How, then, does the region of Ante-Purgatory (*Purgatorio* I-IX) resemble the limbo of the virtuous pagans (*Inferno* IV)? Topographically, limbo is the first, highest circle of Hell; Ante-Purgatory is the first, lowest region of Purgatory; these two regions are thus connected, even though in the northern and southern hemispheres respectively. Existentially, the state of souls in Ante-Purgatory and Limbo is *in re* the same — experience of the *poena damni* (the lack of the divine vision) and deprivation of the *poena sensus* (the pain of sense) — but *in tempore* different: the experience and deprivation are eternal for the limbo dwellers but temporary for the dwellers of Ante-Purgatory.¹⁸ Soteriologically, while the souls in limbo live in desire without hope, the souls in Ante-Purgatory live in desire with hope. Demographically, the first soul whom Virgil (a limbo-dweller) and Dante-character encounter in Ante-Purgatory is the virtuous pagan Cato of Utica (*Purg.* I 31), whom we would have expected to be in limbo (and Ante-Purgatory may even be the same as limbo *in re* and *in tempore* for him).¹⁹ Thematically, in Ante-Purgatory as a whole, there is extended reflection on the fate of the limbo dwellers and of Virgil himself, further linking these two regions. Like limbo, Ante-Purgatory is an in-between realm in which Dante explores – as in a theological thought experiment – the relationship between natural reason and Christian revelation, between the cardinal and the theological virtues (which frame Ante-Purgatory), between the journeys to natural happiness and to supernatural bliss, and between a nostalgia for the world left behind («the earthly city»)

¹⁷ For a full development of the argument equating the secular happiness delineated in the *Monarchia* with the figure of the virtuous pagan in the *Commedia*, see GEORGE CORBETT, *Dante and Epicurus: A Dualistic Vision of Secular and Spiritual Fulfilment* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 122-46. See also IDEM, *Dante's Christian Ethics*, pp. 67-73.

¹⁸ According to many theologians, the state of souls in Hell and Purgatory is similarly *in re* the same but *in tempore* different. Purgatory was typically understood, indeed, as an upper region of Hell. In his commentary (written at the behest of two English bishops, Nicholas Bubwith and Robert Hallam, likewise attending the Council of Constance), the Franciscan theologian Johannis de Serravalle (1350-1445) distinguishes between a moral, imaginary, and essential (or real) Purgatory. The real Purgatory is «as some say, a region of Hell, and they say that the same fire afflicts eternally the damned and temporarily those in Purgatory who, once purged, are with God's mercy transported to heaven» (see JOHANNIS DE SERRAVALLE, gloss to *Inf.* «Introductory Note»: «Essentiale Purgatorium est, ut aliqui dicunt, locus Inferni; et tales dicunt eumdem ignem affligere eternaliter dampnatos et temporaliter purgandos; qui postquam ibi purgati sunt, ad celum, Dei clementia, transportantur»).

¹⁹ The fate of Cato of Utica is ambiguous: it could be that, after the Final Judgement, Cato of Utica's condition — experience of the *poena damni* (the lack of the divine vision) and deprivation of the *poena sensus* (the pain of sense) — will remain the same: he will be in the state of limbo, but cut off from the other limbo dwellers (an appropriate punishment for his suicide, by which he cut himself off willingly from the human community). Alternatively, it could be that Cato of Utica's condition is, in the end, the same as the other dwellers in Ante-Purgatory and that, like them, he will rise up to heaven (for these two hypotheses, see CORBETT, *Dante's Christian Ethics*, p. 56).

and an orienting desire for union with God in the heavenly city. A fitting description of Dante's new eschatological region of Ante-Purgatory is, therefore, "a limbo with hope", a "hopeful limbo".

Ante-Purgatory also has compelling similarities with the other strange region of Ante-Hell: the region of the neutral souls who pursued neither good nor evil, and are grouped with a third order of angels that followed neither God nor Satan: «Mischiate sono a quel cattivo coro / de li angeli che non furon ribelli / né fur fedeli a Dio, ma per sé fuoro» (*Inf.* III 37-39). The early commentator Guido da Pisa notes that this region, if literally understood, goes against the Catholic faith. However, he goes on to emphasise that Dante is to be followed rather than damned, because he is speaking poetically and not theologically in this part.²⁰ As the philosopher Jacques Maritain puts it: «[Dante's] poetry was able freely to play even with its tenets, and to fancy, without deceiving anybody, that condition of the "neither rebellious nor faithful" rejected both by heaven and by hell, which theology does not know».²¹ According to such readers, Dante is not claiming that such a region in the Christian afterlife might actually exist; rather, he is representing a moral state in this life through an imagined, but fictional, eschatological one.²²

The condition of the neutrals certainly serves a clear ethical purpose for Dante. According to the philosophical rationale for Hell, the neutrals correspond to Aristotle's category of the pusillanimous «who omit to do what they could». The pusillanimous are those who turn away from the good (*retrahunt a bene agendo*) and do not even try to achieve good deeds (*absque conatu ad bonas operationes*).²³ As good-avoiders sinning by omission, they are thus contrasted with evil-doers (*malefactores*), whose sins of commission make up the greater part of Dante's Hell (*Inferno* V-XXIV). In their negligence in doing the good, the neutrals also embody a vice which, as we shall see, is particularly associated with Ante-Purgatory: sloth. In Dante's description of the neutrals, indeed, we may see a series of strong parallels with

²⁰ Guido da Pisa notes that, although this is against the catholic faith – because Christ in the gospel says «Who is not with me, is against me» –, the poet should not be condemned because he is speaking poetically and not theologically in this section («Et quamvis hoc sit contra fidem catholicam, quia Christus in Evangelio ait: "Qui non est mecum, contra me est", sustinendus est iste poeta et non damnandus, quia poetice et non theologice loquitur in hac parte»); GUIDO DA PISA, gloss to *Inf.* I 34-42).

²¹ JACQUES MARITAIN, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1953, pp. 354-405 (p. 380).

²² However, it is notable that the sixteenth century commentator Giovan Battista Gelli (1541-63) claims that the hypothesis of neutral angels was not anathema in the early fourteenth century, and that only subsequently did the Church pronounce on this matter. Thus while Matteo Palmieri was rightly condemned for this thesis in his *La città di vita* (1465), which is an imitation of Dante's *Commedia*, Dante himself is not culpable for holding such an opinion which, in his day, was still an acceptable hypothesis (GIOVAN BATTISTA GELLI, gloss to *Inf.* III 37-42).

²³ AQUINAS, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, III. 1. 12, no. 4. See also CORBETT, *Dante's Christian Ethics*, pp. 27-29.

conventional treatments of sloth (or “tepidity”), in terms of their (1) moral state; (2) sadness and despair; (3) punishment; (4) consequent lack of renown; and (5) culpability.

First, and most obviously, the moral state of Dante’s neutrals — expelled from Heaven and vomited up from Hell («Caccianli i ciel [...] né lo profondo inferno li riceve»; *Inf.* III 40-42) — is simply the literal fulfilment of a passage in Revelation: «because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth» (Rev. 3: 16).²⁴ In glossing this passage, Peraldus interprets “lukewarm” as a synonym for tepidity (the genus of sloth): «Hot is he who is fervent for the good. Cold is he who simply gives up on the good. Lukewarm is he who holds the middle way».²⁵ Only tepidity, he adds, provokes God to vomit («tepiditas sola est, quae solet Deo vomitum provocare»)²⁶ Second, Dante’s neutrals are called «sad souls» («l’anime triste»; *Inf.* III 35), overcome by sorrow («che par nel duol si vinta»; 33). Lacking hope and fortitude, they embody “desperation”, the slothful sub-vice of sloth which comes from too much sadness («ex nimia tristitia»)²⁷ Third, the neutrals’ punishment, in conformity with the *contrapasso*, embodies the nature of their sin. Peraldus comments that the slothful soul, in boredom with life (*in taedio vitae*), has a sadness which, like a worm, corrupts his heart, citing Proverbs 25: 20: «Like a moth in clothing, or a maggot in wood, sorrow gnaws at the human heart».²⁸ Likewise, Dante’s punishment for such «sad souls» is to be eternally tormented by large flies and wasps («da mosconi e da vespe»; 66) and by disgusting worms («fastidiosi vermi»; 69), causing them to run so rapidly that it would be pointless for Dante and Virgil to stop walking in order to watch them (52-54).

²⁴ See also *Inf.* III 62-63: «la seta dei cattivi / a Dio spiacenti e a’ nemici sui»; Revelation 3. 15-16: «Scio opera tua, quia neque frigidus es neque calidus. Utinam frigidus esses aut calidus! Sic quia tepidus es et nec calidus nec frigidus, incipiam te evomere ex ore meo».

²⁵ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.1, ch.3, p. 168a: «Calidus est, qui fervens est ad bonum. Frigidus est, qui simpliciter desistit a bono. Tepidus vero est, qui medio modo se habet». Peraldus goes on to highlight that there is greater hope for the cold than for the lukewarm because the latter become complacent on account of the little good they do, failing therefore to correct themselves («quod maior spes est de frigidis, quam de tepidis. Cuius rei haec est causa, quod tepidi quandam fiduciam et securitatem accipiunt de hoc, quod aliquid boni agunt, et ideo se non corrigunt»). Dante thereby represents, in this region, «the timid, the fearful, the lazy, and the tardy» who, in this life, omit to do the good of which they were capable (ANOMINO SELMIANO, gloss to *Inf.* III 34-42: «E così dice, che stanno costoro di questo mondo, che stanno sanza far bene o male; come sono i cattivi, che si stanno timidi e paurosi, pigri e lenti, e non s’inpacciano di bene o di male, e non curano nè di Dio nè del mondo»).

²⁶ PERALDUS, *de vitiis*, t. v, pa.1, ch.3, p. 168b.

²⁷ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2, ch.16, p. 205a: «Desperatio est ultimum vitium pertinens ad acediam. Solet autem provenire desperatio ex nimia tristitia».

²⁸ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.1, ch.3, p. 170a: «Acediosus est in taedio vitae. Unde habet quandam tristitiam, quae ad modum vermis corrodit cor eius. Unde Prover. 25: “Sicut tinea vestimento et vermibus ligno, sic tristitia nocet cordi”».

Fourth, Dante emphasises the neutral souls' consequent lack of renown. As Peraldus notes, sloth takes the goods of glory away because these are promised only to the strenuous and the vigilant («Bona gloriae aufert, quia illa promittuntur solis strenuis et vigilantibus»)²⁹ Due to the blind life of Dante's neutrals («la lor cieca vita»; *Inf.* III 47), they hold no fame in the world («Fama di loro il mondo esser non lassa», 49) and are thus anonymous, unnamed by Virgil («non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa»; 51). Fifth, sloth is particularly blameworthy in those people gifted with great talents or good fortune. Citing Ecclesiastes, «a live dog is better than a dead lion», Peraldus comments that a lazy great man (dead lion) is worse than a hard-working commoner (live dog), and is twice dead.³⁰ Dante alludes to the «viltade» (*Inf.* III 60) of only one neutral soul, Pietro da Morrone, who abdicated the greatest office of Pope (he served for only six months as Pope Celestine V in 1294).³¹ And Dante himself seemed to have had a particular autobiographical horror of «ignavia», which he arguably represents as his first sin in the dark wood (*Inf.* I 13-30).³² He also confesses to his own «viltade» (*Inf.* II 45) in failing initially to embrace his moral journey (and, allegorically, the great authorial project of the *Commedia*).³³

²⁹ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.1, ch.3, p. 171a-b.

³⁰ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2, ch.4, p. 178b: «Et Ecclesiastes 9: “Melior est canis vivus leone mortuo”. Leo mortuus est aliquis magnus otiosus, cui praevallet canis vivus, id est, aliquis vilis strenue operans; imo etiam otiosus infructuosae bis mortuae». In Ante-Purgatory, Dante will refer to his fellow poet Sordello as «sguardando / a guise di leon quando si posa» (*Purg.* VI 65-66). Benvenuto da Imola identifies the symbolic connection between a *magnanimus* (a great-souled one) and the lion; however, in light of this gloss, there may also be symbolic association with sloth (see BENVENUTO DA IMOLA, gloss to *Purg.* VI 64-75: «in hoc ostendit eum magnanimum. Leo enim magnanimus non movetur nec curat eum qui non molestat eum»).

³¹ The first commentators (including Dante's sons Jacopo and Pietro Alighieri) identify the neutral soul (III 59-60) as Pope Celestine V (JACOPO ALIGHIERI, gloss to *Inf.* III 58-60; PIETRO ALIGHIERI [1], gloss to *Inf.* III 31-60). However, in his second and third commentaries, Pietro Alighieri intriguingly places this identification in doubt, noting that Pietro da Morrone had been canonized (by Clement V on 5 May 1313), and suggesting as an alternative possibility the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who had abdicated the imperial office on 1 May 305 (PIETRO ALIGHIERI [2], gloss to *Inf.* III 21-69). For a review of the *status questionis* (which concludes, nonetheless, that Dante does refer here to Celestine V), see HOLLANDER, gloss to *Inf.* III 58-60.

³² In *Inferno* I, before Dante-character encounters the three beasts, he tries and fails to ascend the mountain of holiness, noting that «I took my way again along the deserted slope, so that my halted foot was always the lower» («ripresi via per la piaggia diserta / sì che 'l piè fermo era 'l più basso»; 29-30). While his intellect (the *pes intellectus*) directs him towards virtue, his will (the *pes affectus*) is stationary, embodying his insufficient love for the good, in other words, his moral tepidity. Dante's moral predicament exactly corresponds to Peraldus's description of “ignavia”, the slothful sub-vice of those who choose to remain in great misery rather than undertake the work necessary to escape it («Hoc vitio laborat ille, qui potius eligit in miseria magna permanere, quam aliquantulum laboris sustinere», PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.12, p. 202b). See CORBETT, *Sloth As Dante's First Sin in Inferno I*, in IDEM, *Dante's Christian Ethics*, pp. 158-62.

³³ *Inf.* II 45-48: «L'anima tua è da viltade offesa, / la qual molte fiata l'omo ingombra / sì che d'onrata impresa lo rinvolve, / come falso veder bestia quand' ombra». Like his moral cypher Statius who fell before completing the *Achilleid* (and who did 400 years for sloth in Purgatory), Dante saw himself in constant danger of not fully realising his talents (*Monarchia*. I.1), and of leaving his own great authorial work incomplete (and, of course, he did leave incomplete the *Convivio* and *De vulgari eloquentia*).

Crucially, all that appears to separate the neutral souls in Hell from their slothful counterparts in Ante-Purgatory is a single sign of penitence. Dragged to the pit of hell by demons, Peraldus affirms that the sluggard («acediosus») would not even make the sign of the cross in order to be freed.³⁴ Feeling the fire of depraved desire fall on the foot of his affections (*pes affectus*), the sluggard would rather it burn up his foot than make the little effort to shake it off.³⁵ The sign of the cross is the passport, the *sine qua non*, for penitents arriving to the shores of Ante-Purgatory; in response to it, they throw themselves upon the beach (*Purg.* II 49-51). In Ante-Hell, therefore, the neutrals are tepid but impenitent souls. By contrast, in Ante-Purgatory, we encounter tepid souls who have repented and sought penance at the last. Developing his gloss of Revelation 3:16, Peraldus comments that prelates remove tepid souls from the company of the saints by excommunication, or tepid souls are spat out by God when they fall into worse sin or when, impenitent, they die.³⁶ Citing St Gregory's commentary on the gospel story of the lost sheep (Luke 15: 1-10), Peraldus notes that just souls (the ninety-nine) typically do not feel themselves oppressed by the weight of their sins, and do not anxiously sigh for the heavenly country, frequently being lazy («*pigri*») in performing good deeds and in undergoing penance due to their confidence in not having committed grave sins; by contrast, one grave sinner may be fervent in penitence.³⁷ In Ante-Purgatory, we encounter just but "mediocre" Christians who, although part of Christ's flock, have not been fervent in seeking penitence; we also encounter those grave sinners who, like Manfred or Buonconte, repented with fervour only at death, and are called at the last into his pen.

Thus far, we have scrutinised the resemblances and differences between Dante's Ante-Purgatory and the two regions of his Ante-Hell. At the literal level of the fiction, it seems that only the addition of hope separates the state of Ante-Purgatory from that of the limbo of the virtuous pagans (*Inferno* IV) while only the smallest act of penitence, the sign of the cross, separates the destiny of the slothful souls in Ante-Purgatory from that of their counterparts

³⁴ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.12, p. 202b: «Quarta est, quod cum ipse a daemonibus ad patibulum infernale trahatur non tamen vult se signare cruce poenitentiae ut ab eis liberetur».

³⁵ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.12, p. 203: «Sexta est, quod si ignem pravi desiderii super pedem affectus cadere senserit, ipse potius eligit, quod ignis pedem suum exurat, quam ut ipse laborem excutiendi ignem sustineat».

³⁶ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.1 ch.3, p. 168a: «Tepidus vero de ore Dei evomitur, qui per praedicatorum, in quibus Deus loquitur, de consortio sanctorum removetur per excommunicationem: vel tunc tepidus evomitur quando in deteriora praecipitur, vel quando impenitens moritur».

³⁷ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.1 ch.3, p. 168a-b: «Unde Dominus ferventem peccatorem nonaginta novem iustis acediosis praeponit. Sicut dux in praelio plus eum militem diligit qui post fugam reversus hostem fortiter premit quam eum qui nunquam fugit, nec unquam fortiter egit». Aquinas cites Gregory's moral reading of the same Scriptural passage in *Catena in Lucam*, Lectio 7.

amongst the neutrals (*Inferno* III). Like Ante-Purgatory, the region of the neutrals and the limbo of the virtuous pagans are absurd or, at least, highly unorthodox if understood as actually existing regions of the Christian afterlife. Instead, these peculiar regions only make sense in terms of the moral sense signified through them. Let us now compare Ante-Purgatory to the terrace of sloth in Purgatory-proper, and show how it represents aspects of sloth which it would have been strange to represent on the terrace itself.

2. ANTE-PURGATORY (*PURGATORIO* I-IX) AND THE TERRACE OF SLOTH (XVII 76- XIX 69)

On the terrace of sloth itself, only 68 lines are allocated to the encounter with the slothful souls, only one of whom is identified, his speech lasting just 14 lines (*Purg.* XVIII 112-26). The slothful souls, after all, are diligently making up for lost time, fervently pursuing the path of holiness and spiritual perfection. Their very speed – the «acute fervour» of the penitent slothful causes them, just like the neutral souls in *Inferno* III (52-57), to rush past in a flash – means that there is little opportunity for Dante to depict narratively their previous negligence and delay (albeit these sub-vices are alluded to)³⁸:

«O gente in cui fervore aguto adesso
ricompie forse negligenza e indugio
da voi per tepidezza in ben far messo». (*Purg.* XVIII 106-08)

How, indeed, could Dante have represented souls delaying their conversion while they are, in the fires of Purgatory, actively undergoing it? For the purpose of preaching Christian ethics, nonetheless, it was particularly urgent for Dante to treat these sub-vices of sloth in detail for, by their very nature, they delay or even stop a sinner from pursuing the path of Christian holiness at all. It was therefore natural for Dante to seek to represent this «negligence and delay» outside Purgatory; he does so, I would suggest, precisely by inventing the otherwise peculiar region of Ante-Purgatory.

³⁸ In the sixth chapter of *Dante's Christian Ethics*, I demonstrated systematically the strong connections between Peraldus's *De acedia* and the construction and material of Dante's terrace of sloth (*Purg.* XVII 79-XIX 69), showing that Dante names or alludes to thirteen of the seventeen sub-vices of sloth delineated by Peraldus in *De vitiis*, alongside the opposing vice of indiscreet fervour: «*tepiditas* (*Purg.* XVIII 108); *mollities* (XVIII 136-37); *somnolentia* (XVII 87-88); *otiositas* (XVIII 101-02); *dilatatio* (XVII 90); *tarditas* (XVII 87); *negligentia* (XVIII 107); *imperfectio sive imperseverantia* (XVIII 137); *remissio, dissolutio* (XVII 73 and XVIII 124-25); *incuria* (XVIII 85-86); *ignavia, indevotio, tristitia* (XVIII 123); *taedium vitae* (XVIII 121); and *desperatio* (XVIII 120)» (see CORBETT, *Dante's Christian Ethics*, pp. 133-65 (p. 139)). However, although I referenced «the very first group of souls whom Dante encounters on his journey through Hell (the “wretched souls” of *Inferno* III 35)» as «partly characterised by sloth», and that sloth «dominates the moral colour of Ante-Purgatory», I did not follow through the implications of these observations there, but instead focused my attention on the terrace of sloth itself.

Excepting a single usage in the terrace of sloth itself, Dante only uses the term «negligence» (as noun or comparative) on three occasions in the *Commedia*: all of them occur in Ante-Purgatory. The first group of souls in Ante-Purgatory are called «slow souls» («spiriti lenti»; II 120) chastised for their «negligence» and «staying put» («Qual negligenza, quale stare è questo?»; II 121). Peraldus gives two spiritual remedies for negligence: the first is fear of God; the second is love of God.³⁹ In Dante's narrative, when the penitent souls are upbraided by Cato for their negligence on the shore of Ante-Purgatory, they both flee like doves that see something they fear («se cosa appare ond' elli abbian paura»; II 127) and are also drawn by a greater love («perch' assaliti son da maggior cura»; 129). The very posture of the third group of souls in Ante-Purgatory, moreover, embodies the vice of negligence: «e ivi eran persone / che si stavano a l'ombra dietro al sasso / come l'uom per negghienza a star si pone» (IV 103-05). Amongst this group, Dante points out one (Belacqua) who appears more negligent («più negligente») than if laziness («pigritia») were his sister (110-111). Moreover, Belacqua confesses his sin precisely as a delay: «ch'io 'ndugiai al fine i buon sospiri» (132). The figure of Belacqua, therefore, synecdochically represents the «negligence and delay» which the souls, on the terrace of sloth, fervently and diligently purge: «ricompie forse negligenza e indugio» (XVIII 107-08). Even the qualifier «perhaps» («forse»; XVIII 108) perhaps alludes back to Belacqua's laconic first word («forse»; IV 98) which comes late, at the end of the line, just as his repentance came at the end of his life.

The negligence and delay of the slothful appear to characterise all of the souls in Ante-Purgatory.⁴⁰ On the terrace of sloth, Dante's Biblical example is the Israelites who, having crossed the red sea, must remain outside the promised land until all those who crossed the red sea are dead as a punishment for their back-sliding (*Purg.* XVIII 133-35).⁴¹ Having sung the pilgrim psalm «In exitu Israel de Aegyptu» on their arrival, the souls in Ante-Purgatory must similarly wait before being admitted to Purgatory-proper as punishment for their previous

³⁹ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2, ch.7, p. 200a: «Contra hanc negligentiam duo spiritualia sunt remedia. Primum est timor. Unde Eccles. 7: "Qui timet Deum, nihil negligit". Secundum est amor Dei. Qui enim perfecte Deum diligit, diligentiam adhibet in eis, quae ad Deum pertinent».

⁴⁰ As the early commentators underline, delayed repentance can be of two kinds: internal (of the heart only) and external (in words). See, for example, ANONIMO FIORENTINO, gloss to *Purg.* I "Introductory Note".

⁴¹ Peraldus likewise uses the example of the Israelites in describing, more specifically, the puzzling backsliding and sloth of religious who, when they should be most fervent and full of zeal (i.e. when close to death and final judgement), instead become colder and more slothful (PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2, ch.17, p. 207a: «Sextum est, quod quanto diutius soli iustitiae approximaverunt, tanto frigidiores existunt. Et satis admirandum est, unde hoc accidit. Quanto enim proximiores fiunt, tanto videntur quod ferventiores esse deberent [...] Sicut accidit filiis Israëli, qui triginta octo annis in deserto erraverunt. Qui cum crederent appropinquare terrae promissionis, ab ea elongabantur»).

negligence and delay.⁴² Dante's other-worldly punishment for delaying repentance, in other words, is to live in forced delay, a delay which is doubly bitter: first, because it is an anxious expectation of the corporeal pains of Purgatory (like a man forced to await and, awaiting, contemplate his torture to come) and, second, because the souls have certainty of the beatitude that awaits them (they are saved), and yet are unable to embark on their path towards it.⁴³

Dante nonetheless appears to emphasise different aspects of sloth in the five groups of souls encountered in Ante-Purgatory. The early commentators typically distinguish five categories of delayed repentance, although it is ambiguous whether, in addressing all the new arrivals as «spiriti lenti» [slow spirits], Cato is individuating a specific grouping of souls (the first of five), or whether this is a genus, from which the four subsequent groups are distinct species.⁴⁴ In addition to the generic slothful sub-vice of tardiness («de vitio tarditatis»), the first group are characterised, it seems, by a delay due specifically to vain pleasures. Thus, Dante-character encounters his fellow Florentine Casella who, according to the early commentators, so delighted in music and poetry that he delayed confessing his sins and doing penitence until shortly before his death.⁴⁵ It appears that the punishment for such tardiness, and distraction in worldly pleasures, is to wait by the river Tiber refused (or, after Christmas 1299, voluntarily refusing) the crossing to Purgatory's shore by the angelic oarsman.⁴⁶ Although dead, Casella's

⁴² See, for example, PIETRO ALIGHIERI [3], gloss to *Purg.* "Introductory Note": «in prima quarum auctor tractat de quodam extraordinario loco, in quo anime illorum qui distulerunt venire ad penitentiam et confessionem usque ad finem vite, et tunc constricti mortui sunt, extra verum Purgatorium per eum finguntur expectare et suspense ire antequam vadant ad purgationem tanto tempore quanto vixerunt in hoc mundo in tali mora et negligentia».

⁴³ See, for example, JOHANNIS DE SERRAVALLE, gloss to *Purg.* "Introductory note": «Nota quod pena talium pigritantium et retardantium penitentiam usque ad mortem, est quedam amara et angustiosa expectatio purgationis; que expectatio est valde magna pena, quia qui sunt in talibus locis, cognoscunt clare beatitudinem et felicitatem, et cum maxima pena sustinent illam expectationem. Quomodo? Pro quolibet tempore, quo tardaverunt, hic habent expectare triginta; ut si tardaverunt per annum, vel per mensem, vel per unum diem, oportet eos expectare et perdere tempus, antequam vadant ad Purgatorium, per triginta. Et ista expectatio est istis valde amara».

⁴⁴ The early commentators typically interpret the «spiriti lenti» as the first of five distinct groups of souls in Ante-Purgatory. See, for example, JOHANNIS DE SERRAVALLE, gloss to *Purg.* "Introductory note": «Prima pars montis Purgatorii vocatur Antepurgatorium, que continet quinque circulos, in quibus purgantur quinque retardationes penitentie. Ex quo nota, quod quinque modis aliqui retardant facere penitentiam».

⁴⁵ JOHANNIS DE SERRAVALLE, gloss to *Purg.* II 76-117: «Hic Casella delectatus fuit in cantu et musica in tantum, quod hac de causa tardavit confiteri de peccatis usque ad mortem». Francesco da Buti similarly depicts Casella as «omo di diletti e tardo a venire a lo stato de la penitenzia quando fu nel mondo, occupato da vani diletti infine a l'ultimo» (FRANCESCO DA BUTI, gloss to *Purg.* II 91-105).

⁴⁶ Allegorically, souls of this world – illuminated by the grace of God – come to the state of penitence, some early some late; all, however, must turn to Rome (i.e. to obedience to the Holy Church). God concedes this grace when and to whom he wants. But the year of the Jubilee gave this grace to anyone who desired it. Casella died before this exceptional grace of the Jubilee was made available. But it seems that, even when this passage did become available to «whoever has wished to enter» (i.e. from Christmas 1299; Dante apparently also applying the indulgence to the dead), Casella waited three months to take advantage of it (*Purg.* II 98-99). This further waiting on Casella's part suggests, perhaps, that the amount of time in Ante-Purgatory (as in Purgatory-proper) is not just

soul remained in vain in this world until he became aware of the vain delights of the world; once it did so, it was immediately freed.⁴⁷ As the narrative episode of *Purgatorio* II suggests, nonetheless, Casella was not fully purged of this temptation to delay and indulge in music on his arrival at Purgatory's shores, requiring the strict correction of Cato of Utica.⁴⁸

Unlike in Purgatory-proper, where souls must rise through all the seven terraces of Purgatory (albeit spending more time on one than another), some of the groups in Ante-Purgatory form specific juridical categories, and so the same general rule does not apply. Thus, the second group of souls in Ante-Purgatory are excommunicates, who delayed penitence and were slow to seek absolution (*Purgatorio* III); separated from God's people on earth by ecclesial authority, Dante presents them here, nonetheless, as «elected spirits» («spiriti eletti»; *Purg.* III 13).⁴⁹ While their excommunication is associated with pride and heresy, their delay in seeking absolution is associated with negligence, and the slothful sub-vice of despair («de desperatione»). Although characterised by the slothful sub-vice of delay («de vitio dilationis») common to all in Ante-Purgatory, the fourth group of souls similarly form a specific category: these are the violently killed who repented only at death (*Purgatorio* V-VI).⁵⁰

The third and fifth categories of souls, like the first, are more generally applicable, and one might infer that all souls would spend some time in these three groupings or zones on their journeys through Ante-Purgatory. The third group of souls are the negligent «sluggards», who delayed penitence due to the slothful sub-vice of laziness («de otiositate»).⁵¹ This central group (the third of five) is particularly shameful, as there was no mitigating circumstance for their

penal but purgative; Casella needed, in other words, those last three months to fully recognise the vanity of the world, and to take up the grace offered to leave it. See also FRANCESCO DA BUTI, ad loc.: «l'autore finge che quelli che muoiano ne l'ubidienza de la santa chiesa vadano a purgarsi, chi subitamente come è morto, e chi più tardi e chi meno, secondo che piace a Dio, fingendo che in quello tempo stia in questo mondo, sostenendo pena di tempo e d'aspettare quive dove àe commesso lo peccato».

⁴⁷ OTTIMO COMMENTO, gloss to *Purg.* II 94-97 «Risponde Casella, e dice: sappi che a me non è stato tolto terra, nè fattome oltraggio alcuno, perciò che 'l galeotto, che è a questo officio, non procede altro che giusto; sì che infino a ora è stato ragionevole, che io abbia tardato qui venire a questo luogo. Perciò così come fui in vana delectazione nel mondo, così a porzione di tempo sono stato invano: e sì tosto, come m'acorsi di mia vanità, e dirizzàmi verso Roma, cioè verso li comandamenti della Chiesa, e a quella mi sottoposi; così fui io libero dalla perdizione etternale».

⁴⁸ Citing St Gregory «cum blanda vox queritur sobria vita deseritur» [when one seeks pleasant music, one abandons the sober life], Pietro Alighieri sees Cato, the type of virtue, as upbraiding the souls for indulging in such music. Pietro also cites Aquinas on the danger of instrumental music: «*Musica instrumenta timenda sunt: fingunt enim corda hominum et molliunt, et ideo secundum verbum sapientium esse ut frangenda*» [Thom., *Eth. Arist. exp.* III xix 13] (PIETRO ALIGHIERI [3], gloss to *Purg.* II 13-105).

⁴⁹ See, for example, ANONIMO FIORENTINO, gloss to *Purg.* I «Note»: «il secondo modo è di coloro che per scomunicazioni temporali si ritardarono, come fu il re Manfredi».

⁵⁰ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.5, pp. 182a-198a.

⁵¹ See ANONIMO FIORENTINO, gloss to *Purg.* I «Note»: «il terzo di coloro che solo il feciono per propria nigligentia senza altro rispetto, come fu Belacqua».

delay. The fifth group are those who neglected their duty («fa sembianti / d'aver negletto ciò che fa dovea»; VII 91-92). They seem especially characterised by the slothful sub-vice of negligence («de vitio negligentiae»), as well as imperseverance («de vitio inconsummationis»), weakness («de molittie»), and lack of care for their goods («incuria»; «Hoc vitio laborat ille qui suorum debitam curam non habet»).⁵² Just as Dante gives an example of negligence in the political (and imperial) sphere on the terrace of sloth – the Trojans who remained in Sicily and thus did not partake in Aeneas's glorious triumphs in Italy (*Purg.* XVIII 136-38) – so Dante appears principally to represent those who have neglected or delayed their political duty in the fifth group of souls in Ante-Purgatory.⁵³

Dante's invention of Ante-Purgatory, a strange “limbo with hope”, thus enabled him to represent and describe key aspects of sloth, a capital vice particularly corrosive to those embarking on the path of Christian holiness and wisdom. Where in the fourth terrace itself, the souls are being purged of sloth, in Ante-Purgatory the souls are forced to delay their temporal punishment and moral purification precisely because, through sloth, they had delayed their penitence and penance in their earthly lives. Let us turn now to consider in detail two of the five groups of souls that we find in Ante-Purgatory: the sluggards, who must wait in Ante-Purgatory for the period of their negligence during their earthly life (*Purgatorio* IV), and the excommunicates, who must wait thirty times the period of their contumacy (*Purgatorio* III).

3. DANTE'S SLUGGARDS, AND THE SLOTHFUL SUB-VICE OF LAZINESS (*PURGATORIO* IV)

On the terrace of sloth, Dante refers to the slothful sub-vice of laziness (*otiositas*) by antiphrasis, in the virtuous example of Julius Caesar's zeal and industry (*Purg.* XVIII 101-02). In Ante-Purgatory, the poet similarly represents zeal and diligence (this time, in Dante-character's pursuit of knowledge and virtue); however, he also depicts slothful laziness itself

⁵² PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.7, pp. 199a-200b (“de vitio negligentiae”); *Ibid.*, ch.8, 200b-201a (“de vitio inconsummationis”); *Ibid.*, ch.2, p. 175b (“de mollitie”); *Ibid.*, ch.11, p. 202a (“de vitio incuriae”)

⁵³ Thus, the emperor Rudolf of Hapsburg (1218-1291; emperor 1273-1291) neglected his duty, and the instruction of Pope Gregory X («e che non move bocca a li altrui canti»; *Purg.* VII 83), to heal the Italian peninsula (91-96). For this interpretation, see, for example, BENVENUTO DA IMOLA, gloss to *Purg.* VII 91-93 and JOHANNIS DE SERRAVALLE, gloss to *Purg.* VII 91-96. Some commentators read this line as implying that he also neglected and delayed his penitence (for example, FRANCESCO DA BUTI, gloss to *Purg.* VII 85-96). Finally, a third group of commentators suggest that these souls are punished just for their delay in penance, for which their territorial and political responsibilities were a distraction (see, for example, ANONIMO FIORENTINO, gloss to *Purg.* I “Note”).

through another layman, and Florentine contemporary of Dante, the lute-maker and musician Belacqua.⁵⁴

Having scrambled up to a new ledge of the mountain (*Purg.* IV 49-51), Virgil and Dante sit down («A seder ci ponemmo ivi»; 52) and look east. Seeing the sun moving to the left rather than to the right, Dante is initially amazed (55-60). Virgil then gives Dante an astronomical lesson which exactly parallels the explanation of the accidental and proper movements of the sun around the earth and along the ecliptic in Dante's *Convivio* (*Conv.* III.5.8-17).⁵⁵ In language which reflects his scholastic training in the liberal art of astronomy («in alun' arte»; 80), Dante-character demonstrates to Virgil that he has understood the cause of his initial puzzlement: on its daily arc, the sun moves to the right in the northern hemisphere, but to the left in the southern hemisphere (*Purg.* IV 76-84). In the corresponding astronomical passage in *Convivio*, Dante concludes by juxtaposing an apostrophe to the ineffable wisdom («O ineffabile sapienza») which so divinely orders the cosmos with a diatribe against intellectual sloth, the blindness of those who do not raise their eyes to such things but remain fixed in the mire of their own stupidity.⁵⁶

With Virgil's astronomical lesson complete (*Purg.* IV 52-84), Dante-character now asks him how far they must climb to ascend the mountain, as its summit is out of sight (85-87). In the corresponding passage in *Convivio*, Dante underlined how, in loving (Lady) philosophy, a man is directed away from base appetites towards the path of virtue and, as bad habits are destroyed, he may learn to live virtuously without strain (*Conv.* III.8.4-18).⁵⁷ Here Virgil compares the progress in virtue to the ascent of a mountain, assuring Dante that, although at the beginning the soul is hindered by vices, once it is trained in virtue, what had seemed hard («grave»; 89) will become sweet («soave»; 91), and what had seemed an insurmountable path at the mountain's base («esto sentiero»; 96) will become light («leggero»; 94).⁵⁸ Virgil

⁵⁴ See GEORGE D. ECONOMOU, *Belacqua*, in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. by Richard Lansing, London and New York, Routledge, 2000, p. 96: «The nickname of one Duccio di Bonavia, a Florentine maker of musical instruments who was famous for his indolence».

⁵⁵ The only difference is that Virgil asks Dante to imagine the Mount of Jerusalem and Mount Purgatory at the antipodes (*Purg.* IV 67-75), while, in the *Convivio*, Dante describes two cities (Maria and Luisa) at the north and south pole respectively (*Conv.* III.5.16-17).

⁵⁶ *Conv.* III.5.22: «E voi a cui utilidade e diletto io scrivo, in quanta cechitade vivete, non levando li occhi suso a queste cose, tendendoli fissi nel fango della vostra stoltezza!».

⁵⁷ *Conv.* III.8.17-18: «Altri sono vizi consuetudinarii [...] e questi vizii si fuggono e si vincono per buona consuetudine, e fassi l'uomo per essa virtuoso senza fatica avere nella sua moderazione [...] le consuetudinarie per buona consuetudine del tutto vanno via, però che lo principio loro, cioè la mala consuetudine, per lo suo contrario si corrompe».

⁵⁸ See, for example, BENVENUTO DA IMOLA, gloss to *Purg.* IV 88-96: «Et hic nota, lector, quod poeta hic elegantissime describit virtutem sub figura montis, qui ad radices est asperrimus, sed in summitate est

underlines that this moral truth is certain «e questo so per vero» (96) both by reason and by experience.⁵⁹

At this moment, Virgil and Dante hear a voice from nearby (97-98), revealing a group of hidden souls who, it becomes clear, had overheard, unseen, Virgil's astronomical and ethical lessons. In discussing sloth, Peraldus highlights that he who confesses his sin to a priest professes it to God, while he who wants to hide his sin wants to hide from God; the sluggard is like Adam who, when the Lord was asking where he was, said: «I heard your voice in the garden, but I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself» (Gen. 3: 9-10).⁶⁰ Here, instead of confessing the truth of Virgil's moral lesson, Belacqua seeks to correct it: «forse / che di sedere in pria avrai distretta!» (98-99), Dante seemingly alluding to Proverbs 26: 15: «The lazy man imagines himself wiser than seven men who answer with good sense».⁶¹ While there is some truth in Belacqua's words – at some later point in his journey, Dante will indeed need to rest his body – they are singularly unhelpful to him at this point, as now he must think not of future rest but be spurred, as by Virgil, into present action.

In Ante-Purgatory, Belacqua and the sluggards remain – with the sun risen – in the shadow of the rock just as, in their earthly lives, they had avoided work – when it was hot, they had retreated to the shadows; when it was cold, they had rested in the sun.⁶² From an

amoenissimus [...] Unde philosophus primo Ethicorum: *signum generati habitus est delectatio*. Virtus enim, sicut et scientia est arbor altissima cuius radices sunt amarissimae, fructus vero dulcissimi».

⁵⁹ Ibid.: «ex certa scientia et experientia faciet te certum».

⁶⁰ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.5, p. 195a-b: «Potest autem fatuitas eorum ostendi qui differunt confiteri. Primo per hoc quod ipsi volunt se Deo abscondere. Ille enim qui peccatum suum homini confitetur, illud Deo profitetur. Et qui ei vult abscondere peccatum suum, illud vult abscondere Deo, similis Adae, qui Domino quaerenti ubi esset, ait, ut legitur Genesis 3. “Vocem tuam Domine, audivi in paradiso, et timui, eo quod nudus essem, et abscondi me”».

⁶¹ Benvenuto notes that the lazy man has horror of the bitterness at the beginnings of virtue, as is immediately proven by the words of Belacqua. See BENVENUTO DA IMOLA, gloss to *Purg.* IV 88-96: «Primam autem amaritudinem perhorrescit gustus pigri, sicut statim patebit de uno pigerrimo». In seeking to avoid laziness, Peraldus emphasises that one should be more attentive about what occupies the soul than about what occupies the body for, as St Bernard writes, spiritual exercises are better than corporeal ones. It is clear from his mocking of Dante that Belacqua did not take this advice. See PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.4, p. 182: «Magis attendendum est etiam in occupatione, quod occupet animum, quam quod occupet corpus. Item secundum Bernardum: “Meliora sunt exercitia spiritualia, quam corporalia”». By contrast, twentieth-century readers, perhaps interpreting Belacqua in their own image (like, most famously, the poet Samuel Beckett) have taken a rather more sympathetic approach to Belacqua. Thus, for example, Sapegno suggests that Belacqua's voice appears to arise out of the conscience of the poet, expressing as it does the needs and desires of the fragile body, which are set in antithesis to the high demands of virtue (SAPEGNO, gloss to *Purg.* IV 98). See also VINCENZO MAZZEI, *Belacqua (Purg. IV)*, in IDEM, *Dante e i suoi amici nella Divina Commedia*, Milan, Editrice nuovi autori, 1987, pp. 49-57. Mazzei's interpretation of Belacqua is, similarly, sympathetic: Belacqua's intervention is «un richiamo alla realtà del faticoso cammino» (53).

⁶² BENVENUTO DA IMOLA, gloss to *Purg.* IV 97-105: «Hic poeta volens describere sectam pigrorum [...] vide quam bene poeta tangit in brevibus verbis propriam naturam istorum vilium, qui in frigore stant ad solem, et in sole stant ad umbram».

eschatological perspective, it was pure foolishness to have rested in the present – the time of labour – because, in death – the time of rest – they must now wait to labour in great pain in Purgatory.⁶³ Their shame is made more intense and blameworthy by the presence of the pagan Virgil in Ante-Purgatory: to have been lazy in the age of grace is particularly reprehensible because the Lord has given an example of work and labour (Phil. 2: 7: «he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave»)⁶⁴, and Christians are offered the greatest prize for their work — heaven itself.⁶⁵ The lazy man is dead as a man, sacrificing even vegetative life, and descending to the inanimate existence of stones (*Conv.*, IV.7.14), a moral truth embodied by the sluggards being hidden behind a rock («sasso»; 104) and seemingly indistinguishable from the great boulder itself («gran petrone»; 101).⁶⁶

Dante is nonetheless moved to smile by Belacqua’s «lazy movements and his brief words» («Li atti suoi pigri e le corte parole»; *Purg.* IV 121). Sat down hugging his knees, Belacqua makes only the slightest movement – «shifting his face up a bit along his thigh» («movendo ’l viso pur su per la coscia»; 113), and, subsequently, «barely raised his head» («alzò la testa a pena»; 118).⁶⁷ Correcting Virgil’s “certain” summary of virtue (88-96), Belacqua sarcastically mocks Dante-character’s own pursuit of moral virtue: «Now you go on up, how clever you are!» («Or va tu sù, che se’ valente!»; 114), a fourteenth-century Florentine

⁶³ As Peraldus underlines, man is born to work, just as a bird is to fly (PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.4, pp. 180b-181a: «Nona stultitia otiosi est quod ipse quiescit, quando laborandum esset, scilicet in praesenti, et ideo laborabit, quando esset quiescendum, scilicet in futuro [...] Mundus iste locus laboris est. Unde Iob 5: “Homo nascitur ad laborem, et avis ad volandum”»).

⁶⁴ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.4, p. 181a-b: «Quam irreprehensibiles sint otiosi tempore gratiae [...] Prima causa est haec, quod Dominus dedit nobis formam iam laborandi et exemplum. Unde Ad Philip 2: “Exinanivit semetipsum, formam servi accipiens”. Magna superbia esset si vellet quiescere servus ex quo laborat Dominus. Unde Matth.10: “Non est discipulus super magistrum nec servus super dominum suum”»).

⁶⁵ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.4, p. 181b: «Tertia causa est quia melior merces nobis promittitur. Iudaeis enim promittebatur terra, nobis vero promittitur caelum. Unde Matth. 3: “Poenitentiam agite, appropinquabit enim regnum caelorum”». While the faithful Jews had to pass through Hell (limbo) on their long way to heaven, a Christian may gain heaven in one instant, as one who dies after true baptism, or after so much contrition that suffices for the erasure of his fault and punishment (Ibid.: «Quarta causa est, quia etsi spiritualibus qui erant in veteri lege promitteretur regnum coelorum sub figura terrae promissionis, tamen illa multum illis differebatur. Non enim acceperunt mercedem suam usque post passionem Christi. Nimis erat longe via in paradysum, quando oportebat ire per infernum: sed modo in momento uno lucratur aliquis paradysum, ut cum post verum baptismum decedit, vel cum post tantam contritionem, quae sufficiat ad deletionem culpae et poenae. Unde Bernardus in persona Ecclesiae: “Labor meus vix est unius horae: etsi amplius, prae amore non sentio”»).

⁶⁶ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.4, p. 178b: «Homo otiosus est velut homo mortuus. Unde Sen. “Otium sine literis, mors est, et vivi hominis sepultura”»).

⁶⁷ Dante appears to allude, here, to Proverbs 19:24: «abscondet piger manum in catino, nec ad os suum applicat eam» [the lazy man loses his hand in the dish; he will not even lift it to his mouth]. See PIETRO (I), gloss to *Purg.* IV 123. As St Gregory comments in the *Moralia*, the hand signifies works, the mouth signifies words (GREGORY, *Moralia* II.76: «per manum quippe operatio, per os autem locutio designator»).

commentator remarking that «these are exactly the words that the lazy use».⁶⁸ Belacqua then makes light of Dante-character's astronomical study, the subject of Virgil's long doctrinal discourse (52-84)⁶⁹: «Hai ben veduto come 'l sole / da l'omero sinistro il carro mena? » (119-20),⁷⁰ the implication being «what's the point? », as the same commentator glosses: «che hai guadagnato?»⁷¹

In the context of their barbed comments in this episode, the anonymous Florentine commentator's witty anecdote about Dante and Belacqua seems plausible:

Ora l'Auttoe fu forte suo dimestico: molto il riprende di questa sua nigligenzia; onde un dì, riprendendolo, Belacqua rispose colle parole d'Aristotile: «*Sedendo et quiescendo anima efficitur sapiens*»; di che l'Auttoe gli rispose: «Per certo, se per sedere si diventa savio, niuno fu mai più savio di te».⁷²

[Now Dante was a close neighbour of Belacqua and much reprehended him for this sloth of his. Wherefore it came about that one day Belacqua, being reprehended thus, responded with the words of Aristotle: «By sitting and being at rest, the soul makes itself wise». Dante responded: «Certainly, if by sitting one becomes wise, no one has even been wiser than you»].

Aristotle's dictum refers to the contemplative peace necessary for a man to pursue wisdom, and is exemplified in this canto by Dante-character sitting and resting on the ledge while imbibing an astronomical and ethical lesson (52-96). By contrast, Belacqua, in unrelenting slothfulness, misapplies it simply to a life of inactivity. The early commentators are surely right, then, to characterise Belacqua as an extremely lazy man («pigrissimus homo»; «una pigrissima persona») in worldly and spiritual work.⁷³

Despite the light-hearted familiarity of this episode, it carries a clear moral warning. After all, Dante had not expected Belacqua to be saved; on recognising him, his first words are

⁶⁸ ANONIMO FIORENTINO, gloss to *Purg.* IV 114: «queste sono dirittamente parole che usono i pigri».

⁶⁹ In this episode, Dante reworks a passage of his didactic commentary to *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona* in which he contrasts the bliss of philosophical speculation with the bestial life of the senses, and explains the accidental and proper movements of the sun around the ecliptic (*Conv.* III.5.8-17). See CORBETT, *Dante and Epicurus*, pp. 161-64

⁷⁰ BENVENUTO DA IMOLA, gloss to *Purg.* IV 115-20: «iste piger damnavit laborem Dantis circa opus virtutis, nunc iterum damnat laborem eius circa studium scientiae».

⁷¹ ANONIMO FIORENTINO, gloss to *Purg.* IV 119-20.

⁷² ANONIMO FIORENTINO, gloss to *Purg.* IV 123-26.

⁷³ See, for example, JACOPO DELLA LANA (1324-28), gloss to *Purg.* IV 123-26: «Questo Belacqua fu una pigrissima persona»; CODICE CASSINESE (1350-75), gloss to *Purg.* IV 123: «Iste bivelacqua fuit [...] pigrissimus homo in operibus mundi sicut in operibus anime». For an amusingly oenophilic, if farfetched, *nomen significans rei*, see BENVENUTO DA IMOLA (1375-80), gloss to *Purg.* IV 121-26: «o Bilaqua, et est nomen conveniens homini; bene enim Bilaqua ostendebat se nunquam bibisse vinum, ita erat gelidus et tardus».

«Belacqua, a me non dole / di te ormai» (*Purg.* IV 122-23).⁷⁴ Delaying through sloth «i buon sospiri» of Christian prayer and penitence until the very end of life (III 130-32) is a risky strategy, as Dante highlights through the juxtaposed destinies of Manfred and Frederick II (*Purg.* III 103-45) and Guido and Buonconte of Montefeltro (*Purg.* V 85-106) in the two cantos which frame this episode.⁷⁵ As Peraldus warns, those who are lazy when healthy but seek to escape damnation through repentance at the point of death are – in effect – saying to the Lord, knocking on the door, «Tomorrow, Tomorrow».⁷⁶ Delaying conversion leads, moreover, to the cultivation of bad habits that become, in turn, a second nature.⁷⁷ As Peraldus underlines, to procrastinate is to play chess, as one who knows little of the game, with the devil, who is a grand master: while the sinner plots to delay practicing the virtues to his dying days and only then, at the last, to kill the devil, the devil instead uses this time to corrupt his character with evil habits, such that he succumbs over and over again to temptation.⁷⁸ Fallen into the depths of laziness, the sinner would rather this folly submerge him than work a little bit through the dry earth of poverty in order to come to the door of life (*ad portem vitae*).⁷⁹ This is, indeed, Dante-character's interpretation of Belacqua's waiting: «ma dimmi, perché assiso / quiritto se? attendi

⁷⁴ Even though Belacqua, the late repentant, is saved, he will be saved only through fire (I COR. 3: «salvus erit quasi per ignem»), and he will still suffer remorse, for God better rewards those who serve him longest (JOHN 14: 2: «In my father's house there are many mansions»). See PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.5, p. 185a: «Licet ille qui tarde convertitur, salvetur: sic tamen salvus erit quasi per ignem, 1 Ad Corint. 3 [...] Habet enim Deus unde melius remuneret eos qui sibi diutius servierunt; et licet salvetur qui tarde convertitur, si vere sicut ille qui cito convertitur: tamen in domo Patris caelestis mansiones multae sunt».

⁷⁵ FRANCESCO DA BUTI, gloss to *Purg.* IV 127-35: «Perch'io indugiai; cioè perch'io, Belacqua, penai, al fine i buon sospiri; cioè li pentimenti e rimordimenti de la penitenzia, che inducono sospiri».

⁷⁶ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.5, p. 183a: «Et ista procrastinatio est velut corvus in superliminari, dicens Domino pulsanti ad ostium, "Cras, cras"».

⁷⁷ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.5, p. 185a-b: «Tertio deberet homines movere ad accelerationem conversionis magnum periculum malae consuetudinis [...] A medicis etiam dicitur, quod consuetudo sit altera natura».

⁷⁸ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.5, p. 189a: «Unde magna est fatuitas eorum, qui ita praesumunt, quod in morte convertantur, et quod tunc diabolus devincant, quando ipse melius praeparatus est ad praelium. Similes videntur esse illi, qui ludens ad schachos, et parum de ludo sciens, cogitaret apud se, "Ego permittam mihi familiam auferri: deinde in fine mactabo illum, cum quo ludo in angulo", cum tamen sciret illum, cum quo ludit, peritissimum esse lusorem. Velut imperitus luso est peccator qui, semper in tentationibus succumbit, qui familiam virtutum amisit. Velut peritissimus lusor est diabolus, qui ab initio mundi exercitatus est in ludo tentationem. Qua praesumptione ergo, confidit peccator, quod in angulo debeat eum mactare idem in fine vitae suae vincere, praecipue, cum sine Deo nihil possit facere, et Dei auxilio adeo indignum se fecerit, ut non solum sit dignus a Deo adiuvari sed irrideri».

⁷⁹ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.12, p. 203a-b: «Decima est quod cum ipse in profundum stultitiae ceciderit: tamen potius eligit ut stultitia submergat eum, quam ut ad occupationem per quam evadere possit, manum extendat. Seneca: "A stultitia nemo emergit, nisi manum porrigat ad laborem." Undecima est, quod potius eligit per aquam divitiarum et deliciarum ire ad mortem suam quam aliquantulum laborando per terram siccam paupertatis, ad portum pervenire vitae. Divitiae deliciaeque aquae sunt tendentes ad mare inferni. [...] Duodecima est, quod ipse potius eligit in carcere immundo in quo ad mortem servatur remanere, quam pro evasione sua laborem exeundi sustinere. Mundus iste carcer est peccati».

tu iscorta? O pur lo modo usato t'ha ripriso» (IV 124-26). Belacqua lazily explains to Dante-character that, in punishment for his previous delay, effort on his part is now too late and useless («andar in sù che porta?»; 127) because the angel of God will not let him through the door («la porta»; 129) of Purgatory. Only the prayers of those who live in grace (133-35) may help him now.

Ironically, the opportunity for such intercession is standing before Belacqua in plain sight. However, in his unrelenting laziness, Belacqua only realises that Dante, casting a shadow, is alive (and could therefore intercede for him) after he has moved on and after, in poetic mimesis, Dante opens a new canto (*Purg.* v 1-9). By this time, it is too late: Virgil will not allow Dante-character to slacken his pace and turn back, commanding him, instead, to be «like a strong tower whose top never falls, however hard the winds may blow» («come torre ferma, che non crolla, / già mai la cima per soffiar di venti»; *Purg.* v 14-15), the very image Dante uses in the *Convivio* to describe unassailable human virtue («la diritta torre»; *Conv.*, IV. *canz.*, III.54).⁸⁰

The fact that Belacqua was a contemporary lute maker and musician well-known to Dante opens up one final irony of him being, like Casella, a negligent late-repentant.⁸¹ Peraldus interprets playing the harp as confession, glossing the words of Isaiah 23: 16: «Take a harp, go about the city, O forgotten harlot; pluck the strings skilfully, sing many songs, that they may remember you». The sinner must take a harp all around the city of his soul, that all his sins are confessed; and he must confess skilfully, because he does so before God.⁸² To play the harp well, one must practice regularly so that, if one plays before the king, one is worthy of payment. Likewise, one must regularly confess if one is to please the king of heaven, and gain the reward of heaven.⁸³ Belacqua, by contrast, seems to show little skill or practice of confession: he first hides from Dante and Virgil, overhearing Virgil's astronomical and ethical lessons (an implicit condemnation of sloth); rather than confessing, he questions Virgil's moral doctrine; he then utters «short words» («corte parole») which make fun of Dante's pursuit of moral and

⁸⁰ See *Conv.* IV.13.15-17.

⁸¹ Like Casella, Belacqua (dead before March 1302 but still alive in 1299) is also a recent arrival (see ECONOMOU, *Belacqua*, p. 96).

⁸² PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.5, pp. 191b-192a: «Ideo dicitur ad animam peccatricem, Esa. 23: "Sume citharam, circui civitatem, meretrix oblivioni tradita: bene cane, frequenta canticum, ut memoria tui sit". Cithara ista confessio est, qua sumpta, circumeunda est civitas animae, ut homo omnia peccata sua confiteatur. Et oportet bene cantare; quia confitendo coram rege caelesti cantatur. Et cantus ille, si homo bene cantet, caelesti regno renumeratur».

⁸³ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.5, p. 191b: «Non enim prima vice, qua homo citharizat, vel viellet, bene scit citharizare, vel viellare, ut idoneus sit coram rege opus illud exercere, et dignus sit stipendio: Ita nec prima vice qua aliquis confitetur, interdum bene confitetur».

intellectual virtue; only when questioned by Dante does he eventually confess that he had delayed, through sloth, due prayer and penitence (130-32); and only after Dante moves on does he belatedly realise that he could have asked him for intercession. By staging this encounter with Belacqua in Ante-Purgatory, therefore, Dante is able to explore narratively the nature of the slothful sub-vice of laziness, negligence, and delay which are so debilitating, and potentially disastrous, for a Christian's moral habits, conduct, and eternal salvation.

4. DANTE'S EXCOMMUNICATES, AND THE VICES OF PRIDE AND HERESY (*PURGATORIO* III).

If the sluggard Belacqua excluded himself from full communion with the Church due to his own laziness, the excommunicate Manfred was excluded from this communion by official decree. As Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden of Eden, so incalcitrant sinners are exiled from the church by excommunication and so, according to Dante's fiction, repentant excommunicates are excluded from Purgatory for thirty times the period of their contumacy (*Purg.* III 136-41). The cause of this exile – whether from the garden of Eden, the church, or Purgatory – is disobedience which, like heresy, arises from pride («in sua presunzion»; 140).⁸⁴ Peraldus distinguishes two species of excommunicates: the first (the minor) are debarred from the sacraments of the church; the second (the major) are debarred from entering the church, communicating with the faithful, and from the sacraments.⁸⁵ The excommunicate is worse than the gentile or pagan or Jew because he is an apostate from the Christian religion; he is willingly outside Christianity.⁸⁶ The excommunicate sinner is, therefore, in an extremely dangerous

⁸⁴ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.vi, pa.3, ch.38, p. 322a-b: «De peccato inobedientiae et eius detestatione [...] agemus specialiter de inobedientia eorum qui solemnitates non servant, et inobedientia eorum qui contemnunt quando excommunicarentur, et de peccato eorum qui ecommunicantis non timent communicare [...] Punitum autem est in primis parentibus peccatum istud in hoc, quod propter illud eieci sunt de paradiso. Si illi qui iam erant in paradiso terrestri propter inobedientiam eieci sunt, quomodo credunt se ingressuros in paradysum caelestem qui inobedientes sunt?».

⁸⁵ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.vi, pa.3, ch.38, p. 329b: «De obedientia contemnentium excommunicationem, et quod valde timenda sit [...] Et notandum in primis, quod duae sint species excommunicationis, scilicet maior et minor. Minor separat a sacramentis Ecclesiae: maior separat ab ingressu Ecclesiae et a communione fidelium, et a sacramentis, et haec dicitur anathema». Peraldus treats first the disobedience of those who, against Church law, seek to communicate with excommunicates. Peraldus also includes a section against those who too easily excommunicate Christians («Contra nimis facile excommunicantes»; Ibid., p. 333b), and, citing Augustine, highlights the difference between the earthly seat («*scella terrena*»), that gives sentence, and the heavenly tribunal («*tribunal caeleste*»), that gives the crown (Ibid., p. 334b).

⁸⁶ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.vi, pa.3, ch.38, p. 331a: «excommunicatus videtur esse deterior quam gentilis, est enim quasi apostata a Christiana religione». While the Jew has the old law, albeit this is not sufficient for his salvation, and the pagan has the natural law, the excommunicate seems to have no law, as he is outside the law of Christianity, and is neither Jew nor gentile (Ibid.: «Iudaeus aliquam legem habet, licet non sibi sufficientem.

state.⁸⁷ As Peraldus comments, the justice of God is like a sword hanging over his head, albeit God's mercy sometimes detains it if only the sinner would repent.⁸⁸

Where, in the canto of the heretics, Dante-character and Virgil must turn towards the left («a man sinistra»; *Inf.* X 133), Dante depicts the group of repentant excommunicates in Ante-Purgatory as coming from the left hand («da man sinistra»; *Purg.* III 58) and turning towards the right; allegorically, towards Christ's church. Moving so slowly that they appear static (*Purg.* III 58-60), the souls are represented as Christ's flock («come le pecorelle»; 79), called one by one at the last into His pen (79-87). The only excommunicate to identify himself is Manfred whose father, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, was named amongst the damned heretics in *Inferno* X.⁸⁹ Manfred's whole life, at least according to papal propaganda, was Epicurean («tutta la sua vita fu epicuria»)⁹⁰ In the graveyard of the heretics, the obstinate Epicurean Farinata appeared rising from his tomb as, ironically, an allegorical figure for Christ-resurrected (the *imago pietatis*). With parallel irony, in Ante-Purgatory, the converted Epicurean Manfred takes on the role of the risen Christ who quells his disciple Thomas' doubt about the resurrection. Smiling («sorridente»; III 112), although without a body, Manfred tells the doubting Dante-character to look at his wound: «“Or vedi”; / e mostrommi una piaga a sommo 'l petto» (*Purg.* III 110-11).⁹¹

In depicting the cemeteries of the heretics in *Inferno* X, Dante singles out belief in the human soul's mortality; likewise, in treating the repentant excommunicates in Ante-Purgatory,

Gentilis etiam aliquam legem habet, saltem naturalem: sed excommunicatus nullam videtur habere, cum ille extra legem Christianorum dicatur esse, et non sit Iudaeus vel gentilis»).

⁸⁷ Citing JOHN 3:36 («Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him»), Peraldus underlines that the sinner is, in a sense, at the gates of hell for, if he dies with mortal sin, in an instant he enters hell: PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.5, p. 192b: «In magno etiam periculo est peccator, quia quodammodo ad portam inferni est: iuxta illud Psalm.106. “Appropinquaverunt usque ad portas mortis”. Portae mortis vel inferni sunt peccata mortalia. [...] Ad portam inferni dicitur esse, qui in peccato est mortali: quia inter ipsum et infernum, nihil est medium, nisi transitus corporis. Si enim anima a corpore separatur, quasi in puncto infernum intrat. Unde Iob 21: “Ducunt in bonis dies suos, et in puncto ad inferna descendunt”»).

⁸⁸ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.v, pa.2 ch.5, p. 192a: «Ad idem potest referri quod legitur Iohann.3: “Qui incredulus est Filio, non videbit vitam: sed ira Dei manet super eum”. Haec ira, velut gadius, manet super caput peccatoris [...] Sed misericordia Dei gladium illum aliquantulum detinet, si forte peccator poenitentiam agere velit»).

⁸⁹ On Dante's presentation of Frederick II and Manfred, see, for example, FRANCESCO GUILIANI, *Dante e gli «illustri eroi»: Federico II, Manfredi e Fiorentino*, Foggia, Edizioni del Rosone, 2016.

⁹⁰ GIOVANNI VILLANI, *Nuova Cronica*, ed. by Giuseppe Porta, 3 vols, Parma, Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 1990, I, VII.i.17-28: «Il detto re Manfredi [...] come il padre, e più, dissoluto in ogni lussuria [...] tutta sua vita fu epicuria, non curando quasi Idio né santi, se non a diletto del corpo. Nimico fu di santa Chiesa e de' cherici e de' religiosi»).

⁹¹ In the parallel gospel passage, Thomas would not believe the other disciples' testimony about Jesus's miraculous resurrection from the dead. Jesus tells Thomas to see and touch his wounds and therefore to believe in Him: «Infer digitum tuum huc, et vide manus meas; et affer manum tuam; et mitte in latus meum; et noli esse incredulus, sed fidelis» (JOHN 20. 27).

Dante tackles precisely this heretical doctrine and the intellectual errors that underpin it. The episode begins with Dante-character's feared abandonment, as the rising sun causes him to cast a shadow, while Virgil – being bodiless – does not (*Purg.* III 16-33). This prompts a doubt (which Virgil articulates for him): if a soul is without a body in the afterlife, how may it suffer torments as punishment (31), or bliss as reward, for its actions on earth?⁹² The episode ends when Dante-character, listening intently to Manfred's story, fails to see that the sun had moved fifty degrees across its daily arc (*Purg.* IV 1-8). This gives him true experience («esperienza vera»; 13) of the unicity of the individual soul against «the error that believes one soul is kindled over another in us» («quello error che crede / ch'un'anima sovr' altra in noi s'accenda»; 5-6).⁹³

The «error» referred to in Ante-Purgatory (*Purg.* IV 5) may be either Plato's doctrine of the tripartite soul (which Beatrice will refute in the first sphere of Paradise; *Par.* IV 21-63) or Averroës's doctrine of the separate universal intellect (which Statius will refute in the sixth terrace of Purgatory; *Purg.* XXV 63-66). Crucially, though, it is the correct view on the individual soul which leads to the specific problem of the bodiless existence of the individual soul after death. For Plato, the individual soul is only accidentally tied to the body and so the soul's bodiless existence is unproblematic; for Averroës, the separate intellect is universal and so there is no individual immortality of the soul or of the body. It is the orthodox interpretation of Aristotle – whereby every man has an individual rational soul which is the form of his body – that raises this problem: if the soul's distinctively rational activity depends for its substrate on the body (the receiving of material forms in the corporeal imagination), how can the human soul exist individually in the afterlife?

One answer to this question is, as Epicurus taught, that the human soul does not continue to exist after its separation from the body: «they make the soul die with the body» («l'anima col corpo morta fanno»; *Inf.* X 15): there is no afterlife, no punishment for evil deeds or reward for good. Another answer, the personal view of Pope John XXII (pope 1316-1334), was that the souls of the faithful departed go the altar of the Lord where they will wait until after the general resurrection of the body; only then will they finally receive the beatific vision

⁹² On the representation of human souls after death, see JOHANNIS DE SERRAVILE, gloss to *Inf.* Intro., VI.

⁹³ See AQUINAS, *STh.*, IaIIae, q. 37, a. 1. co: «quia omnes potentiae animae in una essentia animae radicantur, necesse est quod, quando intentio animae vehementer trahitur ad operationem unius potentiae, retrahatur ab operatione alterius, unius enim animae non potest esse nisi una intentio» [Since all the powers of the soul are rooted in the one essence of the soul, it is necessary that when the intention of the soul is strongly drawn to the operation of one power, it is withdrawn from the operation of another power: because the soul, being one, can only have one intention].

(a view he subsequently retracted, and which was condemned as heretical by the papal bull of his successor Pope Benedict XII in 1336).⁹⁴ The view held by Aquinas (which would become church orthodoxy) was that, although the immortality of the human soul can be demonstrated philosophically, the kind of continued existence of the individual soul in the afterlife, prior to the resurrection of the body, is a mystery and a matter of faith and theological speculation.⁹⁵

It is this third approach to the problem – emphasising the need for a theological explanation beyond the remit of philosophy – that Dante dramatizes poetically in the narrative encounter with the excommunicate souls in *Purgatorio* III-IV. Faced with Dante-character's doubt, Virgil points out that his body is already buried on earth (III 25-27), and emphasizes the need for faith: «Perché pur diffidi?» (22); «non credi tu» (24); «non ti maravigliar» (29). When the excommunicate souls – mirroring Dante-character's bemusement – see his shadow, Virgil commands «Non vi maravigliate, ma credete» (97). In this way, Dante underlines the need for belief, the seed of Christian knowledge («credo ut intelligam») rather than wonder, the seed of philosophical knowledge. In philosophy, our wonder at an effect (Aristotle's example is a rainbow) leads us, through reason, to discover its cause, but this particular effect – the souls' bodiless-but-experiential existence – cannot be discovered through philosophical reason but is, rather, a matter of faith:

«A sofferir tormenti, caldi e geli
simili corpi la Virtù dispone
che, come fa, non vuol ch'a noi si sveli
Matto è chi spera che nostra ragione
possa trascorrer la infinita via
che tiene una sustanza in tre persone.
State contenti, umana gente, al *quia*;
ché se potuto aveste veder tutto,
mestier non era parturir Maria;
e disïar vedeste senza frutto
tai che sarebbe lor disio quetato,
ch'etternalmente è dato lor per lutto:
io dico d'Aristotile e di Plato
e di molt' altri»: e qui chinò la fronte,

⁹⁴ *Benedictus Deus* (1336), <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/ben12/b12bdeus.htm>.

⁹⁵ Aquinas argues as follows: to know with the imagination is the proper activity of the soul when it is united to the body («intellegere cum phantasmate est propria operatio animae secundum quod corpori est unita»); the soul, separated from the body, has an aptitude and natural desire to be unified with the body («habens aptitudinem et inclinationem naturalem ad corporis unionem»). It will find, therefore, some other way of knowing similar to that of other substances which are without a body («habebit alium modum intelligendi similem aliis substantiis a corpore separatis»). See AQUINAS, *STh.* Ia. q.75, a.6, ad3; Ia. q.76, a.1, ad6; Ia. q.75, a.6, ad3; and *SCG.* II. cap. 76-77. In its literal sense, Dante's *Commedia* presents a theological hypothesis as to how human souls might exist after death but before the resurrection of the body.

e più non disse, e rimase turbato. (Purg. III 31-45)

Only on the sixth terrace of Purgatory will Statius reveal to Dante-character – opening up thereby «la veduta eterna» (Purg. XXV 31) – the theological cause which makes him wonder: «e quest'è la cagion di che tu miri» (108).

By signposting the eternal fate of the virtuous pagans at this point in the narrative, Dante underlines the foolishness of seeking to understand by reason truths which can only be understood through faith in God's self-revelation (Purg. III 34-36).⁹⁶ If man's desire for truth could be attained through reason, the desire of Aristotle and Plato in Limbo («vivemo in disio»; *Inf.* IV 42) would be quietened. However, God manifested Himself to mankind as the revealed truth which is entirely beyond the scope of philosophy (Purg. III 37-45). Dante also emphasises the foolishness of those who deny all divine truths simply because they are unknowable through reason alone.⁹⁷ Virgil's exasperated tone juxtaposes the presumption of mankind in Christian times – unwilling to accept the divine authority of Scripture (III 37) – with the tragic fate of the pagan philosophers (42) – whose human desire for God, unsatisfied in their earthly life (without God's self-revelation), remains, in the *contrapasso* of the *carentia Dei*, perpetually unsatisfied in limbo.

Through the contrary eternal destinies of the father and son Epicureans Frederick II (*Inf.* X) and Manfred (Purg. IV), Dante both highlights how heresy leads to unbelief, and also underlines the hope for those who repent (even at their last gasp of life), a repentance that may trump even the decree of excommunication:

«Poscia ch'io ebbi rotta la persona
di due punte mortali, io mi rendei
piangendo a quei che volontier perdona.
Orribil furon li peccati miei;
ma la Bontà infinita ha sì gran braccia
che prende ciò che si rivolge a lei. [...]

⁹⁶ *Questio de aqua et terra*, XXI.75: «consimiles questiones vel a multa stultitia vel a multa presumptione procedunt, propterea quod sunt supra intellectum nostrum» [such questions proceed either from much foolishness or presumption, because they are about things which are above our intellect]. Dante berates with similar rhetorical emphasis the intellectual tendency to overstep the limits of rational inquiry: «Desinant ergo, desinant homines querere que supra eos sunt [...] Audiant [...] Ysaim dicentem "Quem distant caeli a terra, tantum distant viae meae a viis vestris" loquebatur equidem in persona Dei ad hominem» [men must stop, therefore, they must stop searching for things which are above them [...] they must listen [...] to Isaiah saying «my ways are as far apart from your ways as the heavens from the earth»; he was speaking to man, indeed, in the persona of God] (*Questio* XXII.77). See also, on the limits of natural reason, *Convivio* III.15.6-9 and II.5.2-3.

⁹⁷ *Conv.* III.15.11-17. Dante castigates such foolishness, also, at *Conv.* IV.5.9: «Oh stoltissime e vilissime bestiuole che a guisa d'uomo voi pascete, che presummete contro nostra Fede parlare e volete sapere, filando e zappando, ciò che Iddio con tanta prudenza hae ordinato! Maledetti siate voi, e la vostra presunzione, e chi a voi crede!». See also AQUINAS, *SCG.* I. cap.3 n.5.

Per lor maladizion sì non si perde
che non possa tornar l'eterno amore,
mentre che la speranza ha fior del verde.» (*Purg.* III 118-23; 133-35)

As Peraldus underlines, the devil tries with all his power to sow errors against the Christian faith because he knows that after he has blinded the eye of faith, he is able to induce men to commit every sin.⁹⁸ The devil also knows that, once he has led man away from the path of faith, even any good that he does will be useless for his salvation, and the man will be ineluctably led to the gibbet of hell.⁹⁹ It is for this reason that Dante represents Epicureanism as the heresy *par excellence* – a heresy that implies disbelief in Christianity as a whole – and that Dante's circle of heresy precedes the circles punishing the multifarious sins of wilful malice.

As the devil attacks the truths of the Christian faith – the very foundation of the whole spiritual edifice – so Christians and above all preachers must try to refute these errors with all their might, leading men and women to repentance. Peraldus cites Christ's parable of the sower: «The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While the men were asleep his enemy came and sowed weeds all through the wheat, and then went off» (Matthew 13: 24-25). The sleep of men signifies the negligence of prelates.¹⁰⁰ Thus, while heresy is associated with pride as its cause, the diffusion of heresy through society is associated with sloth: the negligence and laziness of prelates in teaching the truth and in combatting error, which allows heresy to go unchecked in the church, the body of Christ, and in society as a whole. It is perhaps partly for this reason that Dante situates the sluggards, the negligent lazy (*Purg.* IV 19-5.21), directly after the excommunicates (*Purg.* III 16-4.18).

Through his depiction of the excommunicates (*Purg.* III 17- IV 18), therefore, Dante explores how intellectual pride can lead to heresy and, then, to excommunication and, also, how diligent study and preaching is needed to refute such errors. In Dante's account, the Dominican order was founded precisely with this preaching vocation in mind. St Dominic is

⁹⁸ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.vi, pa.3, ch.26, p. 308b: «Quod diabolus multum conatur seminare errores in Ecclesia Dei [...] Prima causa est, quia ipse scit postquam oculum fidei excaecaverit in homine, ipse potest hominem inducere in omne peccatum».

⁹⁹ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.vi, pa.3, ch.26, p. 309a: «Quarta causa est haec, quia ipse scit quod, si potest aliquem ponere extra viam fidei, quidquid postea ille faciet: inutile erit sibi, quantum ad meritum vitae aeternae».

¹⁰⁰ PERALDUS, *De vitiis*, t.vi, pa.3, ch.26, p. 309a: «Propter has causas diabolus multum conatur errores fidei contrarios seminare in Ecclesia Dei. Et propter easdem causas multum deberemus conari contra errores, et praecipue Praelati, quorum negligentia errores ut frequentius subintrant: sicut Dominus ostendit Matt.13 dicens: "Simile est regnum caelorum homini, qui seminavit bonum semen in agro. Cum autem dormirent homines, venit inimicus eius, et superseminavit zizania in medio tritici". In dormitione hominum negligentia praelatorum intelligitur».

«the amorous lover of the Christian faith» («l'amoroso drudo / de la fede christiana»; *Par.* XII 55-56) who, for love of wisdom, became «a great teacher, so that he took to tending the vine that quickly withers if the vinekeeper is lazy» («gran dottor si feo, / tal che si mise a circuir la vigna, / che tosto imbianca se 'l vignaio è reo»; 85-87). St Dominic received the preaching license to fight for the seed of faith, defending it from the devil and from the thickets of heresy, so that it might germinate in the lives of the blessed (88-102); and, from St Dominic are «derived various streams that water the Catholic vineyard» (103-05).¹⁰¹ As is clear from *Convivio* IV, Dante saw his own mission as, like that of the Dominican Aquinas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, to refute the arguments of all those who deviate from the Christian faith: «I model myself [...] on the good friar Thomas Aquinas, who entitled one of his works, written to refute the arguments of all those who deviate from our faith, *Against the Gentiles*» (*Conv.*, IV.30.3).¹⁰² In *Purgatorio* III-IV, Dante addresses the incorrect view on the nature of the human soul after death; in the poem as a whole, he provides an antidote to heresy through its philosophical and theological teaching.

If the Dominican Aquinas is a principal source for Dante's philosophical and theological teaching, the principal source for Dante's moral teaching in *Purgatorio* appears to be the Dominican Peraldus's treatise *De vitiis et virtutibus*. Where I have previously demonstrated the influence of Peraldus's *De vitiis* on Dante's terrace of pride (*Purg.* X-XII) and sloth (*Purg.* XVII 79-XIX 69), in this article I have shown – for the first time – the influence of Peraldus's “de superbia” and “de acedia” on Dante's treatment of these two vices, and their sub-vices, in Ante-Purgatory (*Purg.* I-IX) as well.¹⁰³ In drawing upon Peraldus as a hitherto unexamined ethical source and context for Ante-Purgatory, I have also developed a more far-reaching thesis: namely, the identification and analysis of the ethical purposes underpinning Dante's invention of this strange region of the afterlife in the first place. Ante-Purgatory, like the two regions of the neutrals and of the virtuous pagans in Ante-Hell, only makes theological and dogmatic sense in terms of ethics (the moral state signified), and not as eschatology (a literal region of the Christian afterlife). In inventing Ante-Purgatory, Dante's primary ethical

¹⁰¹ It is the seed of faith that bore the twenty-four plants that encircle Dante in the heaven of the wise («lo seme / del qual ti fascian ventiquattro piante»; *Par.* XII 95-96). In a vertical reading, Dante portrays the graveyards of the proud heretics (in *Inferno* X); the corresponding Christian humility against pride (in *Purgatorio* X-XII); and the flowering of Christian faith in the wisdom and lives of the saints (in *Paradiso* X-XV).

¹⁰² *Conv.* III.30.3: «Questo “Contra-li-erranti” è tutto una parola, ed è nome d'esta canzone, tolto per essempro dal buono frate Tommaso d'Aquino, che a un suo libro, che fece a confusione di tutti quelli che disviano da nostra Fede, puose nome “Contra li Gentili”».

¹⁰³ CORBETT, *Dante's Christian Ethics*, pp. 107-65.

purpose was to explore the capital vice of sloth and its sub-vices (such as negligence, delay, and laziness) in detail and depth, knowing that on the terrace of sloth itself he would represent the penitent souls purging their former tepidity with zealous (but not indiscrete) haste as they rush past Dante and Virgil in an encounter lasting just 68 lines. Ante-Purgatory also provides a narrative space – outside the graveyard of the heretics in Hell (*Inferno* X) and the terrace of pride in Purgatory (*Purgatorio* X-XII) – to explore the relationship between pride, heresy, and excommunication, as well as the association between the laziness and negligence of preachers and the diffusion of heresy in society. As in a theological thought experiment, Dante’s invention of Ante-Purgatory enables him to depict such moral and psychological states as “being outside” (excommunicates) or “neglecting” (sluggards) Catholic faith and religious practice as well as, of course, the “hopeful state” of Christians on their pilgrim journey.