



## The condemnation of greed in *Purgatory* from the Treaty *Monarchia*.<sup>1</sup>

La condena de la avaricia en *Purgatorio* a partir del tratado *Monarquía*.

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### ABSTRACT

Greed is the most condemned sin by Dante Alighieri in his Comedy. To understand this condemnation, in this paper, it is opted for a dualist lecture of *Purgatory*, i.e., one that allows us to consider both what reason understands human virtue and vice and what one must accept by the Christian faith. To achieve this, some of Dante's theological and political ideas are recovered from his treatise *Monarchia*.

**Keywords:** Greed. Dante Alighieri. *Purgatory*. *Monarchia*.

### RESUMEN.

La avaricia es el pecado más condenado por Dante Alighieri en su *Comedia*. Para comprender la dimensión de esta condena, en este artículo se opta por una lectura dualista del *Purgatorio*, i.e., una que permite considerar lo que entiende la razón de la virtud y el vicio humano y lo que hay que entender por la fe cristiana. Para lograr esto, se revisan algunas ideas teológicas y políticas de Dante en su tratado *Monarquía*.

**Palabras Clave:** Avaricia. Dante Alighieri. *Purgatorio*. *Monarquía*.

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Of the incontinent sins, *i.e.*, whose nature lies in the excess or defect of an action, greed is the sin most condemned by Dante in his *Comedy*. Quantitatively, the infernal circle of greed is the most populous (*Hell*, VII, 20); qualitatively, by the voice of Hadrian V, we know that the penalty of the greedy is the most severe in purgatory (*Purgatory*, XIX, 117).<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the poem, the same sin is represented by a she-she-back, along with lust and pride, symbolized by a panther and a lion, respectively (*Inferno*, I, 31-54), these sins being those that predominate in the world, and those that caused many of Dante's bitterness. In this paper, I want to examine how condemnation of greed occurs. For this, I will first explain how Dante classifies sins; Next, I will review some of his statements in the treatise *Monarchy*; later, I will link the revised with some parts of the xvi to xx cantos of *Purgatory*<sup>3</sup> and conclude with some brief reflections.

From Canto XI of *Hell*, we know that the structure of Hell is based on the moral philosophy of Aristotle in the *Ethics of Nicomachus*. Broadly speaking, the low hell – from the second to the fifth circle – contains the incontinent sinners, *i.e.*, who lived in excesses or defects in their acts; on the other hand, the high hell – from the sixth to the ninth circle – contains sinners who committed some absolute evil, *i.e.*, who do not accept a medium or who implied the use of reason to harm others. In Canto XVII of *Purgatory* we find a similar explanation of the order of purgatory. Through Virgil we have news that everything, both the Creator and his creatures, radiates love. The way in which it is directed determines when one lives virtuously or in some vice. Because love seeks the happiness of the wearer, self-hatred is impossible; and because everything has God as its cause, no one can hate Him. In this way, hatred is only possible for others and for created things. Having established these principles, Virgil explains to Dante that in purgatory there is a threefold classification: deformed love, which hates one's neighbor and his well-being in order to elevate oneself, which corresponds to pride, anger and envy; deficient love, which corresponds to laziness; and excessive love, which corresponds to greed, gluttony and lust.

<sup>2</sup> That greed is also the most far-reaching sin is reiterated in *Purgatory*, XIX, 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> Although in the XXI song of the *Purgatory* Dante is still on the ledge of the misers, this one is more directed to the prodigals and to the encounter of Dante and Virgil with Statius.



*Prima facie*, purgatory can seem like an intermediate between hell and paradise. Whoever was not a sinner whose sin has won him hell, but neither a soul whose works deserved paradise, has to go through purgatory to become pure and ascend to the perfection of heaven. Moreover, the fact that there are sins that occur in both places – such as gluttony, lust, greed and anger – gives greater sustenance to this idea. Even so, in the literature of the last century a dualistic reading of *Purgatory* has been promoted. While hell is ruled by what reason alone can comprehend of the moral order in the world, purgatory is a path of the soul from love to earthly to the love of divine things. Thus, the structure of this is based rather on the right love for God, and, therefore, its structure is rather theological (Corbett, 2014). In favor of this, it is enough to observe that the moral order that governs its cornices are the seven deadly sins and that at the door of purgatory appears the process of penance represented by three steps that symbolize the consciousness, sin and blood of Christ respectively (*Purgatory*, IX, 94-102). This dualistic reading suggests that we look not only for the philosophical or rational reasons for condemning greed – as an excess – but also the theological reasons for doing so.

From this type of reading one can recover some theological-political ideas of Dante in his treatise *Monarchy*. In this short text, Dante adds to a discussion of his time: is temporal power independent of spiritual power? Beyond the theological-philosophical field, the political camps were then divided between the Guelphs – mostly nobles – who believed that both powers should go together, and the Ghibellines – mostly the nouveau riche (bourgeois) – who believed that the powers are independent. While Dante lived in Florence, he was a Guelph by tradition in his family, even though I belonged to the white faction of these, which defended the political independence of Florence from the pope; however, after his experiences in exile, Dante turned more to the side of the Ghibellines (Díaz, 2013, 311).

There may have been several reasons why Dante decided to write his treatise *Monarchy*. Some scholars date the beginning of the drafting of the treaty in 1310 with the descent of Henry VII to Italy and the interruption in 1314 when he died (Gutiérrez, 1994, pp. 694s). From the letter that Dante addresses to this emperor, it is plausible to suppose that one reason was his desire to return to



Florence, since Henry VII was not exactly a very successful king in his ventures (Díaz, 2013, p. 313). Whatever the engine of the drafting, in his treatise Dante decided to direct an open criticism of the Roman pontificate for its close relations with temporal power, more specifically with French kings.

The treatise consists of three books, each of which has a central argument. The former defends monarchy as the form of government that best serves the happiness of men. Among others, Dante's central theses in this text are:

- (a) Peace is the best means for men to achieve their happiness. (I, 4)
- (b) The best government is unique and unifies the people. (I, 5)
- (c) The monarchy orders everything to the same end, which is peace. (I, 7)
- (d) The single monarch is the fairest of all because he doesn't want anything. (I, 11)
- (e) The monarch wants everyone to live for himself, *i.e.*, he does not submit. (I, 12)
- (f) The monarchy of Augustus was a happy and full time. (I, 16)

Some of these theses may seem naïve. In this regard, Ángel Crespo has pointed out that Dante is moved more by a poetic reason than a scientific one, so it is not uncommon to find many requests for principle in his argumentation (1999, pp. 82s); however, for our purpose it is convenient for us to keep in mind these ideas of Dante.

The second book is devoted to demonstrating, from historical and poetic sources, that the Roman Empire was legitimate insofar as it was a will of God. We will not detail this here.

Finally, the third book answers the question: does the authority of the monarch depend on God or on some minister or vicar of God? As Dante points out in his opening, his response is unfavorable to the Roman pontiff and beneficial to the prince. Dante believed that the authority of the monarch derives directly from God and not from any of his vicars or ministers.

Dante's arguments in favor of separation are as follows. First, he denies a reading of genesis in which it is said that the Sun and the Moon represent the two powers, saying that God would create the remedy rather than the problem, since these precede the creation of man who has not yet sinned and does not need guidance in such a state; moreover this reading rather suggests that both powers



are distinct and independent, even when the help of one another can better illuminate the world (III, 4). Another passage that Dante denies is a direct response to a reading of Boniface VIII, whom Dante considered the cause of his banishment by sending Charles of Valois to Florence. Boniface VIII defended the union of powers based on a passage from Luke's Gospel in which Peter has two swords, which means that Peter, his vicar, has both powers. Dante resignifies the passage by saying that Jesus cautioned all his apostles from the danger that would come in his capture, so he asks everyone, not just Peter, to have a sword (III, 9).

Finally, Dante rejected one of the foundations of the political authority of the church: the donation of Constantine (III, 10). Back then, Constantine was believed to have donated half of his empire to Pope Sylvester I, who would cure him of an illness; with the Western Empire, the pope would then stay with Rome, the capital of the empire. A couple of centuries after Dante's death the document validating the fact was declared false; however, for a long time it was believed that this gave a political figure to Pedro's successor (Barceló, 2003, pp. 55-57).

As such Dante considered that Constantine's intention was good, but that his action destroyed the world (*Paradise*, XX, 58-60), for it had enriched the first father (*Hell*, XIX, 115-117). Contrary to this legal principle, Dante sees a bilateral problem. Neither Constantine could donate the empire nor the church could receive it. On the former, Dante took an affirmation of an exclusive third. Constantine was or was not emperor when making the donation. If he was emperor, he could not donate his empire because the emperor brings unity and does not separate his domain. If he was not emperor, he could not make the donation legally. As for the latter, Dante indicates that, even if Constantine had been able to make the donation, the church could not receive it because in the Gospel according to St. Matthew it says "do not possess gold or silver" (10: 9, Version Reina Valera), and that its relaxation is very limited (Luke, 9, 3). Evangelical poverty was not preached then.

Now, some of the ideas that we have reviewed from the *treatise Monarchy* are at the bottom of *Purgatory* and it is very possible that both works were written at the same time (Crespo, 1999, p.87), so they also complement each other.



As such, we will find the misers until the XIX song of *Purgatory*, but from the XVI song we can point out some parallels that clarify more the cause of the punishment. So, we will begin with the conversation with Marco Lombardi on the ledge of the angry. It should be noted that the generic name and lack of information of the character has led commentators to believe that Dante put his own thoughts on another character apart from himself (Chiclana, 2002, p. 305; Echeverría, 2013, p. 304), so this would be a kind of monologue by Dante. Marco Lombardi tells Dante that in the world no one tends the arc of virtue anymore, and his explanation is as follows:

the simple soul, without expertise,  
but, moved by happy author,  
he is inclined to what he thinks is delight.  
In slight well first find flavor,  
but he deceives himself and, to achieve it, he runs  
if rein or brake do not twist your love  
The good law slows her down and helps her,  
that a king should at least measure  
of the authentic city the tower.  
The law exists, more by whom is it enforced?  
For no one, the shepherd who marches to the front  
ruminate can, but your nail is not cleft;  
and since his guide sees the people  
injure her coveted prey,  
nothing asks and in pacer consents.  
You see that depraved behavior  
it is the cause that the world lay unclean,  
not that our nature is added.  
He used to Rome, for whom he was fruitful,  
with a sun point the way



of God, and with the other that of the world.  
He turned off each other, and his fate  
unite[staff] and sword; [...] if the hand<sup>4</sup>  
they are given by force, it is pure nonsense  
because, together, none is sovereign.<sup>5</sup> (Purgatory, XVI, 88-112)

On the one hand, Dante recognizes that sin is something proper to the sinner. The soul tends to things that bring it pleasure, which is natural and not a vice *per se*. In Canto XVIII, Virgilio explains

<sup>4</sup> In Crepo's version it says "tiara", but the Tuscan text says "pasturele", which Ruiz translates as "crosier" and seems to me to be more appropriate. The omission of the "and" occurs for metric reasons.

<sup>5</sup> Quotes from the *Divine Comedy* they come from Crespo (1981) and are contrasted in the notes with the Tuscan text from González Ruiz (1994). Quotes from the *Monarchy* come from Gutiérrez (1994).

l'anima semplicetta che sa nulla  
salvo che, mossa di lieto fattore,  
volontier torna a ciò che la trastulla,  
Di picciol bene in pria sente sapore;  
quivi s'inganna, e dietro ad esso corre  
se guida o fren non torce sou amore.  
Onde convenne legge per fren porre;  
convinde rege aver, che discernesse  
de la vera cittade almen la torre  
Le leggi son, ma chi pon mano ad Esse?  
Nullo: però che'l pastor che procede,  
ruminare può, ma non ha l'hungie fesse;  
per che la gente, che sua guida vede  
Pur a quel ben fidire ond'ella è ghiotta  
di quel ben qui pasce, a più oltre non chiede.  
Ben puoi veder che la mala condotta  
è la cagion che'l mondo ha fatto reo,  
e non la natura che'n voi sia corrotta.  
Soleva Roma, che'l buon mondo feo,  
duo soli aver, che l'una e l'altra strada  
facean vedere, e del mondo e di Deo.  
L'un l'altro ha spento; ed e guinta la spada  
pasture cabbage, e l'un con l'altro insieme  
per viva forza mal conven che vada  
but chè, giunti, l'un l'altro non teme.



that part of freedom consists in curbing desire because we can distinguish between what is good and bad, although he relegates a more detailed explanation to his encounter with Beatrice in paradise, since this is a matter of faith (González, 1994, 316). On the other hand, we find that one of the reasons why Dante wants to separate spiritual power from temporal power is because of the spiritual guidance it represents. While there are laws aimed at taking care of good behavior, Dante sees that the ecclesiastical authorities of his time know them, although they do not comply with them; metaphorically, they ruminate, but they don't have a sunken hoof. The pope,<sup>6</sup> by failing as an example, causes his flock, the people, to also deviate from their path. Dante immediately puts a counterposition when referring to the two suns of Rome, or its two powers. While one was in charge of providing the conditions of peace for the optimal means of man's happiness, the other power was in charge of directing man to the right path that God commands. This is something that Dante considered lost, because, being united, neither of them fulfills its end. As an example, he refers to the contests carried out by Frederick II in the regions of the Po River. Finally, Dante concludes his dialogue with Marcus by indicating that he now understands that the Levites had their inheritance taken away from them in order to focus solely on the divine. The event referred to is found in the book of Acts and deals as follows:

The lord said to Aaron, You will not receive inheritance in his land, nor will you have a share among them. I myself will be your inheritance and your part in the midst of the children of Israel. I give as an inheritance to the sons of Levi all the tithes of Israel in compensation for the services they render in the tent of encounter. In this way, the Israelites will have no need to approach the tent of encounter, and they will not become sinners or die. (XVIII: 20-23, Reina-Valera version).

After this passage we have to wait until the XIX song to rediscover a direct criticism of spiritual power. Upon entering the fifth ledge of purgatory, that of the misers, Dante has a vision in which a deformed

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<sup>6</sup> An extended comment on this metaphor can be found in (Barceló, 2003, pp. 325 - 327).





woman appears to him head-on, although the more the sight the more beautiful it appears. In Dante's words: he took "his faded countenance the dye that love wants" (XIX, 14s).<sup>7</sup> The fantasy ends when one holy woman takes her clothes from the other and she loses her charm. Among commentators the interpretation is almost unanimous: The woman who transforms herself in sight represents material goods, since these gain attractiveness the greater the attention received, and the holy woman who undresses her represents prudence.<sup>8</sup> This brings to mind what we saw recently: the soul takes a place in temporal goods and can be lost in them if it does not take care of its freedom.

As in hell, in purgatory irony is what governs the nature of punishments. By looking only at earthly goods, misers keep their faces down while weeping to purify themselves with every tear. Here we can notice a couple of things.

In the first place, the relevance that Dante gives to the eternity, order and unity of heaven, because Virgil claims it "What do you have that you are looking at the earth?" (Purgatory, XIX, 52).<sup>9</sup> A similar claim had already happened the same in Canto XIV (148-151):

Heaven calls you and turns you around  
To show you its eternal beauty  
and your eye towards the earth looks:  
and you are punished by the one who governs everything.<sup>10</sup>

In *Monarchy* (I, 9), Dante suggested that there must be a single government in the world because heaven is unique and orderly; and, even more, he offers us this reflection from a passage from the *Consolation*

<sup>7</sup> Com'amor vuol, così le colorava.

<sup>8</sup> Some e.g., they discuss whether it is the holy woman or Virgil, guided by the holy woman, who undresses the other woman (De Montalbán, 2001, 183).

<sup>9</sup> Che hai che pur inver la terra guati?

<sup>10</sup>

Chiamavi 'l cielo e 'ntorno vi si gira,  
showingvi le sue bellezze eterne,  
e l'occhio vostro pur a terra mira;  
onde vi batte chi tutto discerne



of *philosophy* (II, 8) of Boethius that refers: "O happy human race if your souls govern the love that governs heaven",<sup>11</sup> which seems a plausible candidate for Dante's inspiration from his last verse in the *Comedy*, in which he states that his will was moved by the love that moves the Sun and the other stars.

Secondly, we also realize that tears, and therefore pain, is something explicitly concomitant with this punishment. While in other parts of purgatory we find characters who cry, in no other cornice is this necessary relationship between condemnation and tears established. As Hadrian V makes explicit, this is the most bitter penalty of all purgatory (Purgatory, XIX, 117).

Continuing with characterization of the latter character, Hadrian V was a pope whose duration in spiritual power was very short, barely 37 days; however, Dante argues that this was enough time for him to realize how difficult it is to wear the sacred mantle without staining it, as if to imply that anyone who occupies that position is placed in a position prone to greed. The saddest thing about this situation is that out of greed Hadrian V himself says that all actions became vain. The scene concludes as follows: Dante, wanting to keep respect for the figure of Hadrian V, tries to kneel in front of him, to which he reminds him that there is no marriage after death, so the respect owed to him as head of the Church is no longer something that corresponds to him. In this way, Hadrian V is shown to us as a man who, after all, is only a man like everyone else and who must face only the judgment of God. This could be an opposition to the scene of hell in which Dante responds to the Simonian Pope Nicholas III and whose speech does not take on a higher tone because of Dante's respect for the keys:

And, for reverence forsails me,  
since you had the supreme keys,  
when you were there, in the Leda life,  
I do not have to say even more serious words.  
O greed in which the world grieves:

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<sup>11</sup> I reproduce here the verse of Boethius as it appears in (Gutiérrez, 1994, p. 703).



sink the good, lift the bad you know. (Hell, XIX, 100-105).<sup>12</sup>

To conclude with our review of purgatory, let's look at Canto XX. Our central character refers to himself as Hugo Capeto, although commentators agree that by his description he is actually Hugo the Great, father of Hugo Capeto (González, 1994, p. 291; De Montalbán, 2001, 187). In any case, whoever it was spoken:

root of the evil plant  
that gives Christianity an overwhelming shadow  
for which good mieses does not lift. (Purgatory, XX, 43-45).<sup>13</sup>

Specifically it refers to the kings of the Capetian dynasty, which lasted from 987 to 1328 by direct line (Echeverría, 2013, p. 329), indicating an open criticism of the French monarchy in Dante's time.

In this song, by way of Hugh the Great, Dante reproaches the evils of certain French kings. It refers to the usurpations of Philip "The Beautiful" in "Pontieu, Gascona" and Philip Augustus in "Normandy" (*Purgatory*, XX, 66); Charles of Anjou, who had Conradino beheaded, the last king of the Hohenstaufen dynasty and heir to the kingdom of Naples, when he was 16 years old, and it is this same Charles who was believed to be the supposed murderer of St. Thomas Aquinas, since he could oppose him at the Council of Lion (Crespo, 1981, 281; Echeverría, 2013, p. 330). Later in the same song (vv. 79-81) he also refers to him as the one who haggled with his daughter alluding to the

12

E se non fosse ch'anchor lo mi vieta  
la reverenza delle Somme chiavi  
che tu tenesti nella vita lieta,  
io userei parole ancor più gravi ;  
che la vostra avarizia il mondo attrista,  
calcando i buoni e sollevando i pravi

13

Io fui radice de la mala pianta  
che la terra cristiana tutta aduggia,  
si che boun fruto rado se ne schianta



marriage he agreed between her and the Marquis of Ferrara Azzo VII (vv.79-81). Particularly, it says of one:

I see a time, which is already approaching,  
in which France new Charles launches  
to leave, with his own, flaunting.  
He goes out without weapons, only with the spear  
with Judas to just, and with his tip  
towards Florence burst the belly. (Purgatory, XX, 70 – 75).<sup>14</sup>

Here Dante shows one of the most personal episodes. It refers to Charles of Valois, who went down to Florence as an alleged peacemaker commanded by Boniface VIII; however, what actually happened was a neutralization of the white faction of the Guelphs to establish the primacy of the black faction and with it the power of the pope in Florence. Dante was on a diplomatic mission in Rome, but this was the fact that marked his banishment. Even so, Dante also condemns that Philip IV, "The Beautiful", captivated the Vicar of Christ by alluding to the prison of Boniface VIII and his eventual death in prison (Crespo, 1981, 282). Beyond personal enmity, Dante continued to recognize the figure of Peter's successor. Finally, he says about it:

New pilate so cruel contemplate  
that does not satisfy him, and leads without decree  
the ambitious candles against the temple. (Purgatory, XX, 91-93)<sup>15</sup>

14

Tempo vegg'io, non molto dopo ancoi  
che tragge un altro Carlo fuor di Francia  
per far conocer meglio e sè e' suoi  
Sanz' arme n' esce e solo con lancia  
with the qual giostrò Guida, e quella punta  
sì ch'a Fiorenza fa scoppiar la pancia

15

Veggio il novo Pilato sì crudele,



The fact referred to is the attack on the leaders of the Templars, whom he burned. This would mark the end of the order (Crespo, 1981, 282).

In contrast to these actions, Dante puts in the songs of the misers exemplary cases of a life without greed. It refers to Mary who had the king of heaven in a poor hospice; and also Fabricius, a Roman who denied himself riches in order to maintain his virtue. A curious case is the allusion to the history of St. Nicholas. A man without money was about to prostitute his daughters; and Nicholas, knowing of this, donated some gold coins at night and secretly so that the daughters of man could devote themselves to the honest life (Crespo, 1981, p. 280). The name was later deformed from Nicolás to Klaus (Echeverría, 2013, p. 328). In the United States this scene is depicted with the socks on the fireplace. In the same way, it also refers to some cases in which greed was counterproductive. The misers remember Midas, the king who asked that everything he touched be turned into gold, which brought the death of one of his daughters, and whose story, Dante says, "all mockery comes to mind" (*Purgatory*, XX, p. 108).<sup>16</sup> They shout among all "Oh, Crassus [...] if, well, you know, how does gold taste?" (p. 116s),<sup>17</sup> referring to the death of Licinius Crassus, who, on his death, was made to swallow molten gold for his insatiable thirst for riches (Crespo, 1981, 283). All these stories are sung by the misers, although in the vicinity of Dante only Capet sings them with force while the others barely murmur because great is his fault compared to that of others (*Purgatory*, XX, 118-123).

What we have reviewed in this paper is a general characterization of greed in purgatory in relation to *Dante's Monarchy*. At the time, his ideas were revolutionary, or at least contravened an established order. Proof of this is the condemnation suffered by this *document* in 1329 by Cardinal Bertran de Pogeto, who tried to burn it (González, 1994, 697). In 1559 he was included in the index of books forbidden by the Vatican, although Leo XIII took it out later for not finding anything in it that contradicted Christian doctrine. He even wrote a couple of bulls, *Immortale Dei* and *Sapientiae*

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che ciò nol sazia, ma senza decreto  
porta nel Tempio le cupide vele

<sup>16</sup> per la qual cempre conven che si rida.

<sup>17</sup> Crasso / dilci, che'l UPS: di che sapore è l'oro.



*Cristianiae*, in which here recovered some ideas of the temporal and spiritual division of powers (Robles and Frayle, 1992, 20-22).

Certainly many of the arguments that Dante put forward cannot be recovered in our times for various reasons. It is the opinion of Étienne Gilson that the *Monarchy* was removed from the index when it no longer represented any danger because no modern state would take it as the basis of its thought (p. 20-22). In any case, I believe that in order not to lose these reflections, it is essential to question the actions of all ecclesiastical authority with respect to temporal goods, but this is a task that is left to everyone for their own time and environment.

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