

Seven deadly sins

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Hieronymus Bosch's *The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things*

The **seven deadly sins**, also known as the **capital vices** or **cardinal sins**, is a classification of objectionable *vices* (part of [Christian ethics](#)) that have been used since [early Christian](#) times to educate and instruct Christians concerning fallen humanity's tendency to *sin*. The currently recognized version of the sins are usually given as [wrath](#), [greed](#), [sloth](#), [pride](#), [lust](#), [envy](#), and [gluttony](#).

The [Catholic Church](#) divides sin into two categories: [venial sins](#), in which guilt is relatively minor, and the more severe [mortal sins](#). Theologically, a mortal or deadly sin is believed to destroy the life of [grace](#) and [charity](#) within a person and thus creates the threat of eternal [damnation](#). "Mortal sin, by attacking the vital principle within us – that is, charity – necessitates a new initiative of God's mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished [for Catholics] within the setting of the [sacrament of reconciliation](#)."^[1]

To Catholics the seven deadly sins do not belong to an additional category of sin. Rather, they are the sins that are seen as the origin ("capital" comes from the Latin *caput*, head) of the other sins. A "deadly sin" can be either venial or mortal, depending on the situation; but "they are called 'capital' because they engender other sins, other vices".^[2]

Beginning in the early 14th century, the popularity of the seven deadly sins as a theme among European artists of the time eventually helped to ingrain them in many areas of Catholic culture and Catholic consciousness in general throughout the world. One means of such ingrainng was the creation of the [mnemonic](#) "SALIGIA" based on the first letters in Latin of the seven deadly sins: *superbia*, *avaritia*, *luxuria*, *invidia*, *gula*, *ira*, *acedia*.^[3]

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Biblical lists [\[edit\]](#)

In the [Book of Proverbs](#) (Mishlai), among the verses traditionally associated with [King Solomon](#), it states that the Lord specifically regards "six things the Lord hateth, and the seventh His soul detesteth", namely:^[4]

1. A proud look
2. A lying tongue
3. Hands that shed innocent blood
4. A heart that devises wicked plots
5. Feet that are swift to run into mischief
6. A deceitful witness that uttereth lies
7. Him that soweth discord among brethren

While there are seven of them, this list is considerably different from the traditional one, with only pride clearly being in both lists.

Another list, given this time by the [Epistle to the Galatians](#) (Galatians 5:19-21), includes more of the traditional seven sins, although the list is substantially longer: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, "and such like".^[5] Since Saint Paul goes on to say that the persons who commit these sins "shall not inherit the Kingdom of God", they are usually listed as (possible) [mortal sins](#) rather than [capital vices](#).

History [\[edit\]](#)



An allegorical image depicting the human heart subject to the seven deadly sins, each represented by an animal (clockwise: [toad](#) = avarice; [snake](#) = envy; [lion](#) = wrath; [snail](#) = sloth; [pig](#) = gluttony; [goat](#) = lust; [peacock](#) = pride).

The modern concept of the seven deadly sins is linked to the works of the 4th century [monk Evagrius Ponticus](#), who listed eight *evil thoughts* in [Greek](#) as follows:^[6]

- Γαστριμαργία (gastrimargia) [gluttony](#)
- Πορνεία (porneia) [prostitution, fornication](#)
- Φιλαργυρία (philargyria) [avarice](#)
- Ὑπερηφανία (hyperēphania) [hubris](#) – in the [Philokalia](#), this term is rendered as [self-esteem](#)
- Λύπη (lypē) [sadness](#) – in the [Philokalia](#), this term is rendered as [envy](#), sadness at another's good fortune
- Ὀργή (orgē) [wrath](#)
- Κενοδοξία (kenodoxia) [boasting](#)
- Ἀκηδία (akēdia) [acedia](#) – in the [Philokalia](#), this term is rendered as [dejection](#)

They were translated into the Latin of Western Christianity (largely due to the writings of [John Cassian](#)),^[7] thus becoming part of the Western tradition's spiritual [pietas](#) (or [Catholic devotions](#)), as follows:^[8]

- Gula ([gluttony](#))
- Fornicatio ([fornication, lust](#))
- Avaritia ([avarice/greed](#))
- Superbia ([hubris, pride](#))
- Tristitia ([sorrow/despair/despondency](#))
- Ira ([wrath](#))
- Vanagloria ([vainglory](#))
- Acedia ([sloth](#))

These "evil thoughts" can be categorized into three types:^[6]

- lustful appetite ([gluttony](#), [fornication](#), and [avarice](#))
- irascibility ([wrath](#))
- intellect ([vainglory](#), [sorrow](#), [pride](#), and [Discouragement](#))

In AD 590, a little over two centuries after [Evagrius](#) wrote his list, [Pope Gregory I](#) revised this list to form the more common *Seven Deadly Sins*, by folding ([sorrow/despair/despondency](#)) into [acedia](#), [vainglory](#) into [pride](#), and adding [envy](#).^[9] In the order used by both [Pope Gregory](#) and by [Dante Alighieri](#) in his epic poem *The Divine Comedy*, the seven deadly sins are as follows:

1. ***luxuria*** (lechery/lust)^{[10][11][12]}
2. ***gula*** (gluttony)
3. ***avaritia*** (avarice/greed)
4. ***acedia*** (sloth/discouragement)
5. ***ira*** (wrath)
6. ***invidia*** (envy)
7. ***superbia*** (pride)

(It is interesting to note that Pope Gregory's list corresponds exactly to the traits described in [Pirkei Avot](#) as "removing one from the world." See [Pirkei Avot 2:16](#), [3:14](#), [4:28](#) and the [Vilna Gaon's](#) commentary to [Aggadot Berachot 4b](#).)

The identification and definition of the seven deadly sins over their history has been a fluid process and the idea of what each of the seven actually encompasses has evolved over time. Additionally, as a result of [semantic change](#):

- [socardia sloth](#) was substituted for [acedia](#)

It is this revised list that [Dante](#) uses. The process of [semantic change](#) has been aided by the fact that the personality traits are not collectively referred to, in either a cohesive or codified manner, by the Bible itself; other literary and ecclesiastical works were instead consulted, as sources from which definitions might be drawn.^[citation needed] Part II of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, *Purgatorio*, has almost certainly been the best known source since the [Renaissance](#).^[citation needed]

The modern Catholic Catechism lists the sins in Latin as "*superbia, avaritia, invidia, ira, luxuria, gula, pigritia seu acedia*", with an English translation of "*pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth/acedia*".^[13] Each of the seven deadly sins now also has an opposite among corresponding [seven holy virtues](#) (sometimes also referred to as the *contrary virtues*). In parallel order to the sins they oppose, the seven holy virtues are [humility](#), [charity](#), [kindness](#), [patience](#), [chastity](#), [temperance](#), and [diligence](#).

Historical and modern definitions [\[edit\]](#)

Lust [\[edit\]](#)



Lust

Sankt Bartholomäus church (Reichenthal),pulpit (1894)

Main article: Lust

Lust or **lechery** (carnal "*luxuria*") is an intense desire. It is usually thought of as excessive sexual wants; however, the word was originally a general term for desire. Therefore lust could involve the intense desire of money, fame, or power as well.

In Dante's *Purgatorio*, the penitent walks within flames to purge himself of lustful/sexual thoughts and feelings. In Dante's *Inferno*, unforgiven souls of the sin of lust are blown about in restless hurricane-like winds symbolic of their own lack of self-control to their lustful passions in earthly life.

Gluttony [\[edit\]](#)

Main article: Gluttony



Excess

(Albert Anker, 1896)

Derived from the Latin *gluttire*, meaning to gulp down or swallow, **gluttony** (Latin, *gula*) is the over-indulgence and **over-consumption** of anything to the point of waste.

In Christian religions, it is considered a sin because of the excessive desire for food, and its withholding from the needy.^[14]

Because of these scripts, gluttony can be interpreted as **selfishness**; essentially placing concern with one's own interests above the well-being or interests of others.

Medieval church leaders (e.g., **Thomas Aquinas**) took a more expansive view of gluttony,^[14] arguing that it could also include an obsessive anticipation of meals, and the constant eating of delicacies and excessively costly foods.^[15] Aquinas went so far as to prepare a list of six ways to commit gluttony, comprising:

- *Praepropere* – eating too soon
- *Laute* – eating too expensively
- *Nimis* – eating too much
- *Ardenter* – eating too eagerly
- *Studiose* – eating too daintily
- *Forente* – eating wildly

Greed [edit]

Main article: *Greed*



1909 painting *The Worship of Mammon* by Evelyn De Morgan.

Greed (Latin, *avaritia*), also known as **avarice** or **covetousness**, is, like lust and gluttony, a sin of excess. However, greed (as seen by the church) is applied to a very excessive or rapacious desire and pursuit of material possessions. **Thomas Aquinas** wrote, "Greed is a sin against God, just as all mortal sins, in as much as man condemns things eternal for the sake of temporal things." In Dante's Purgatory, the penitents were bound and laid face down on the ground for having concentrated too much on earthly thoughts. **Scavenging**^[citation needed] and **hoarding** of materials or objects, **theft** and **robbery**, especially by means of **violence**, **trickery**, or **manipulation** of **authority** are all actions that may be inspired by greed. Such misdeeds can include **simony**, where one attempts to purchase or sell **sacraments**, including **Holy Orders** and, therefore, positions of authority in the Church hierarchy.

As defined outside of Christian writings, greed is an inordinate desire to acquire or possess more than one needs, especially with respect to **material wealth**.^[16]

Sloth [edit]

Main article: *Sloth (deadly sin)*



Sloth

Parable of the Wheat and the Tares by [Abraham Bloemaert](#), [Walters Art Museum](#)

Sloth (Latin, *Socordia*) can entail different vices. While sloth is sometimes defined as physical laziness, spiritual laziness is emphasized. Failing to develop spiritually is key to becoming guilty of sloth. In the Christian faith, sloth rejects [grace](#) and God.

Sloth has also been defined as a failure to do things that one should do. By this definition, evil exists when good men fail to act.

Over time, the "[acedia](#)" in [Pope Gregory's](#) order has come to be closer in meaning to sloth. The focus came to be on the consequences of acedia rather than the cause, and so, by the 17th century, the exact *deadly sin* referred to was believed to be the failure to utilize one's talents and gifts.^{[\[citation needed\]](#)}

Even in Dante's time there were signs of this change; in his *Purgatorio* he had portrayed the penance for acedia as running continuously at top speed.

Wrath [\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Wrath](#)



Wrath,

by [Jacob Matham](#)

Wrath (Latin, *ira*), also known as "**rage**", may be described as inordinate and uncontrolled feelings of hatred and anger. Wrath, in its purest form, presents with self-destructiveness, violence, and hate that may provoke **feuds** that can go on for centuries. Wrath may persist long after the person who did another a grievous wrong is dead. Feelings of anger can manifest in different ways, including **impatience**, **revenge**, and **vigilantism**.

Wrath is the only sin not necessarily associated with selfishness or self-interest, although one can of course be wrathful for selfish reasons, such as jealousy (closely related to the sin of envy). **Dante** described vengeance as "love of **justice** perverted to **revenge** and **spite**". In its original form, the sin of anger also encompassed anger pointed internally as well as externally.

Thus **suicide** was deemed as the ultimate, albeit tragic, expression of hatred directed inwardly, a final rejection of God's gifts.^[*citation needed*]

Envy [\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Envy](#)



Envy

Arch in the nave with a gothic fresco from 1511 of a man with a [dog-head](#), which symbolizes envy ([Dalbynder Church](#) (da), Denmark)

Like greed and lust, **Envy** (Latin, *invidia*) is characterized by an insatiable desire. Envy is similar to jealousy in that they both feel discontent towards someone's traits, status, abilities, or rewards. The difference is the envious also desire the entity and [covet](#) it.

Envy can be directly related to the [Ten Commandments](#), specifically, "Neither shall you desire... anything that belongs to your neighbour." Dante defined this as "a desire to deprive other men of theirs". In Dante's Purgatory, the punishment for the envious is to have their eyes sewn shut with wire because they have gained sinful pleasure from seeing others brought low. Aquinas described envy as "sorrow for another's good".^[17]

Pride [\[edit\]](#)

Main article: [Pride](#)



Building the [Tower of Babel](#) was, for [Dante](#), an example of [pride](#). Painting by [Pieter Brueghel the Elder](#)

In almost every list, **pride** (Latin, *superbia*), or **hubris** (Greek), is considered the original and most serious of the seven deadly sins, and the source of the others. It is identified as a desire to be more important or attractive than others, failing to acknowledge the good work of others, and excessive love of self (especially holding self out of proper position toward God). Dante's definition was "love of self perverted to hatred and contempt for one's neighbour". In Jacob Bidermann's [medieval miracle](#)

play, *Cenodoxus*, pride is the deadliest of all the sins and leads directly to the damnation of the titular famed Parisian doctor. In perhaps the best-known example, the story of *Lucifer*, pride (his desire to compete with God) was what caused his fall from Heaven, and his resultant transformation into *Satan*. In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the penitents were forced to walk with stone slabs bearing down on their backs to induce feelings of humility.

Historical sins [\[edit\]](#)

Acedia [\[edit\]](#)

Main article: *Acedia*



Acedia

mosaic, [Basilica of Notre-Dame de Fourvière](#)

Acedia (Latin, *acedia*) (from Greek ἀκηδία) is the neglect to take care of something that one should do. It is translated to *apathetic* listlessness; depression without joy. It is related to *melancholy*: *acedia* describes the behaviour and *melancholy* suggests the emotion producing it. In early Christian thought, the lack of joy was regarded as a willful refusal to enjoy the goodness of God and the world God created; by contrast, apathy was considered a refusal to help others in time of need.

When *Thomas Aquinas* described *acedia* in his interpretation of the list, he described it as an *uneasiness of the mind*, being a progenitor for lesser sins such as restlessness and instability. Dante refined this definition further, describing *acedia* as the *failure to love God with all one's heart, all one's mind and all one's soul*; to him it was the *middle sin*, the only one characterised by an absence or insufficiency of love. Some scholars^[*who?*] have said that the ultimate form of *acedia* was despair which leads to suicide.

Vainglory [\[edit\]](#)

Main article: *Vanity*



Conversion of the Magdalene' or 'Allegory of Modesty and Vanity by Bernardino Luini, c. 1520

Vainglory (Latin, *vanagloria*) is unjustified boasting. Pope Gregory viewed it as a form of pride, so he folded *vainglory* into pride for his listing of sins.^[*citation needed*]

The Latin term *gloria* roughly means *boasting*, although its English cognate - *glory* - has come to have an exclusively positive meaning; historically, *vain* roughly meant *futile*, but by the 14th century had come to have the strong **narcissistic** undertones, of irrelevant accuracy, that it retains today.^[18] As a result of these semantic changes, *vainglory* has become a rarely used word in itself, and is now commonly interpreted as referring to *vanity* (in its modern narcissistic sense).

Catholic Seven Virtues [\[edit\]](#)

The Catholic Church also recognizes **seven virtues**, which correspond inversely to each of the seven deadly sins.

Vice	Latin	Virtue	Latin
Lust	<i>Luxuria</i>	Chastity	<i>Castitas</i>
Gluttony	<i>Gula</i>	Temperance	<i>Temperantia</i>
Greed	<i>Avaritia</i>	Charity	<i>Caritas</i>
Sloth	<i>Acedia</i>	Diligence	<i>Industria</i>
Wrath	<i>Ira</i>	Patience	<i>Patientia</i>
Envy	<i>Invidia</i>	Kindness	<i>Humanitas</i>
Pride	<i>Superbia</i>	Humility	<i>Humilitas</i>

Associations with demons [\[edit\]](#)

In 1589, Peter Binsfeld paired each of the deadly sins with a **demon**, who tempted people by means of the associated sin. According to Binsfeld's *classification of demons*, the pairings are as follows:

- **Lucifer**: pride (*superbia*)
- **Mammon**: greed (*avaritia*)
- **Asmodeus**: lust (*luxuria*)
- **Leviathan**: envy (*invidia*)

- [Beelzebub](#): gluttony (gula or gullia)
- [Amon](#) or [Satan](#): wrath (ira)
- [Belphegor](#): sloth (acedia)

This contrasts slightly with an earlier series of pairings found in the fifteenth century English [Lollard](#) tract *Lanterne of Light*, which differs in pairing Beelzebub with Envy, Abaddon with Sloth, Belphegor with Gluttony and matching Lucifer with Pride, Satan with Wrath, Asmodeus with Lust and Mammon with Avarice.^[19]

In *Doctor Faustus*, there is a "parade" of the seven deadly sins that is conducted by [Mephistopheles](#), [Satan](#), and [Beelzebub](#) suggesting that the demons do not match with each deadly sin, but the demons are in command of the seven deadly sins.

Patterns [\[edit\]](#)

According to a 2009 study by a Jesuit scholar, the most common deadly sin confessed by men is lust, and for women, pride.^[20] It was unclear whether these differences were due to different rates of commission, or different views on what "counts" or should be confessed.^[21]

Cultural references [\[edit\]](#)

The seven deadly sins have long been a source of inspiration for writers and artists, from medieval works such as [Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*](#), to modern works such as the film *Seven*.

Biologist [Jeremy Griffith](#) cites the seven deadly sins as manifestations of the three psychological states of anger, egocentricity and alienation that necessarily accompanied the emergence of [consciousness](#) in humans, beginning some two million years ago.^[22]

See also [\[edit\]](#)
