

## THE SAPPHIRE LIGHT OF THE MIND: THE SKEMMATA OF EVAGRIUS PONTICUS

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*[Evagrius Ponticus (ca. 345–399) is now recognized as one of the pioneers of Christian mystical theology. Some of his most important mystical views appear in a little-known treatise, the Skemmata (“Reflections”), a collection of 62 brief, proverb-like chapters. At an early date, this work was attached as a supplement to his boldly speculative Kephalaia gnostica (“Gnostic Chapters”) and came to influence Syriac spirituality. In 1931, Joseph Muyltermans rediscovered and published the long-lost original Greek text. The Skemmata takes up favorite Evagrian themes: the interplay among the eight deadly “thoughts” (logismoi); the distinction between the life of ascetic practice (praktikē) and the life of mystical knowledge (gnostikē); the nature of pure prayer; the purified mind (nous) as the “place of God”—a sort of interior Mt. Sinai where one encounters the “sapphire light” of the Trinity. We present here the first complete English translation of the text and explore its key themes.]*

ONE TENDS TO THINK of “theology” today as something one studies, something read in a book or examined in a classroom.<sup>1</sup> Theology is an academic enterprise, scholastic in the literal sense of the word. One of the pioneers of Christian mysticism, Evagrius Ponticus (ca. 345–399), had a quite different view. According to Evagrius, theology is a knowledge of God gained from first-hand experience. It comes not from books, but from

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prayer. Evagrius did not doubt the value of reading, of study, of reason; nor did he doubt the profound value of dogma, of liturgy, or of ecclesiastical authority. Far from it. But for him, theology in the strict sense is the encounter of the praying mind with God. In his best-known maxim, he proclaimed: "If you are a theologian, you pray truly; if you pray truly, you are a theologian."<sup>2</sup>

Evagrius may not be a household name today, but in the 4th century, he was on Christianity's cutting-edge and rubbed shoulders with some of the most prominent figures in the early Church.<sup>3</sup> He grew up in Pontus, near the Black Sea, and was the son of a *chorepiskopos*, a country bishop. In his early teens, he was ordained lector by Basil of Caesarea, the great defender of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. Later, in the 370s, he moved to Constantinople, following another of the Cappadocian fathers, Gregory of Nazianzus. During Gregory's tenure as bishop of Constantinople, Evagrius served as archdeacon and helped man the frontlines of the debate on the Trinity before and at the Council of Constantinople in 381. After Gregory's resignation, he stayed on and served the new bishop, Nektarios. Evagrius's life then took an unexpected turn. He fell in love with the wife of a high imperial official and found the affections returned. One night he had an ominous dream. He imagined himself shackled, on trial, standing before an angelic magistrate; in this dream-trial he swore an oath to leave the city. Upon waking, he fled the imperial capital for Jerusalem. There he was taken in by Melania the Elder, a Roman aristocrat-turned-abbess who had lavished her spectacular wealth on monastic establishments in Egypt and

<sup>2</sup> *De oratione* 60 (PG 79.1180). All translations are ours unless otherwise noted. On this issue, see Andrew Louth, *Wisdom of the Byzantine Church: Evagrius of Pontus and Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Jill Raitt, 1997 Paine Lectures in Religion (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> For a valuable survey, see Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont, *Évagre le Pontique, Traité pratique ou le Moine*, Sources chrétiennes 170 (Paris: Cerf, 1971) 21–112; for a concise summary, see their article, "Évagre le Pontique," *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* 4.1731–44. Much of what we know about Evagrius's life comes from his disciple, Palladius, who put together a biographical sketch in *Historia Lausiaca* 38; for a critical edition of the text and a commentary, see Cuthbert Butler, *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, Texts and Studies, 6, pts. 1–2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1894–1904). The Coptic version of the *Lausiaca History* contains additional material and has been the focus of renewed research and discussion; see Gabriel Bunge and Adalbert de Vogüé, *Quatre ermites égyptiens d'après les fragments coptes de l'Histoire Lausiaque*, Spiritualité orientale 60 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1994); Tim Vivian, "Coptic Palladiana I: The Life of Pambo (Lausiaca History 9–10)," *Coptic Church Review* 20.3 (Fall 1999) 66–84, and "Coptic Palladiana II: The Life of Evagrius (Lausiaca History 38)," *Coptic Church Review* 21.1 (Spring 2000) 8–23. Other ancient sources for the life and works of Evagrius are Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* IV.23; Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* VI.30; and Gennadius, *De viris illustribus* 11.

the Holy Land. She and Rufinus of Aquileia, the famed translator of Greek theological works for the Latin West, had set up an extraordinary Latin-speaking monastic enclave on the Mount of Olives. Under Melania's influence, Evagrius embraced the monastic life and was sent on to Egypt.

Fourth-century Egypt was the nerve center of that new emerging phenomenon we call monasticism. In 383, Evagrius settled in Nitria, a large cenobitic monastery at the desert's edge, some 40 miles from Alexandria. Two years later, he moved on to the more remote and more anchoritic monastic settlement of Kellia. There he spent the remaining 14 years of his life. While in Egypt, he apprenticed in the monastic life under two of the greatest of the Desert Fathers, Macarius the Alexandrian and Macarius the Egyptian. The ancient historian Socrates remarks that "Evagrius became a disciple of these men and acquired from them the philosophy of deeds, whereas before he knew only a philosophy of words."<sup>4</sup> Also, Evagrius joined a circle of remarkable intellectual monks known as the "Tall Brothers" (the nickname came from their unusual height). In 400, right after Evagrius's death, the Tall Brothers found themselves branded as "Origenists" and chased out of Egypt by Theophilus, Patriarch of Alexandria. They appealed their case to John Chrysostom, a move that precipitated John's eventual tragic downfall.

In Kellia, Evagrius made his living as a calligrapher and copyist—one of the first known monks to do what became standard practice in the Middle Ages. He also was renowned for his gift of discernment of spirits and attracted an influential circle of disciples. One was Palladius, friend of John Chrysostom and author of the *Lausiac History*. In the Coptic version of this work, Palladius acknowledges his profound debt to Evagrius who, he says, "taught me the way of life in Christ and helped me understand holy scripture spiritually." He deeply admired Evagrius's "apostolic way of life" and stressed that he "saw the majority of [Evagrius's] virtues with my own eyes as well as the powers that he demonstrated."<sup>5</sup>

Evagrius died in 399. Death spared him the fate of his friends and disciples who were accused of heresy and forced to flee Egypt. A century and a half after his death, in 553, accusation became condemnation. Evagrius's name was joined with those of Origen and Didymus the Blind, and he was formally anathematized by the Council of Constantinople II. While the real target of this condemnation were certain sixth-century Origenist monks in Palestine, it does seem that Evagrius shared, perhaps even sharpened, some of Origen's boldest hypotheses—about the pre-existence and primor-

<sup>4</sup> Socrates, *Historia ecclesiastica* IV.23 (PG 67.516).

<sup>5</sup> Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* (Coptic): *Life of Evagrius* 2. The Coptic text is found in E. Amélineau, *De Historia Lausiaca* (Paris: 1887); trans. Tim Vivian, "Coptic Palladiana II," 10.

dial fall of souls, about the soul of Christ, and about universal salvation (*apokatastasis*).<sup>6</sup>

Evagrius's extraordinary significance for the history of spirituality has emerged only recently. Early in the 20th century, a quiet but remarkable reclamation of his writings began to occur. Some were rediscovered, buried in little-known Syriac and Armenian manuscripts. Others texts were discovered to have been disguised and passed on under the name of venerable figures like Nilus of Ancyra. Meanwhile, scholars discovered that John Cassian, whose writings profoundly shaped medieval Benedictine spirituality, had drawn heavily from Evagrius. Cassian never acknowledged his borrowings or even mentioned Evagrius's name, but the ideas are everywhere. Even Church Fathers who condemned Evagrius, such as Maximus the Confessor in the seventh century, were discovered to be deeply in his debt. Scholars began to realize that Evagrius is "one of the most important names in the history of spirituality, one of those that not only marked a decisive turning-point, but called forth a real spiritual mutation"<sup>7</sup>; "he is the almost absolute ruler of the entire Syriac and Byzantine mystical theology, and . . . has influenced in a decisive manner Western ascetical and mystical teaching as well."<sup>8</sup>

Even ordinary Christians unfamiliar with his name are familiar with his famous catalogue of human vices: the so-called Seven Deadly Sins—though Evagrius calls them "thoughts," not "sins," and has eight, not seven. With his Greek literary and philosophical training, Evagrius was able to translate and transform Coptic spirituality for the Greek-speaking world, systematizing its insights into a gem-like brilliance.<sup>9</sup> In the process, he would become the first great theoretician of the spiritual life.

Over the last 50 years, scholars (mostly French-speaking) have been steadily editing and translating Evagrius's works. The English-speaking world, however, has seen little of this. Two of his finest works, the *Prak-*

<sup>6</sup> On Evagrius as an Origenist, see Antoine Guillaumont, *Les "kephalaia gnostica" d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origénisme chez les grecs et chez les syriens*, *Patristica Sorbonensia* 5 (Paris: Seuil, 1962); and Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1992). For a spirited defense of Evagrius, see the works of Gabriel Bunge, especially "Origenismus—Gnostizismus: Zum geistesgeschichtlichen Standort des Evagrius Pontikos," *Vigiliae Christianae* 40 (1986) 24–54; and "Hénade ou Monade? Au sujet de deux notions centrales de la terminologie évagrienne," *Le Muséon* 102 (1989) 69–91.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Bouyer, *History of Christian Spirituality, 1: The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (New York: Seabury, 1963; reprint 1982) 381.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Metaphysics and Mystical Theology of Evagrius," *Monastic Studies* 3 (1965) 183.

<sup>9</sup> On this issue, see William Harmless, "'Salt for the Impure, Light for the Pure': Reflections on the Pedagogy of Evagrius Ponticus," *Studia Patristica* 37 (2001) 514–26.

*tikos* and the *Chapters on Prayer*, have been translated into English, as has his *Ad monachos*.<sup>10</sup> A small sampling of two sizeable works, the *Kephalalaia gnostica* and the *Antirrhetikos*, has appeared, but the vast majority of his writings—*Gnostikos*, *Peri logismōn*, *De octo spiritibus*, *Ad virginem*, his biblical commentaries on the Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, as well as most of his letters—have not been translated into English.<sup>11</sup> To remedy this, we are working to gather a team of scholars to publish a wide-ranging translation of Evagrius's writings. This article is a small first effort in that direction.

Here we would like to introduce one of Evagrius's mystical treatises, the *Skemmata* ("Reflections"). It is a small collection of terse proverbs that takes up some of his favorite themes: the interplay among the eight deadly "thoughts" (*logismoi*); the distinction between the "life of ascetic practice" (*praktikē*) and the "life of mystical knowledge" (*gnostikē*); the practice of pure prayer. More importantly, the *Skemmata* articulates the center of Evagrius's theology—and "theology" in his sense of it: the encounter of the praying mind with God. Here Evagrius insists that the sacred core of the human person is the purified mind (*nous*); it is the "place of God," a sort of interior Mt. Sinai where one encounters the "sapphire light" of the Trinity. In this article, we first introduce the text, survey its key themes, and then present the first English translation.

<sup>10</sup> John Eudes Bamberger, *Evagrius Ponticus: Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, Cistercian Studies 4 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1981). A slightly different recension of the *De oratione* was included in the *Philokalia* of Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and Macarius of Corinth; see *Philokalia* 1, trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979) 55–71. For the *Ad monachos*, see Jeremy Driscoll, *The Mind's Long Journey to the Holy Trinity: the Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1993); this is a popularization of Driscoll's larger and more technical study: *The Ad Monachos of Evagrius Ponticus, Its Structure and a Select Commentary* (Rome: Studia Anselmiana, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> David Bundy translated the first "century" of the *Kephalalaia gnostica* in *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 175–86; in the same anthology, Michael O'Laughlin translated selections from the *Antirrhetikos* (243–62). Evagrius's *Ad Melaniam* has been translated into English by Martin Parmentier, "Evagrius of Pontus and the 'Letter to Melania'" *Bijdragen: Tijdschrift voor Filosofie en Theologie* 46 (1985) 2–38. Another very brief treatise attributed to Evagrius has been translated by Graham E. Gould, "An Ancient Monastic Writing Giving Advice to Spiritual Directors (Evagrius of Pontus, *On Teachers and Disciples*)," *Hallel* 22 (1997) 96–103. Selections from the *Antirrhetikos* and other works appear also in Columba Stewart, "Evagrius Ponticus on Prayer and Anger," in *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, ed. Richard Valantasis (Princeton: Princeton University, 2000) 69–81.

## GENRE AND STYLE: THE ART OF MOSAIC

Evagrius cultivated an artful brevity. All of his best-known and most influential writings—the *Praktikos*, *Gnostikos*, *Kephalaia gnostica*, *De oratione*, *Ad monachos*—are collections of terse proverb-like sentences or brief paragraphs, called *kephalaia* or “chapters.” The *Skemmata* follows this same pattern. It contains 62 chapters, duly numbered. The text translated here comes from a tenth-century manuscript, *Codex Parisiensis gr.* 913, published in 1931 soon after its rediscovery by Joseph Muyldermans.<sup>12</sup> This version seems the most complete, but clusterings of these same chapters appear in various recensions in Greek, Syriac, and Armenian.

At an early date, the *Skemmata* was sometimes appended to Evagrius’s controversial and highly speculative cosmological treatise, the *Kephalaia gnostica* (or “Gnostic Chapters”). The *Kephalaia* originally had 540 chapters. But in a letter to his friend Anatolius, Evagrius remarks that he is sending along a text with 600 chapters.<sup>13</sup> The reason for the discrepancy is not clear. But Evagrius’s ancient editors knew his fondness for mystical numbers and decided to remedy the problem. They tacked on 39 chapters from the *Skemmata* and 21 additional chapters onto the *Kephalaia* to push its 540 chapters to an even 600. So scholars often refer to these chapters from the *Skemmata* as the “supplement” (or “pseudo-supplement”) of the *Kephalaia*. This role as “supplement” proved a happy accident. When the *Kephalaia* was translated into Syriac, the *Skemmata* was also passed into the Syriac tradition and came to influence its spirituality through its great seventh-century spiritual writers, Babai the Great and Isaac the Syrian.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Muyldermans, “Evagriana,” *Le Muséon* 44 (1931) 37–68 and “Note additionnelle: Evagriana,” *Le Muséon* 44 (1931) 369–83. This double article was later published as a monograph (with different page numbering). In the initial article (37–68), Muyldermans published *Codex Barberini gr.* 515 which contained a recension of the *Skemmata* in Greek and which somewhat resembled material found in *Codex Barberini lat.* 3024, a Latin translation of the *Skemmata* done by J. Soares, the 17th-century editor of Nilus of Ancyra. Later in 1931, Muyldermans published the companion article, “Note Additionnelle,” offering a better edition of the *Skemmata*, based on *Codex Parisiensis gr.* 913; this text matches much more closely the content and numbering of Soares’s Latin version. For the Greek text, see 374–80 of the journal article (= 38–41 of the monograph). A hard-to-find, but valuable French translation of the *Skemmata*, was recently published: Vincent Desprez and M. André Ducos, “Évagre le Pontique: Réflexions (*Skemmata*): Une traduction annotée,” *Lettre de Ligugé* 284.2 (1998) 14–29.

<sup>13</sup> *Praktikos*, Prol. 9 (Sources chrétiennes 171.492).

<sup>14</sup> For the Syriac text of the *Skemmata* (together with a commentary by Babai the Great), see W. Frankenberg, *Evagrius Ponticus*, *Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*; Philol. His. Klasse, Neue Folge, 13.2 (Berlin, 1912) 422–70. For a discussion of the *Skemmata*’s role as a “supplement,” see Guillaumont, *Les “kephalaia gnostica”* 19–20.

One of the best descriptions of reading Evagrius is also one of the earliest. It comes from Babai:

He does not write in a discursive or rhetorical manner, but he cites each chapter in itself and for itself, condensing it, gathering it together, enclosing it, delimiting it in itself and for itself, with a profound and marvelous wisdom. Then he abandons the subject of this chapter, as though to rest himself in some other dwelling-place, and he begins another subject, composing another chapter in the same way. He then returns to the first [idea, but] under another form. Then he leaves it in order to begin another one of them, then to return to the preceding one, treating sometimes divinity, sometimes creation and creatures, all in order to return again to providence. He . . . then once more returns to the first, turns himself back towards the last, in order to return to the intermediate, briefly, in a manner never the same and always different.<sup>15</sup>

What struck Babai strikes the modern reader: that Evagrius's writings are an elegant polyphony, a fugue-like weave of motifs, built from self-contained morsels.

Where did Evagrius get this style of writing? Certainly not from his old mentor, Gregory of Nazianzus. Gregory had favored the fashionable baroque style of the day, with its intricate, flowing sentences, peppered with archaic vocabulary, daring wordplay, and subtle literary allusions. Evagrius may have shared his old teacher's trinitarian theology, but in literary terms the two could not have been more different. Where Gregory was prolix, Evagrius was gnomic. The literature of Stoicism may have served as a literary model for the *Skemmata* and his other collections of proverbs.<sup>16</sup> But a more obvious model was the Wisdom tradition of the Bible. It is no accident that Evagrius singled out the Book of Proverbs for one of his major biblical commentaries.<sup>17</sup>

But the real roots of the *Skemmata*'s proverbial style lie in the terse wisdom and the great silences of Egyptian monasticism. At the heart of desert spirituality were those momentous encounters when a monk begged a spiritual father for a "word of salvation."<sup>18</sup> Those meetings between

<sup>15</sup> Babai the Great, *Commentary* (Frankenberg, 46).

<sup>16</sup> Suzanna Elm, "Evagrius Ponticus' *Sententiae ad Virginem*," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991) 107–8; Guillaumont, *Traité Pratique*, Sources chrétiennes 170.114–16.

<sup>17</sup> See *Évagre le Pontique: Scholies aux Proverbes*, ed. Paul Géhin, Sources chrétiennes 340 (Paris: Cerf, 1987). On the link between *kephalaia* and *scholia*, see *ibid.* 15.

<sup>18</sup> The classic study is that of Jean-Claude Guy, "Remarques sur le texte des *Apophthegmata Patrum*," *Recherches de science religieuse* 43 (1955) 252–58. For a valuable overview, see Antoine Guillaumont, "L'enseignement spirituel des moines d'Égypte: La formation d'une tradition," reprinted in *Études sur la spiritualité de l'Orient chrétien*, *Spiritualité orientale* 66 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1996) 81–92; Benedicta Ward, "Traditions of Spiritual Guidance: Spiritual

monk and abba would become enshrined in the literary form of the apophthegm and be brought together in the great collections of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (or “Sayings of the Fathers”). These collections record stories from Evagrius’s teachers and contemporaries—Macarius the Egyptian, Macarius the Alexandrian, John the Little. But the *Apophthegmata* were written down and assembled only much later, in the late fifth or early sixth centuries. In fact, the earliest collection of *written* apophthegms is the nine that close another of Evagrius’s treatises, the *Praktikos*.<sup>19</sup>

Individual proverbs of the *Skemmata* are quite varied in style. Several rely, for instance, on catchy images:

The contemplative mind . . . chases down, like a dog, all impassioned thoughts. The ascetical mind barks, like a dog, at unjust thoughts (*Skemmata* 9–10).

Others are enumerative lists. For example:

There are four ways by which the mind grasps representations: the first way is through the eyes; the second, through the ear; the third, through memory; and the fourth, through temperament (*Skemmata* 17).

Still others offer systematic classifications, reminiscent of ancient scientific treatises. This is particularly the case in the second half of the treatise. For instance:

Of the (various types of) thoughts, certain ones lead, others follow. Those of the concupiscible lead, those of the irascible follow.  
Of the thoughts that lead, some lead and some follow. The ones that lead are from gluttony, but the ones that follow are from lust.  
Of the thoughts that follow, some lead and some follow. The ones that lead are from sadness, the ones that follow are from anger (*Skemmata* 41–43).

Finally there are definitions, lots of definitions. Of the 62 chapters in the *Skemmata*, 30 are definition-like sentences that use the grammatical form “X is Y.” *Skemmata* 27–30 gives four in quick succession:

Prayer (*proseuchē*) is the state of the mind that comes to be from the single-light of the Holy Trinity.

A petition (*deēsis*) is the likeness of mind toward God through supplication, embracing help or (embracing) the search for good things.

A vow (*euchē*) is a willing undertaking of good things.

An intercession (*enteuxis*) is an invocation presented to God—presented for the salvation of others by one who is greater (spiritually).

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Direction in the Desert Fathers,” *The Way* 24 (1984) 61–70, reprinted in *Signs and Wonders* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> *Praktikos* 91–99 (Sources chrétiennes 171.692–710). Less well-known are the apophthegms of various “old men” quoted in *Scholia in Prov.* 245 and 258 (Sources chrétiennes 340.340, 352).

These four definitions disclose another and often overlooked side of Evagrius, namely, his work as a biblical commentator. As Columba Stewart has noted, exegesis was, for Evagrius, “a mode of being”; he was “keying himself into texts recited by heart day in and day out.”<sup>20</sup> Evagrius did not compose verse-by-verse commentaries. His biblical works instead are *scholia*—terse, pungent comments on selected verses.<sup>21</sup> These four sentences are, in essence, a *scholion* on 1 Timothy 2:1: “First of all, then I urge that supplications (*deēseis*), prayers (*proseuchas*), intercessions (*enteuxeis*), and thanksgivings (*eucharistias*) be made for everyone.” In other words, in these four chapters Evagrius is commenting on the Pauline text by defining three of its four terms.

Evagrius likely knew that Origen, in his treatise *On Prayer*, had singled out this same verse, and carefully distinguished between the four terms. Yet Evagrius’s definitions do not match Origen’s. Origen defines “supplication” as “a prayer offered with entreaty to get something a person lacks,” while an “intercession” is “a petition for certain things addressed to God by someone who has greater boldness.”<sup>22</sup> Evagrius also probably knew that Origen had noted that “prayer” (*proseuchē*) was often used in ways synonymous with its root-meaning, “vow” (*euchē*).<sup>23</sup> Evagrius distinguishes the two terms, for he wants to reserve the word “prayer” for the wordless, imageless mystical ascent to God.

Evagrius is not easy reading. His chapters are dense wisdom-sayings that need to be mulled over and, sometimes, deciphered. We know that he consciously cultivated a certain obscurity, at least on some matters. In the preface to the *Praktikos*, he quotes Jesus’ saying that one should not “give what is holy to the dogs or cast our pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6) and

<sup>20</sup> Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001) 173–204. This is a revision of an address given at the 13th International Conference on Patristic Studies, Oxford, England, August 18, 1999. We are grateful to Fr. Stewart for sending us copies of both his original address and the forthcoming article.

<sup>21</sup> Besides the *Scholia on Proverbs* (see n. 17 above), his *Scholia on Ecclesiastes* and *Scholia on Psalms* have also been preserved. The former has been edited: Paul Géhin, *Évagre le Pontique: Scholies à l’Ecclésiaste*, Sources chrétiennes 397 (Paris: Cerf, 1993). The latter remains unedited, but was preserved within Origen’s commentary on the Psalms: see M.J. Rondeau, “Le commentaire sur les Psaumes d’Évagre le Pontique,” *Orientalia christiana periodica* 26 (1960) 307–48.

<sup>22</sup> Origen, *De oratione* XIV.2; Origen: *Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, and Selected Works*, trans. Rowan A. Greer, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1979) 109.

<sup>23</sup> Origen, *De oratione* III.2 and IV.1–2. It is noteworthy that Evagrius’s disciple, John Cassian, devotes significant discussion to this same verse; see *Conferences* 9.9–14.

then adds: “some of these matters will be kept in concealment and others alluded to only obscurely, but yet so as to keep them quite clear to those who walk along in the same path.”<sup>24</sup>

This studied obscurity poses a real challenge for contemporary commentators. One has to decode Evagrius. The approach pioneered by Irénée Hausherr and Antoine Guillaumont has been to use Evagrius to interpret Evagrius, to find parallels and doublets to decode key ideas. That resolves many, but not all problems. In the case of the *Skemmata*, we have been able to decipher some chapters, but others are either too terse to be sure about or are simply baffling.

There is a great paradox in Evagrius’s art of the “chapter.” One would imagine that his style would reflect his thought. In other words, one would presume that a writing style that broke thoughts into small disconnected snippets would leave the thought itself piecemeal. In fact, the opposite is the case. The snippets, like the bright-colored tesserae used in ancient mosaics, come together and create a vast coherent landscape. His thinking about the spiritual life is startlingly consistent and complete.

### THE EIGHT THOUGHTS

*Skemmata* 1–39 modulates from topic to topic, weaving a polyphony of themes; *Skemmata* 40–62, by contrast, is more focused. These later chapters begin again and again with the same phrase: “Of the (various types of) thoughts . . .” (*Tōn logismōn*). Because this final third of the treatise concerns what Evagrius regards as the early phase of the spiritual life, we need to begin with it.

The “thoughts” (*logismoi*) that concern Evagrius in *Skemmata* 40–62 are the so-called “eight evil thoughts.” The basic list appears again and again in his writings: gluttony (*gastrimargia*); fornication (*porneia*); love of money (*philarguria*); sadness (*lupē*); anger (*orgē*); listlessness (*akēdia*); vainglory (*kenodoxia*); pride (*huperēphania*).<sup>25</sup> This list should look familiar. It would become, with slight modification, the “Seven Deadly Sins” and enjoy a venerable place in the spirituality of the Middle Ages; and in Dante’s hands, it would come to define the very geography of the afterlife, both the *Inferno* and the *Purgatorio*. The one who brought Evagrius’s list to the Latin West was his disciple, John Cassian (ca. 360–435), who dis-

<sup>24</sup> *Praktikos*, prol. 9 (Sources chrétiennes 171.492–94; trans. Bamberger, 15). Evagrius sees this cultivated obscurity as essential to good spiritual pedagogy; see *Gnostikos* 44 (Sources chrétiennes 356.174).

<sup>25</sup> *Praktikos* 6 (Sources chrétiennes 171.506–8). On Evagrius’s theory, see Guillaumont, *Évagre le Pontique: Traité pratique*, Sources chrétiennes 170.63–84; on his sources, see Irénée Hausherr, “L’origine de la théorie orientale des huit péchés capitaux,” *Orientalia christiana analecta* 30 (1933) 164–75.

cussed its components at length in two works, *The Institutes* and *The Conferences*.<sup>26</sup> Evagrius's originality comes not from the list itself. One finds similar ones in Origen, and behind him in the New Testament. Rather, his originality comes from the classic descriptions he provides and from his insights into the psychology of their interplay. Note that Evagrius calls them "thoughts," not "sins." Sin implies consent and responsibility, as Evagrius notes: "It is not in our power to determine whether we are disturbed by these thoughts, but it is up to us to decide if they are to linger within us or not and whether or not they are to stir up our passions."<sup>27</sup>

The "eight evil thoughts" are the centerpiece of several of Evagrius's writings. The *Praktikos* (or "Practical Treatise") gives the classic description of each and offers various suggestions for combating them. The *Antirrhetikos* (or "Counter-Arguments") is a sort of scriptural battle-manual, which groups 487 temptations under the headings of these same eight thoughts. After a one or two-line description of the temptation, Evagrius lists an apt text from Scripture with which the monk can counter the temptation. He draws his inspiration from the way Jesus quoted Scripture when tempted by the devil in the desert. A third treatise, *On the Eight Spirits of Evil*, devotes two paragraphs to describing each. Finally, the recently edited treatise, *Peri logismōn* ("Concerning Thoughts"), explores the eight thoughts by focusing on their sequence and interplay.

The *Skemmata* most resembles the *Peri logismōn* in terms of method (though not literary style). It does not describe the thoughts themselves, but rather maps their sequence, interplay, and psychic locale. In fact, several proverbs from the *Skemmata* reappear word-for-word in the *Peri logismōn*.<sup>28</sup> Why these doublets? It is hard to say. Perhaps the proverbs of the *Skemmata* were a preliminary sketch for the more intricate exposition of the *Peri logismōn*. It is also possible that the *Skemmata* was composed afterward as a sort of shorthand digest of the larger treatise.

<sup>26</sup> Cassian devotes Books 5–12 of the *Institutes* to the eight thoughts (Sources chrétiennes 109.186–500). He also puts a discussion of them in the mouth of Abba Serapion in the fifth of the *Conferences* (Sources chrétiennes 42.188–217). See Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> *Praktikos* 6 (Sources chrétiennes 171.508; trans. Bamberger, 17).

<sup>28</sup> The doublets are: *Skemmata* 23 = *Peri logismōn* 40; *Skemmata* 24 = *Peri logismōn* 42. *Peri logismōn* 31 contains a sentence that is nearly a word-for-word equivalent of *Skemmata* 46. In addition, two chapters found only in the Syriac version of the *Skemmata* (*Kephalaia gnostica*, supplement 24–25) are identical to two chapters in *Peri logismōn* (38–39). There are other points of convergence: e.g., representations that imprint (*Skemmata* 17; *Peri logismōn* 2, 41); the order of the attack of various thoughts (*Skemmata* 40–42; *Peri logismōn* 1).

*Skemmata* 41–43 provide a clear point-of-entry. Here they are again:

Of the (various types of) thoughts, certain ones lead, others follow. Those of the concupiscible lead, those of the irascible follow.

Of the thoughts that lead, some lead and some follow. The ones that lead are from gluttony, but the ones that follow are from lust.

Of the thoughts that follow, some lead and some follow. The ones that lead are from sadness, the ones that follow are from anger (*Skemmata* 41–43).

Evagrius was writing for monks, particularly monks who lived as solitaries in the desert. His concern here is to map out the order of temptations that such solitaries face. According to Evagrius, the temptations come in certain predictable patterns of attack. The sequence he gives here is gluttony, lust, sadness, and anger. But he sees these not as a single line of opponents, but as two waves, each with two phases.

Gluttony and lust form the first pair. He associates these two with the “concupiscible” (*epithumia*), one of the three parts of the human psyche.<sup>29</sup> The concupiscible is the realm of the bodily and of desire, the whole panoply of yearnings and hungers that can erupt to sully purity of heart. Here he locates these two “thoughts” as vices distinctive to the concupiscible. However, in the *Praktikos* he notes that this psychic domain, when rightly ordered, can give rise to certain virtues: continence, charity, and self-control;<sup>30</sup> similarly, in *Skemmata* 37, he notes that when used rightly, “the concupiscible is a power of the soul that gets rid of anger.”<sup>31</sup>

Sadness and anger attack in the second wave. These two are associated with the second part of the psyche: the “irascible” (*thumos*). The irascible is the realm of psychic energy, which, when disordered, emerges as the intertwining streams of violence, fear, and frustration that lurk in the depths of the human heart. Evagrius’s stress here is that these two vices belong to the irascible. However, in the *Praktikos* he notes that, when rightly ordered, the irascible’s energy can produce certain virtues: namely, courage and endurance;<sup>32</sup> similarly, in *Skemmata* 8, he claims that when used rightly, “the irascible is a power of the soul capable of destroying (evil) thoughts.”

Thus *Skemmata* 41–43 touch on four of the eight evil thoughts and two

<sup>29</sup> For an overview of Evagrius’s anthropology, see *Évagre le Pontique: Scholies aux Proverbes*, ed. Paul Géhin, Sources chrétiennes 340.33–37; Michael O’Laughlin, “Elements of Fourth-Century Origenism: The Anthropology of Evagrius Ponticus and Its Sources,” in *Origen of Alexandria, His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Petersen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1988) 355–73.

<sup>30</sup> *Praktikos* 89 (Sources chrétiennes 171.682).

<sup>31</sup> See *Praktikos* 38 (Sources chrétiennes 171.586): “The irascible needs more remedies than the concupiscible, and this is why love is called great, because it bridle the irascible’s rage.” On this theme, see Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus on Prayer and Anger” 65–69.

<sup>32</sup> *Praktikos* 89 (Sources chrétiennes 171.682).

of the three parts of the soul. The preceding chapter fills out the picture somewhat:

Of the (various types of) thoughts, some assail us (from our nature) as animals, others (from our nature) as human beings. Those (that assail us from our nature) as animals come from the concupiscible and from the irascible. Those (that assail us from our nature) as human beings come from sadness, vainglory, and pride. Those that come from *akēdia* are mixed and affect us both as animals and as human beings (*Skemmata* 40).

Here he distinguishes what human beings hold in common with animals from what is uniquely human. In his view, human beings share with animals two parts of their psyche: the concupiscible and the irascible. There is a third part, the rational (*logistikon*), which is unique to us as human beings. He does not cite this term here, but does so in the *Praktikos*. What he does list are the “thoughts” that attack this realm: sadness, vainglory, and pride. Why he includes “sadness” both with the irascible (and thus part of our animal nature) and with the rational (what is distinctive to human nature) is not clear. But he does say here that *akēdia* has this crossover quality, touching both our animality and our humanity.

Evagrius’s analysis of *akēdia* is perhaps his most famous and influential. The Greek word *akēdia* has no easy equivalent in English.<sup>33</sup> The medievals often translated it as “sloth,” but that is not what the desert tradition means. For Evagrius, *akēdia* is a sort of restless boredom, a listlessness, and beneath that, discouragement. For centuries, Evagrius’s translators have groped to find a single term that captures the rich meaning he gives the word. Early Syrian writers, for instance, translated it as “despondency of spirit” or as “ennui,” while John Cassian translated it into Latin as *taedium cordis*, “weariness of heart.”<sup>34</sup> In the *Praktikos*, Evagrius says that *akēdia* attacks between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when the day is hottest and the monk is hungriest. This “noonday demon . . . makes the day seem fifty hours long.”<sup>35</sup> Boredom and restlessness make the solitary unable to concentrate on the task at hand, whether work or spiritual reading or prayer. As Evagrius notes in the *Eight Spirits of Evil*:

The eye of the one who suffers *akēdia* is continually fixed on the windows [of his cell] and, in his imagination, on visitors. The door creaks and he jumps up and looks outside. He hears a voice and he looks out the window, not leaving until he is forced

<sup>33</sup> On *akēdia*, see Guillaumont, *Évagre le Pontique: Traité pratique*, Sources chrétiennes 170.84–98; Jeremy Driscoll, “Listlessness in *The Mirror for Monks* of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Cistercian Studies* 24 (1989) 206–14.

<sup>34</sup> John Cassian, *Institutes* V.1 (Sources chrétiennes 109.90); X.1 (Sources chrétiennes 109.384). On other Oriental languages, see Guillaumont, *Évagre le Pontique: Traité pratique*, Sources chrétiennes 170.85–86.

<sup>35</sup> *Praktikos* 12 (Sources chrétiennes 171.520).

to sit down, all lethargic. When reading he often yawns and is easily conquered by sleep; he rubs his eyes, rubs his hands and, taking his eyes off the book, stares at the wall; then he turns again to the book, reads a little more, then opening the pages he turns them, counts the sheets, calculates the number of pages, criticizes the calligraphy and the decoration; finally, lowering his head, he places the book beneath it and falls into a light sleep, until he is awakened by hunger and driven to attend to his necessities.<sup>36</sup>

The heart of the temptation is, as Evagrius notes, “to induce the monk to forsake his cell and drop out of the fight.” To leave the cell is to abandon his solitude. A monk might convince himself that he needs to set up his monastic cell elsewhere:

This demon drives him along to desire other sites where he can more easily procure life’s necessities, more readily find work and make a real success of himself. He goes on to suggest that, after all, it is not the place that is the basis of pleasing the Lord. God is to be adored everywhere.<sup>37</sup>

*Akēdia* is such a great temptation for the solitary precisely because it is an attack on his very identity as a solitary. The only solution is to stay put, for “endurance cures *akēdia*.”<sup>38</sup> In conquering *akēdia*, the monk recovers his identity. That is why, according to Evagrius, no other temptations follow in its wake and the monk enjoys “deep peace and inexpressible joy.”<sup>39</sup> Why then does the *Skemmata* assert that this “thought” belongs to both our humanity and our animality? Given these descriptions, it is clear that *akēdia* touches our animality in the desire for sleep or the desire for easier access to life’s necessities; likewise, it touches our humanity in the quest for success or in rationalizing (about God’s omnipresence).

*Skemmata* 44–62 continue the analysis of “thoughts.” Evagrius maps them out from different vantage points: whether they are “material” or “immaterial” (44); whether they are “natural” or inspired by demons (45); whether they originate from inside or outside oneself (47, 48, 59); what they hold in common (58) and what makes certain ones unique (57, 61). One chapter even asserts that “the first thought of all is that of love of self (*philautia*); after this [come] the eight” (*Skemmata* 53). This assertion, that there is a ninth “thought” prior to the others, is, to the best of our knowledge, not found anywhere else in Evagrius’s writings. The claim seems almost “Augustinian”: that the selfish love of self is *the* primordial evil thought, a sort of original sin.

The *Skemmata*’s chapters on “thoughts” are dense, to be sure, and seem almost schematic. Despite appearances, these reflections spring from first-

<sup>36</sup> *De octo spiritibus* 14 (PG 79.1160).

<sup>37</sup> *Praktikos* 12 (Sources chrétiennes 171.524; trans. Bamberger, 18–19).

<sup>38</sup> *De octo spiritibus* 14 (PG 79.1169).

<sup>39</sup> *Praktikos* 12 (Sources chrétiennes 171.524; trans. Bamberger, 19).

hand experience. Palladius says his teacher had “innumerable” personal experiences with demons;<sup>40</sup> the anonymous author of the *History of the Monks of Egypt* likewise remarks that Evagrius’s skill in the discernment of spirits was “acquired by experience.”<sup>41</sup> Evagrius encouraged readers to reflect on their personal experience, to “study where the most dangerous (thoughts) come from” (*Skemmata* 19). In the *Praktikos*, he teases out what such study requires:

If there is any monk who wishes to take the measure of some of the more fierce demons so as to gain experience in his monastic art, then let him keep watch over his thoughts. Let him observe their intensity, their periods of decline, and follow them as they rise and fall. Let him note well the complexity of his thoughts, their periodicity, and the demons, which cause them, with the order of their succession and the nature of their associations. Then let him ask from Christ the explanation of these data he has observed.<sup>42</sup>

Evagrius’s recommendation is somewhere between that of a military commander and a psychologist: one needs to study the enemy to defeat him. But insight comes from what Christ himself tells the monk. Christ provides the *gnosis*, the knowledge.

#### MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

Sometime, probably in the mid-380s, Evagrius and one of the Tall Brothers, Ammonius, set out from their desert monastery in Lower Egypt and trekked upriver to consult with John of Lycopolis, the famed “Seer of the Thebaid.” It would have been a demanding pilgrimage. We know that when Evagrius’s disciple, Palladius, made the same journey some years later, it took him 18 days, partly on foot through the desert, partly by boat up the Nile.<sup>43</sup> Evagrius and Ammonius sought advice on an urgent question concerning prayer, concerning certain peak experiences that occurred during prayer. At these moments, they—or perhaps monks they knew—enjoyed a vision of formless light. Where did this light come from? Only a man of extraordinary holiness and wisdom, they felt, would know. When the two monks got to Lycopolis, they asked John’s view: whether the light comes out of the purified mind itself (implying that the mind’s primordial nature is luminous) *or* whether the light comes from God, whose light in

<sup>40</sup> Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 37 (Butler, 122).

<sup>41</sup> *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* XX.15. For the text, see André-Jean Festugière, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto: Édition critique du text grec et traduction annotée*, Subsidia Hagiographica 53 (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1971) 123; *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Norman Russell, Cistercian Studies 34 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1981) 107.

<sup>42</sup> *Praktikos* 50 (Sources chrétiennes 171.614–16; trans. Bamberger, 29–30).

<sup>43</sup> Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 35 (Butler, 101).

turn illuminates the mind, much as the sun illuminates the moon. John's answer was a bit coy: "It is not in the power of human beings to explain it. Besides, the mind cannot be illuminated during prayer without the grace of God."<sup>44</sup>

Evagrius, in time, came to formulate his own answer. At first sight, he too seems to hedge. Sometimes he says that the light seen during prayer is the "light of the holy Trinity";<sup>45</sup> other times he says that the mind "sees its own light."<sup>46</sup> His ultimate answer is both—in a sense. In what sense it is both becomes clear in the *Skemmata*.

The second saying provides the point-of-entry:

If one wishes to see the state (*katastasis*) of the mind (*nous*), let him deprive himself of all representations (*noēmata*), and then he will see the mind appear similar to sapphire or to the color of the sky. But to do that without being passionless (*apatheia*) is impossible, for one must have the assistance of God who breathes into him the kindred light (*Skemmata* 2).

Here, as in all his works, Evagrius chooses his words with great care. Let us first look at four key terms in this text, for they lay the groundwork for understanding Evagrius's view.

(i) **Mind** (*nous*). For most people today, the word "mind" implies the faculty of logic, of thinking, of rational deduction. But in the Greek tradition, the mind (*nous*) is our intuitive side. It enables us to know and recognize the truth of things instantly, whether a friend's face or a mathematical proof. Evagrius believed that the way the mind knows God is not a matter of logic, of thinking; it is a direct intuition. As he once put it, "For knowledge of God, one needs not a debater's soul, but a seer's soul."<sup>47</sup> For Evagrius, as for the whole Eastern theological tradition, the mind is the highest dimension of the human person. It is the image of God within us, that which is most like its creator. Thus Evagrius insists in *Skemmata* 34: "The mind is the temple of the Holy Trinity." Since the mind is the most God-like part of us, it is the faculty most capable of knowing God. Thus Evagrius claims that there is nothing more natural to us as human beings

<sup>44</sup> *Antirrhētikos* VI.16 (Frankenberg, 524).

<sup>45</sup> *Antirrhētikos* prologue (Frankenberg, 474). The classic study of Evagrius's views on prayer and the mystical life is Irénée Hausherr's *Les Leçons d'un contemplative: Le Traité de l'oraison d'Evagre le Pontique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1960). Other important aspects are treated in Antoine Guillaumont, "La vision de l'intellect par lui-même dans la mystique évagrienne," in *Études sur la spiritualité de l'Orient chrétien*, *Spiritualité orientale* 66 (Bégrolles-en-Mauges: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1996) 143–50.

<sup>46</sup> *Praktikos* 64 (Sources chrétiennes 171.648); see *Gnostikos* 45 (Sources chrétiennes 356.178), *Peri logismōn* 39 (Sources chrétiennes 438.286).

<sup>47</sup> *Kephalaia gnostica* 4.90 (PO 28.175).

than praying: “The mind, by its very nature, is made to pray”;<sup>48</sup> “prayer is the activity best suited to the dignity of the mind.”<sup>49</sup> He highlights this in the *Skemmata*, insisting that “the pure mind at the time of prayer is a censer” (*Skemmata* 6). This image plays on Psalm 141:2 which speaks of prayer rising up like incense before God. As Evagrius sees it, if prayer is like incense, then the vessel of prayer, the mind, is a sort of censer.<sup>50</sup>

(ii) **State** (*katastasis*). In *Skemmata* 2, Evagrius says that prayer is not just an activity of mind; it is a state of mind, a *katastasis*. That means that prayer is not so much something one does as something one is. Evagrius does not think of true prayer as ecstatic—at least, not in the strict sense. Ecstasy (*ekstasis*) literally means to “stand outside” oneself. For Evagrius, prayer is not *ekstasis*, not leaving oneself; it is a *katastasis*, a coming to one’s true state. As he says explicitly in both *Skemmata* 26 and 27, “prayer is a state of the mind . . .”

(iii) **Representations** (*noēmata*).<sup>51</sup> In *Skemmata* 2, Evagrius insists that to see the state of the mind, one must “deprive oneself of all representations.” Note that he does not say one must deprive oneself of all “thoughts” (*logismoi*). As we have seen, “thoughts” is almost always a negative word in Evagrius’s vocabulary; “thoughts” are typically stimuli provoked by demons.<sup>52</sup> So while Evagrius would certainly insist that one must deprive oneself of all “thoughts”—demonic incursions—in order to pray rightly, that is not his point here. The term he uses here, “representations” (*noēmata*), is more neutral. These “representations” are mental images, images that re-present to the mind stimuli harvested (for the most part) by the senses from the external world. They are like photos, slides projected on the mind’s inner screen. Evagrius tends to think of the workings of the mind in highly visual terms. Nonetheless, in *Skemmata* 17 he notes that “there are four ways by which the mind grasps representations”: (1) “through the eyes”; (2) “through the ears”; (3) “through the memory”; and

<sup>48</sup> *Praktikos* 49 (Sources chrétiennes 171.612).

<sup>49</sup> *De oratione* 84 (PG 79.1185).

<sup>50</sup> Evagrius regularly plays on the image of prayer as incense rising to God: see *De oratione* 1, 75–77, 147; *De octo spiritibus* 2; see Origen, *Selecta in Ezek.* 16.18.

<sup>51</sup> On Evagrius’s epistemology of prayer and the character of the *noēmata*, see Antoine Guillaumont, “Introduction: La doctrine,” *Évagre le Pontique: Sur les pensées*, Sources chrétiennes 438 (Paris: Cerf, 1998) 21–28; Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus.”

<sup>52</sup> There are a handful of instances in which Evagrius uses the term *logismoi* in something other than a negative way; e.g. *Skemmata* 46: “. . . to a good thought”; *Peri logismōn* 8 (Sources chrétiennes 438.176): “After long observation, we have learned to know the difference between angelic thoughts, human thoughts, and those which come from demons”; *Praktikos* 80 (Sources chrétiennes 171.668) speaks of “thoughts inspired in us by angels.” On this issue, see Guillaumont, *Évagre le Pontique: Traité pratique*, Sources chrétiennes 170.56–63.

(4) “through the temperament.” So, strictly speaking, “representations” can come from the outside (eyes, ears) or from the inside (memory, temperament).

In the *Skemmata*, Evagrius’s concern is not simply with the source of the representations; more urgent to him is their effect on the mind. Some representations have unusual permanency: they “imprint a form” (*Skemmata* 17). In the ancient world, a calligrapher typically used a wax tablet as his notebook and scratched out the letters with a metal stylus.<sup>53</sup> Evagrius the professional calligrapher believed that certain representations, especially those from the eye, were capable of imprinting themselves on the wax of the mind (*Skemmata* 17 and 55). He would have agreed with the author of the *History of the Monks of Egypt*: “very often forgetfulness follows what we hear, whereas the memory of what we have seen is not easily erased but remains imprinted on our minds like a picture.”<sup>54</sup> The moral character of these “representations” depends on how the mind uses them, for good or for ill. But even if they are good or are neutral, Evagrius is convinced that the mind must be purged of all concepts, all mental imagery, to enter the heights of mystical prayer:

The mind would not see the “place of God” in itself unless it has been raised higher than all the representations (*noēmata*) of objects (*Skemmata* 23).<sup>55</sup>

For Evagrius, God is utterly beyond material confines, beyond shape, color, or time.<sup>56</sup> To pray before any image, even a mental image, is idolatrous. As he says in his *Chapters on Prayer*, “When you pray, do not shape an image of the divine in yourself; do not allow any form to be imprinted on your mind; approach the Immaterial immaterially and then you will understand.”<sup>57</sup> This is why in the *Skemmata* Evagrius insists:

Having come to be in prayer, it enters into the formlessness which is called the “place of God.” (*Skemmata* 20).

(iv) **Passionlessness** (*apatheia*).<sup>58</sup> In *Skemmata* 2, Evagrius remarks that

<sup>53</sup> See Harry Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University, 1995) esp. 42–81. In *Kephalaia gnostica* 3.57 (PO 28.121), Evagrius plays on this when he compares Christ embedding his wisdom in the created order to a school teacher writing letters on a wax tablet to teach students how to read.

<sup>54</sup> *Historia monachorum in Aegypto* 1.19 (trans. Russell, 55).

<sup>55</sup> See *De oratione* 11, 69, 70, 118, 120; *Skemmata* 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Gnostikos* 27 (Sources chrétiennes 356.132): “Do not speak about God inconsiderately and never define the Divinity. For definitions belong to created and composite beings”; see *Skemmata* 20.

<sup>57</sup> *De oratione* 66 (PG 79.1181); see *De oratione* 114.

<sup>58</sup> On *apatheia*, see Guillaumont, *Évagre le Pontique: Traité pratique*, Sources chrétiennes 170.98–112; Guillaumont, “Le gnostique chez Clément d’Alexandre et

to see the state of the mind is impossible unless one is “passionless.” Evagrius’s term here, *apatheia*, has nothing to do with “apathy.” Nor does it mean a lack of passion in the sense of a “lack of emotion.” In fact, Evagrius defines his understanding quite precisely in the *Skemmata*:

Passionlessness is a quiet state of the rational soul. It results from gentleness and self-control (*Skemmata* 3).

The term *apatheia* had been originally used by the Stoics, but Christian theologians soon adopted it. Athanasius, for instance, speaks of Christ as “passionless”; and in the *Life of Anthony*, Athanasius describes his hero arriving at a state of dispassionate tranquility.<sup>59</sup> Evagrius’s concern is prayer, and in his view passions interfere with true prayer: “A man in chains cannot run. Nor can the mind that is enslaved to passion see the place of spiritual prayer. It is dragged along and tossed by these passion-filled thoughts and cannot stand firm and tranquil.”<sup>60</sup> Passionlessness, as Evagrius describes it, is not an all-or-nothing state; there are degrees. Think of health. One can be healthy in the sense of not being sick. Still one can have certain nagging aches and pains; one can have good days and bad days and still be healthy. And then there is the robust health and fitness of an elite athlete. For Evagrius, *apatheia* is the state of the healthy soul.<sup>61</sup> Just because one has arrived at “passionlessness” does not mean the endless ebbs and flows of thoughts cease. Rather, they lose their ability to subvert self-control. As he notes in the *Skemmata*:

The ascetical mind is one that always receives passionlessly the representations (*noēmata*) of this world (*Skemmata* 16).<sup>62</sup>

The ascetic thus enjoys a measured calm during waking consciousness. But

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chez Évagre le Pontique,” *Études sur la spiritualité de l’Orient chrétien*, esp. 155–57; Jeremy Driscoll, “*Apatheia* and Purity of Heart in Evagrius Ponticus,” in *Purity of Heart in Early Ascetic and Monastic Literature*, ed. Harriet Luckman and Linda Kulzer (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999) 141–59.

<sup>59</sup> Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos* III.34 (PG 26.396–97); *Vita Antonii* 67 (Sources chrétiennes 400.312–14); see *Vita Antonii* 20 (Sources chrétiennes 400.190–92). On Athanasius’s Christology, see especially Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Johannes Roldanus, *Le Christ et l’homme dans la théologie d’Athanasie d’Alexandre*, *Studies in the History of Christian Thought* 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1977) esp. 277–348. On the *Vita Antonii*, see the introduction by G.J.M. Bartelink, *Athanasie d’Alexandre: Vie d’Antoine*, Sources chrétiennes 400 (Paris: Cerf, 1994); David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York: Oxford University, 1995) 201–65.

<sup>60</sup> *De oratione* 71 (PG 79.1181; trans. Bamberger, 66).

<sup>61</sup> *Praktikos* 56 (Sources chrétiennes 171.630).

<sup>62</sup> *Praktikos* 67 (Sources chrétiennes 171.652) notes that this applies not simply to things perceived by the senses, but also to memories that well up.

*apatheia* also extends to the unconscious, to dreams: “the test of *apatheia* is that the mind . . . remains calm before visions [that occur] during sleep.”<sup>63</sup> Here he intuits an insight developed in 20th-century psychology: that dreams offer tell-tale signs about our psychic health. Evagrius’s *apatheia* is not some Stoic ideal of imperturbability. It is a relative calm on the far side of the storm—and a realistic calm that still must face the daily upsets of life. To be passionless was a sign of advance, but it was no guarantee of holiness. Evagrius knew that even advanced monks could fall, and fall badly.<sup>64</sup> Still, he believed that after long years of practice, the monk could, and should, arrive at a measure of genuine tranquility.

These four terms (*nous*, *katastasis*, *noēmata*, *apatheia*) clarify some of the basics of Evagrius’s mystical theology. In his view, to see one’s highest, truest self—the mind—one must have arrived at a fairly advanced state, that of a tranquil passionlessness; and to see that highest, truest self, one must also enter into a sort of psychic asceticism, clearing the mind of mental images. Then, and only then, is it possible to see oneself as one is. But, as he adds in *Skemmata* 2, one must have “the assistance of God.” Here Evagrius acknowledges what John of Lycopolis had told him and Ammonius: that this seeing the light of the mind is a graced event. Nonetheless, that grace presumes also a graced purity of life. To see God is only possible for the purified, one who has let the commandments enter into the depths of one’s being. As Evagrius remarks in one of his letters:

To be sure, it is not the mind itself, which sees God, but rather the pure mind. ‘Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God’ (Mt 5:8). Note that [Jesus] does not praise purity as blessed but rather the one [who does the] seeing. Purity is passionlessness of the reasonable soul but seeing God is true knowledge of the one essence of the adorable Trinity, which those will see who have perfected their conduct here and through the commandments purified their souls.<sup>65</sup>

There are two phrases in *Skemmata* 2 that still need elucidation: namely, what is this “kindred light”? and how can the mind’s state be “similar to sapphire or the color of the sky”? *Skemmata* 4 repeats and extends these two themes:

The state of the mind is an intellectual peak, comparable in color to the sky. Onto it, there comes, at the time of prayer, the light of the holy Trinity (*Skemmata* 4).

Here, once more, Evagrius speaks of the “state” (*katastasis*) of the mind. And he again asserts—strangely enough—that it is the “color of the sky.” This chapter makes explicit something only implied in *Skemmata* 2: that

<sup>63</sup> *Praktikos* 64 (Sources chrétiennes 171.648).

<sup>64</sup> Jeremy Driscoll, “Evagrius, Paphnutius, and the Reasons for Abandonment by God,” *Studia Monastica* 40 (1998) 259–86.

<sup>65</sup> *Ep.* 56.2 (Frankenberg, 604; trans. Driscoll, “*Apatheia*” 157).

this seeing the mind occurs during “the time of prayer.” In other words, it is not mere introspection, but a prayer-experience. Here Evagrius also begins to clarify the issue of the “light,” of its origin. The light of the Trinity shines, so to speak, onto the mind, that “intellectual peak,” such that the mind itself becomes luminous. The implicit image seems that of the sun coming out suddenly, as though from behind a cloud, and shining on a snow-covered mountain peak, which in turn causes the mountain peak to glisten. In other words, during prayer, or rather, during certain privileged moments of prayer, the one praying sees the interior heights of the mind become luminous because they are illumined by the light that God is. This clarifies what Evagrius means in *Skemmata* 2 when he says that “God breathes into him a kindred light.” The light of the mind is “akin” to the light of the Trinity; but God initiates the illumination, and the two lights, while “kindred,” are distinct: the light of God, like that of the sun, ignites the light of the mind, like a mountain peak glistening in the sunlight.

But what of the color? How is this “light . . . similar to sapphire or the color of the sky”? That is made clear from a passage found in his treatise *Peri logismōn* (“Concerning Thoughts”). The passage also makes the mountain imagery explicit:

When the mind—after having stripped off the old man—has been re clothed in the [new] one who comes from grace, then it will see its state, at the moment of prayer, similar to sapphire or to the color of the sky. This is what Scripture describes as the “place of God”—what was seen by the ancients on Mt. Sinai.<sup>66</sup>

Here Evagrius again speaks of a sapphire or sky-blue light. When he speaks of it in the *Skemmata*, it sounds as though it were an inner-sensory experience. But is it really? The *Peri logismōn* makes clear that Evagrius is alluding to the great theophany described in the Book of Exodus. The biblical account says that Moses, Aaron, and the seventy elders climbed up Mt. Sinai and there “they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness” (Exodus 24:9–10). For Evagrius, the experience of pure prayer marks a return to Mount Sinai. The monk enjoys (potentially) the same awe-inspiring experience of God’s presence that Moses and the elders of ancient Israel enjoyed. The Hebrew text says bluntly that Moses and the

<sup>66</sup> *Peri logismōn* 39 (Sources chrétiennes 438.286–88). Note that this exact passage appears also in the Syriac version of the *Skemmata* (but not in the Greek): *Kephalaia gnostica*, supplement 25 (Frankenberg, 450). This seems to be another of those links (noted earlier) between the *Skemmata* and the *Peri logismōn*. The Pauline idea of “stripping off the old man” (Colossians 3:9–10, Ephesians 4:22–24) appears elsewhere in Evagrius: *Ep.* 4 and 39. Evagrius uses the verb found in Colossians 3:9 in *Skemmata* 23: “And (the mind) will not be raised higher unless it has stripped off all the passions that bind it to sensory matters via representations.”

elders “saw” God. But the Greek version of the Old Testament that Evagrius and other Greek-speaking Christians used—the Septuagint—says that the elders “saw” not God himself, but the “place of God.”

What is this “place of God”? Evagrius defines it in the *Skemmata*:

From holy David we have clearly learned what the “place of God” is: “His place is established in peace and his dwelling in Zion” (Psalm 75:3). The “place of God” therefore is the rational soul, and his dwelling (is) the illuminated mind, which has renounced the pleasures of the world and has learned to contemplate from afar the (underlying) principles of the earth (*Skemmata* 25).

Here Evagrius reads the biblical text allegorically. First, he transposes outer realities into inner ones. Thus Mt. Sinai, the “place of God,” is not simply a place on a map of the Holy Land; it is an inner landmark, a center in the geography of the soul. The encounter with God is not limited to some past theophany. Rather for Evagrius, the encounter is always possible because the place of encounter is within the “rational soul.”<sup>67</sup> Second, he uses the Bible to interpret the Bible.<sup>68</sup> Here he plays on the fact that the phrase “place of God” found in Exodus 24 appears also in Psalm 75. Thus Psalm 75 is read as a commentary on Exodus 24. This reading leads him to insist that the interior Mt. Sinai is also an interior Mt. Zion. The true “temple” is not in Jerusalem; it is in the mind (*Skemmata* 23). In other words, the eternal dwelling-place of God is the human person; the person is the true place of presence, of illumination.

From these passages, we now can piece together Evagrius’s basic view. During pure prayer, the purified mind sees itself, its truest self, its true state. And the self that it sees is luminous. But that luminosity which permits it to see itself is the divine light, God himself.<sup>69</sup> In seeing itself as luminosity, as light like sapphire or sky-blue, the mind discovers its God-likeness. At the same time, it sees and knows by seeing—indirectly, as in a mirror—the uncreated, immaterial light that God is. That is why for Evagrius prayer is at once a moment of self-discovery and an encounter with ultimate Mystery:

<sup>67</sup> A similar linking of Mt. Sinai, sapphire light, and the “place of God” is found in *Ep.* 39 (Frankenberg, 592): “If, by the grace of God, the intellect escapes them [= the demons] and strips itself of the old man, its state will appear to it, at the moment of prayer, as sapphire or similar to the color of the sky, what Scripture has called ‘the place of God,’ which the ancients saw on Mount Sinai. This place is also called ‘the vision of peace,’ because one sees in oneself there this peace which is above all intelligence and which guards our hearts, because in the pure heart is imprinted another heaven, of which the vision is light and the place spiritual.”

<sup>68</sup> On Evagrius as an exegete, see Géhin, *Évagre le Pontique: Scholies aux Proverbes*, Sources chrétiennes 340.26–32. Géhin notes: “Persuaded that the Bible forms a whole and that there is a harmony between all the parts, Evagrius often considers it best to have Scripture comment on itself (17).”

<sup>69</sup> *Kephalaia gnostica* 1.35 (PO 28.33): “God, in his essence, is light.”

Prayer (*proseuchē*) is the state of the mind that comes to be from the single-light of the Holy Trinity (*Skemmata* 27).

Here we see the core of Evagrius's theology—and theology in his sense of the term: the encounter of the praying mind with God. One question remains: is the language of “sapphire light” simply biblical? Or does it have experiential roots? Antoine Guillaumont has suggested that “in this description of pure prayer, Evagrius is certainly referring to an experience, both real and personal.”<sup>70</sup> We agree. While Evagrius clearly draws on various intellectual tools—allegorical exegeses of the Old Testament, epistemological analyses of the workings of the mind—he seems to be trying to make sense of his own most intense, most epiphanic experiences of prayer.

The *Skemmata* is not an easy document. It is at times dense, even encrypted. But when decoded, it offers eloquent testimony to Evagrius's core conviction: that theology—this speaking-of-God—cannot be dislocated from the experience of prayer, that to be a theologian one must truly pray and pray truly. This conviction has lost none of its relevance.

<sup>70</sup> Guillaumont, “La vision de l'intellect” 148–49. He adds: “But it is evident that [Evagrius] is using, in order to express this experience, a language which he owes to his culture—a philosophical one, especially neo-Platonist.”

## THE SKEMMATA: A TRANSLATION

[Note on the translation: In the *Skemmata*, Evagrius uses a dense, elliptical style that is difficult to render with equal brevity into English. To make parallelisms clear, we have added certain words or phrases implied by or presumed in the Greek original. These additions have been put in parentheses. The footnotes list cross-references to important technical terms and themes that reappear in other works of his since, as we have seen, such cross-referencing is key to de-coding his ideas. We do not, however, repeat references to terms already discussed in the commentary above.]

1. Christ, insofar as he is the Christ, possesses knowledge of Being.<sup>71</sup> Insofar as he is Creator, he possesses the (underlying) principles of ages and worlds.<sup>72</sup> Insofar as he is incorporeal, he possesses the (underlying) principles of incorporeal things.

2. If one wishes to see the state of the mind, let him deprive himself of all representations, and then he will see the mind appear similar to sapphire or to the color of the sky. But to do that without being passionless is impossible, for one must have the assistance of God who breathes into him the kindred light.

3. Passionlessness is a quiet state of the rational soul. It results from gentleness and self-control.<sup>73</sup>

4. The state of the mind is an intellectual peak, comparable in color to the sky. Onto it, there comes, at the time of prayer,<sup>74</sup> the light of the holy Trinity.

<sup>71</sup> “Of Being” (*ousiōdē*, from *ousia* “being”). To translate this phrase as “essential knowledge” (as some have done) could be confusing, since in English “essential knowledge” would normally mean “knowledge of what really matters.” For Evagrius, only the Trinity is true uncreated Being; Christ alone has knowledge of Being, of the uncreated *ousia* that God is. This implies the divinity of Christ, since in the Cappadocian tradition God as uncreated *ousia* is unknowable to creatures. Christ’s knowledge of Being is a common theme; see *Kephalaia gnostica* 3.2–3; 4.21; 6.14, 16, 18; *Ep. ad Melaniam* 6. On Evagrius’s controversial Christology, see Francis Kline, “The Christology of Evagrius and the Parent System of Origen,” *Cistercian Studies* 20 (1985) 155–83; Guillaumont, *Les “kephalaia gnostica”* 117–19.

<sup>72</sup> Literally, “Insofar as he is demiurge, he has the reasons (*logoi*) of the ages/worlds.” The rich resonances of *logoi* are almost impossible to capture in English; the word might also be rendered “rational laws,” “ordering principles,” or “inner dynamics.” In Evagrius’s view, Christ as Logos, as Creator of the universe, possesses the archetypes of all things within himself. See *Kephalaia gnostica* 3.57.

<sup>73</sup> “Gentleness and self-control”: see *Scholia in Prov. 17:9* no. 157 (Sources chrétiennes 340.254). On this theme, see Jeremy Driscoll, “Gentleness in the *Ad monachos* of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Studia Monastica* 32 (1990) 295–321.

<sup>74</sup> “At the time of prayer”: This is a common phrase in Evagrius’s works: see *Skemmata* 6; *Praktikos* 23, 25; *Gnostikos* 45; *De oratione* 11, 44, 70, 118, 120.

5. Christ is a rational nature, having in himself something symbolized by the dove descending upon him.<sup>75</sup>

6. The pure mind at the time of prayer is a censer—no object of the senses connected to it.<sup>76</sup> On the eighth day, we will be one according to virtue; on the last day, (we will be one) according to knowledge.<sup>77</sup>

7. The kiss of the mind is something blameworthy, an impassioned representation of a sensory object. This is why the Savior says to the disciples, “Greet no one along the pathway” of virtue.<sup>78</sup>

8. The irascible is a power of the soul capable of destroying thoughts.

9. The contemplative mind—by moving the irascible (part of the soul)—chases down, like a dog,<sup>79</sup> all impassioned thoughts.

10. The ascetical mind barks, like a dog, at unjust thoughts.<sup>80</sup>

11. Training is the denial of impiety and of worldly desires.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>75</sup> See Matthew 3:16 (and parallels). This is one of the *Skemmata*’s more obscure sayings; one parallel illuminates it partially: “The wings of the holy dove are the contemplation of the corporeal and of the incorporeal, thanks to which the mind is raised and reposes in the knowledge of the Holy Trinity” (*Scholia 2 ad Ps 54:7*); see also *Peri logismōn* 29 (Sources chrétiennes 438.256).

<sup>76</sup> The manuscripts contain a subtle but interesting variant. For the translation here, we have relied, not on *Codex Paris. gr.* 913, but on *Codex Barb. gr.* 515 which has the adjectival “pure” (*katharos*) (Muyldermans, “Evagriana” 51). *Codex Paris. gr.* 913 has the adverbial “purely” (*katharōs*); i.e. “The mind, (praying) purely at the time of prayer, is a censer . . .” If this reading were followed, it would mean that it is not the mind itself that is a censer; rather it is only when the mind prays purely that it is a censer.

<sup>77</sup> Normally, in Evagrius’s eschatology, the “eighth day” is the “last day.” This distinction between “virtue” and “knowledge” mirrors Evagrius’s standard distinction between ascetic practice (*pratikē*) and mystical knowledge (*gnostikē*). On Evagrius’s eschatology, see Guillaumont, *Les “kephalaia gnostica”* 39, 113–17.

<sup>78</sup> See Luke 10:4.

<sup>79</sup> *Skemmata* 9–10 continue the line of thought begun in *Skemmata* 8, tracing out how the irascible part of the soul, when rightly ordered, can be harnessed as a purifying force. *Peri logismōn* 13 (Sources chrétiennes 438.199) compares the irascible to a “sheep-dog” that needs to be trained to “destroy only the wolves and not to devour the flock.”

<sup>80</sup> These two chapters touch on Evagrius’s classic distinction between the “life of ascetic practice” (*pratikē*) and the “life of mystical gnosis” (*gnostikē*). The goal of ascetic practice is a cleansing of the passions and the acquisition of virtue (*Praktikos* 78); the goal of mystical gnosis is a purging of ignorance and the acquisition of knowledge of God (*Praktikos* 84, *Gnostikos* 49). It is common for Evagrius to compare and contrast the two as he does here: *Skemmata* 20, 32–33, 38–39, *Gnostikos* 1, *Ad monachos* 121; see *Skemmata* 6. On Evagrius’s basic understanding of the “mind” (*nous*), see the introduction; however, the *Skemmata* frequently defines particular mindsets or conditions of mind: “pure mind” (6), “contemplative mind” (9, 20), “ascetical mind” (10, 16, 20), “enfleshed mind” (35), “impure mind” (36).

<sup>81</sup> “Training” (*paideia*) could equally be rendered “education.” *Paideia* is the classical term for the whole system by which one became an educated person in the

12. Fear is a betrayal of thought-ridding helps.<sup>82</sup>

13. A demonic thought is an image of a person perceived by the senses, (an image) which forms itself in the understanding and with which the mind—roused by passions—speaks or acts lawlessly in the secret recesses with regard to the imaginings that come in succession under the influence of (the demon).<sup>83</sup>

14. An anchorite<sup>84</sup> is one who, in the world formed in his understanding, conducts himself piously and justly.<sup>85</sup>

15. A practiced ascetic<sup>86</sup> is a person who uses rightly the gifts from God.<sup>87</sup>

16. The ascetical mind is one that always receives passionlessly the representations of this world.

17. There are four ways by which the mind grasps representations: the

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ancient world, a person at once knowledgeable and virtuous, capable of leadership and eloquent; see Werner W. Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1985). Evagrius gives it a distinctively Christian accent here by quoting Titus 2:12 (quoted also in *Skemmata* 14). In his *Scholia on Proverbs*, he uses the term in relation to a three-phase program of spiritual progress; see Géhin, *Évagre le Pontique: Scholies aux Proverbes*, Sources chrétiennes 340.28.

<sup>82</sup> See Wisdom 17:12; also *De oratione* 97.

<sup>83</sup> “Demonic thought”: an unusual specification since for Evagrius, “thoughts” (*logismoi*) almost always refer to demonic influence. This chapter appears almost verbatim in *Peri logismōn* 25 (Sources chrétiennes 438.244); there he cites two examples: committing adultery in one’s heart, and getting in a quarrel with a fellow monk. Evagrius is saying that our minds can turn a still “image” (*eikon*) into moving “pictures” (*eidolon*)—much as a film is really a succession of still photos passed rapidly through a film projector. Evagrius, in other words, conceives of temptation cinematically, as watching an inner movie. Stewart, “Imageless Prayer,” notes: “Evagrius taught that the mind processes *noēmata* serially: only a single imprinting *noēma* can be present to the mind at one time, though the succession of *noēmata* can occur so rapidly as to create a sense of simultaneity. Evagrius’s emphasis on singularity may be explainable by the Platonic imperative to move from multiplicity to simplicity in thought and contemplation.”

<sup>84</sup> “Anchorite” (*anachōrētēs*): one who has withdrawn (from the world). Athanasius, in his *Vita Antonii*, describes Antony’s spiritual journey as an *anachōrēsis* a sequence of withdrawals from the world. Here Evagrius uses the word as though it has already become a technical term; but his stress is that true *anachōrēsis* is not just a physical withdrawal from the world, but an interior one as well.

<sup>85</sup> “Piously and justly”: Evagrius is again quoting Titus 2:12; see *Skemmata* 11 and 38.

<sup>86</sup> “Practiced ascetic” (*praktikos*): Evagrius’s technical term for one who has mastered the initial stage of the spiritual life. Normally he contrasts “practiced ascetic” with “gnostic” (*gnōstikos*) (e.g., *Gnostikos* 1, *Skemmata* 32–33); but here he pairs it with “anchorite” (*Skemmata* 14).

<sup>87</sup> “Use uprightly the gifts of God”: see *Scholia in Eccl.* 3:13, no. 16 (Sources chrétiennes 397.86).

first way is through the eyes; the second, through the ear; the third, through memory; and the fourth, through temperament. Through the eyes it grasps only representations that imprint a form. Through the ear it grasps representations that either imprint a form or do not imprint one, because a word (can) signify both sensory objects and contemplative objects. Memory and temperament follow the ear but each one either imprints a form on the intellect or does not do so, in imitation of the ear.

18. In bodies, there is both oneness-in-being and difference-in-being.<sup>88</sup> In incorporeal beings, there is only oneness-in-being. In knowledge, there is difference-in-being, for none of the contemplations is the same as the contemplation of the stars.<sup>89</sup> In the Trinity, there is only oneness-in-being—for there are not different objects underlying (it) as (there are) in the contemplations, nor does (the Trinity) consist of several substances as is the case with bodies. I speak now of substances which come together to constitute a definition that shows the contents of the being of an object here-below<sup>90</sup>—but not as in incorporeals. Thus we read that those ones-in-being are susceptible of the same knowledge.

19. Since the mind grasps thoughts from the five senses, one must study from which (of the senses) come the most dangerous (thoughts). It is

<sup>88</sup> “Oneness-in-being and difference-in-being” (*homousiotēs kai heteroousiotēs*). In this subtle and rather obscure chapter, Evagrius invokes the terminology of the trinitarian controversy. The Nicene Creed, of course, speaks of Christ as “one-in-being” (*homoousios*) with the Father. In the debates from the 350s to 370s, the term served as the watchword for the Nicenes, while *heteroousios* became a key term for Aetius, Eunomius, and the so-called Neo-Arian party. For a discussion of the complex semantic issues during the Nicene conflict and the Cappadocian clarification of terminology, see R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–381* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1988) esp. 181–207, 676–737; also Thomas Kopecek, *History of Neo-Arianism*, 2 vol., Patristic Monograph Series (Cambridge, Mass.: Philadelphia Patristic Society, 1979). Evagrius was on the forefront of that debate when he served as a deacon under Gregory of Nazianzus. His views are found in his *Letter on the Trinity (Epistula fidei)*, that was, for centuries, attributed to Basil of Caesarea and was preserved as *Ep.* 8 in the collection of Basil’s letters. See *Skemmata* 20.

<sup>89</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15:40–41 in which Paul contrasts the glory of heavenly bodies and earthly bodies and notes the variety of heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars); *Kephalaia gnostica* 3.37, 3.62, 4.31.

<sup>90</sup> Evagrius denies that God is a being like other beings, and thus capable being analyzed and defined in a philosophical or scientific way: see *Gnostikos* 41 (Sources chrétiennes 356.166): “Every proposition has a predicate or a genus or a distinction or a species or a property or an accident or is compounded of these things—but in regard to the Trinity, none of this terminology is admissible. Let the ineffable be adored in silence!”; *Gnostikos* 27 (Sources chrétiennes 356.132): “Do not speak about God inconsiderately and never define the Divinity. For definitions belong to created and composite beings.”

evident that they come by hearing, since it is true, as the (biblical) proverb says: “a sad word disturbs the heart of man.”<sup>91</sup>

20. The mind involved in ascetic practice deals with representations of this world. The mind involved in (mystical) knowledge passes its time in contemplation.<sup>92</sup> Having come to be in prayer, it enters into the formlessness which is called the “place of God.” Therefore it will see oneness-in-being and difference-in-being in bodies—just as it will (see these) in contemplative things and in God. In what concerns God, this is something evidently impossible—since the knowledge of Being is un-revelatory and has no parallel to knowledge of being.<sup>93</sup>

21. Some temptations produce pleasure in human beings; others, sadness; and still others bring bodily pain.<sup>94</sup>

22. The mind sometimes goes from one representation to other representations, sometimes from one contemplation to other contemplations, (and again from a representation to a contemplation)<sup>95</sup> and from a contemplation to representations. But there is a (time) when it runs from an imageless state to representations or to contemplations and back again from these to the imageless state. This thing happens within it in the time of prayer.<sup>96</sup>

23. The mind would not see the “place of God” in itself unless it has been raised higher than all the representations of objects. And it will not be raised higher unless it has stripped off all the passions that bind it to sensory matters via representations. And it will put away passions through virtues and (will put away) petty thoughts through spiritual contemplation. And this contemplation will happen when the light has been manifested to it.

24. Demonic thoughts blind the soul’s left eye, which is involved in the contemplation of things that have come into being.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Proverbs 12:25.

<sup>92</sup> See *Scholia in Eccl.* 44 (Sources chrétiennes 397.140): “When a person receives from God spiritual knowledge, he rarely remembers this existence and this sensory life, since his heart is applied to contemplation continuously.”

<sup>93</sup> See notes above on *Skemmata* 18; see *Gnostikos* 27, 41.

<sup>94</sup> “Bodily pain”: see *De oratione* 105 (PG 79.1189; trans. Bamberger, 72): “Despise the needs of the body while you are engaged in prayer lest you do some damage to that unsurpassed gift that you gain by prayer due to the sting of some flea or even a louse, fly or mosquito.”

<sup>95</sup> These words marked by the ◊ are added following *Vat. gr.* 653 and *Vat. gr.* 1434, as noted by Joseph Muyltermans, “Evagriana de la Vaticane,” *Le Muséon* 54 (1941) 14; see the 17th-century Latin translation of Suares in Muyltermans, “Evagriana,” 60.

<sup>96</sup> John Cassian likewise notes that the restlessness of the mind during prayer, its inability to hold its center; see *Conferences* 10.13.

<sup>97</sup> A doublet of this appears in *Peri logismōn* 42 (Sources chrétiennes 438.296).

25. From holy David we have clearly learned what the “place of God” is: “His place is established in peace and his dwelling in Zion.”<sup>98</sup> The “place of God” therefore is the rational soul, and his dwelling (is) the illuminated mind, which has renounced the pleasures of the world and has learned to contemplate from afar the (underlying) principles of the soul.<sup>99</sup>

26. Prayer is a state of mind destructive of every earthly representation.<sup>100</sup>

27. Prayer is the state of the mind that comes to be from the single-light of the Holy Trinity.<sup>101</sup>

28. A petition is the likeness of mind toward God through supplication, embracing help or (embracing) the search for good things.

29. A vow is a willing undertaking of good things.

30. An intercession is an invocation presented to God—presented for the salvation of others by one who is greater (spiritually).

31. Hades is a lightless region filled with eternal darkness and gloom.<sup>102</sup>

32. The gnostic is a hired day-laborer.<sup>103</sup>

33. The practiced ascetic is a laborer awaiting his pay.

34. The mind is the temple of the Holy Trinity.

35. The enfleshed mind is the spectator of all the ages-and-worlds.

36. The impure mind is the one that lingers over a blameworthy passion (that comes up) through sensory objects.

37. The concupiscible is a power of the soul that gets rid of anger.

38. The practiced ascetic is the one who piously and justly lives as a monk in the world that exists within his understanding.

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On “blinding” and contemplation: see *Gnostikos* 5 (Sources chrétiennes 356.96): “the one who has touched upon knowledge and who allows himself easily to fall into anger is like someone who has jammed an iron nail into his eyes”; also *Kephalaia gnostica* 5.39 (PO 28.193); *De oratione* 65 (PG 40.1181). On the “left eye”: see *De oratione* 72 (PG 40.1181; trans. Bamberger, 67): “When the spirit prays purely without being led astray then the demons no longer come upon it from the left side but from the right.”

<sup>98</sup> Psalm 75:3.

<sup>99</sup> “Principles of the soul” (*tous tēs psuchēs logous*); see *Codex Barb. gr.* 515 has “principles of the earth” (*tous tēs gēs logous*).

<sup>100</sup> Evagrius formulated several influential definitions of prayer: *De oratione* 3 (PG 40.1108): “Prayer is the conversation of the mind with God”; *De oratione* 35 (PG 40.1173): “Prayer is the ascent of the mind to God”; see *De oratione* 15, 16, 84.

<sup>101</sup> See *Kephalaia gnostica*, supplement 29 (Frankenberg, 453–455); the Syriac adds the unEvagrius phrase “by means of ecstasy.”

<sup>102</sup> For Evagrius’s views on hell, see *Kephalaia gnostica* 1.57–58, 3.18, 3.39, 3.60, 6.8; see also the discussion by Géhin, “Introduction,” Sources chrétiennes 340.48–50.

<sup>103</sup> See Job 7:1.

39. The contemplative is the one who forms in his understanding the sensory world only from the vantage point of his knowledge.<sup>104</sup>

[ON THE THOUGHTS]<sup>105</sup>

40. Of the (various types of) thoughts, some assail us (from our nature) as animals, others (from our nature) as human beings.<sup>106</sup> Those (that assail us from our nature) as animals come from the concupiscible and from the irascible. Those (that assail us from our nature) as human beings come from sadness, vainglory, and pride. Those that come from *akēdia* are mixed and affect us both as animals and as human beings.

41. Of the (various types of) thoughts, certain ones lead, others follow. Those of the concupiscible<sup>107</sup> lead, those of the irascible follow.

42. Of the thoughts that lead (= the concupiscible), some lead and some follow. The ones that lead are from gluttony, but the ones that follow are from lust.<sup>108</sup>

43. Of the thoughts that follow (= the irascible), some lead and some follow. The ones that lead are from sadness, the ones that follow are from anger. Thus, as Proverbs says, “a sad word gives rise to anger.”<sup>109</sup>

44. Of the (various types of) thoughts, some are without matter, some are material to a lesser degree, and others are deeply material.<sup>110</sup> The ones without matter are those from the first pride;<sup>111</sup> the ones of a lesser materiality are from lust; and the ones of deep materiality are from vainglory.

<sup>104</sup> See *Kephalaia gnostica* 5.12 (PO 28.181): “The mind which is stripped of passions and sees the intellections of beings does not receive any longer the images which come by the senses; but it is as if another world was created by its knowledge . . . tossing away from him the sensory world.”

<sup>105</sup> These 23 remaining chapters form a sort of mini-*Peri logismōn*; most open with the phrase “Of the thoughts” (*Tōn logismōn*). One has to wonder if these 23 chapters did not originally form an independent treatise, though there are links and overlaps with what precedes.

<sup>106</sup> “As animals . . . as human beings”: This anthropological distinction appears frequently in Evagrius’s writings: *Kephalaia gnostica* 3.76, 6.85; *Peri logismōn* 18; *Ep. ad Melaniam* 9.

<sup>107</sup> *Codex Paris. gr.* 913 has *huperēphania* (pride); we have instead read it as *epithumia* (concupiscible) following *Codex Scorialensis* Y, III, 4 and the Syriac version; on this reading, see Muyldermans, *Evagriana syriaca* 36, and Desprez, “Évagre le Pontique: Réflexions” 24, n. 62.

<sup>108</sup> See *Peri logismōn* 1 (Sources chrétiennes 438.148).

<sup>109</sup> Proverbs 15:1. *Praktikos* 11 (Sources chrétiennes 170.516–18) describes anger as “the sharpest passions” and says that it “makes the soul wild all day.” See *De oratione* 46, *Gnostikos* 5, *Kephalaia gnostica* 5.39, 6.63, *Antirrhētikos* 5.

<sup>110</sup> “Without material . . . lesser materiality . . . deeply material”; see *Skemmata* 47, *Peri logismōn* 36; *Disciples of Evagrius* 33, 69, 161.

<sup>111</sup> See *Skemmata* 49 for the distinction between first pride and second pride.

45. Of the (various types of) thoughts, some injure over time, others by consent, and still others by the act of sin. Those that injure only over time are the natural ones. Those that do so over time and by act are the unnatural, the demonic, and the evil-willed.

46. Two thoughts stand opposed to a good thought: the demonic and the evil-willed. Three (thoughts stand opposed) to an evil thought: the natural, the good-willed, the angelic.

47. Of the (various types of) thoughts, some get their materials from the outside, but those from lust come from the body.

48. Of the (various types of) thoughts, some are born from a movement of the soul. Others come to be from outside, by the doings of demons.

49. Of the (various types of) impure thoughts, some show God as unjust, others as partial or powerless, still others as pitiless. Those that portray him as unjust are thoughts of greed and vainglory; those (that portray him) as partial are thoughts that come from second pride; (those that portray him) as powerless (are thoughts) from first pride;<sup>112</sup> (those that portray him) as without pity (are) the other thoughts.

50. Of the (various types of) thoughts, some travel along with us as monks; others (travel with us as) men of the world.<sup>113</sup>

51. Pleasure follows every thought except those (thoughts) of sadness.<sup>114</sup>

52. Of the (various types of) thoughts, some have prior imaginings of their own knowledge, others have the knowledge.

53. The first thought of all is that of love of self; after this, the eight.

54. Of the (various types of) thoughts, some arise from seeking, others from the common war.<sup>115</sup>

55. Of the (various types of) thoughts, some imprint their form on the reason; others do not. The ones that imprint their form are from sight; the ones that do not are from the other senses that travel along with us.

56. Of the (various types of) thoughts, some act according to nature, others, contrary to it. Those contrary to nature are from the concupiscible

<sup>112</sup> “Second pride . . . first pride”: see *Skemmata* 44. John Cassian distinguishes between spiritual and carnal pride, the first being against God, the second against human beings (*Institutes* 12.2.24; *Conferences* V.12). A very similar distinction appears in Dorotheos of Gaza, *Inst.* II.31–33, and is probably derived from Evagrius.

<sup>113</sup> “Monks . . . men of the world”: see *Praktikos* 48 (*Sources chrétiennes* 171.608; trans. Bamberger, 29): “The demons strive against men of the world chiefly through their deeds, but in the case of monks for the most part by means of thoughts, since the desert deprives them of such affairs.”

<sup>114</sup> See *Peri logismōn* 12 (*Sources chrétiennes* 438.192): “All the demons teach the soul to love pleasure; only the demon of sadness does not accept doing this, but goes on until it destroys the thoughts of those who are in the place . . . drying up every pleasure of the soul.” See *Skemmata* 61.

<sup>115</sup> *Codex Barb. gr.* 515 has “common enemy” rather “common war”; see Muyl-dermans, “Evagriana” 55, n. 42.

and the irascible; those (that are) natural arise from a father, a mother, a wife, or children.

57. Of the (various types of) thoughts, only those of vainglory and pride travel along with us after our conquest of the other thoughts.<sup>116</sup>

58. Common to all thoughts: causing injury over time.

59. Of the (various) passions that move (us), some are triggered by memory, others by the senses, others by demons.<sup>117</sup>

60. All impure thoughts enchain the mind, whether those from the concupiscible (part of the soul), those from the irascible, or those from sadness.

61. Only the thoughts from sadness are destructive of all the thoughts.<sup>118</sup>

62. Of the (various types of) representations, five are from the senses; ten are from memory. Of those (ten from memory), five are pure if one acts well, five are impure if one behaves badly.

(Of the various representations), there are five from angels—spiritual ones; and there are five from demons.

(Of the various representations), there are five from sight: from a good (memory) and an evil memory, from an angel; from a sight; and from demons. Of these (from sight), two are evil: those from an evil memory and from demons. Three are pure.

And twenty-eight are imageless.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>116</sup> See *Praktikos* 31 (Sources chrétiennes 171.573; trans. Bamberger, 24): “I have observed the demon of vainglory being chased by nearly all the other demons, and when his pursuers fell, shamelessly he drew near and unfolded a long list of his virtues”; *Peri logismōn* 15, *De octo spiritibus* 15; *Tractatus ad Eulogium* 20, 28.

<sup>117</sup> See *Praktikos* 4, 38.

<sup>118</sup> See *Skemmata* 51.

<sup>119</sup> The following two sentences appear after chapter 62 in the Syriac version of the *Skemmata* and, in Greek, in the *Codex Scorialensis* Y.III.4: “The demonic thought is the representation of a sense object exciting unnaturally the irascible and the concupiscible. A pig frequents the pigsty; so does the demon of lust; the wild boar is (the demon) of anger. The one that rips out their tusks by the power of God crushes their power.” See Muyldermans, *Evagriana syriaca* 37.