

Beholding the Luminous *Nous*:
Trinitarian and Demonic Light-Visions in Evagrius of Pontus' Prayer Trilogy

Thirza Buijx (s1062252)

Supervisor: Dr Elisabeth Hense

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Preface

I encountered Evagrius for the first time when listening to a lecture of Metropolitan Kallistos Ware on the *Philokalia*. In this lecture, he advised those interested in reading this compilation of key mystical texts of the Christian East to start with Evagrius. Thus, I gratefully followed his advice and have studied Evagrius ever since. Spending time with this fourth-century monastic has been like getting to know a friend: it has been a process of continuous surprises and discoveries, confusion, and joy.

Ultimately, this thesis is about a quest for God. Evagrius' descriptions of the “noetic heights” of spiritual experiences are not the culminative point, but rather a beginning. They mark the ascetic's initiation into divine mysteries and involve a fundamental transformation of the self. In this sense, this thesis is about the whole of the Christian life: the journey from Adam to Christ; to “strip off” the false layers of self and to be clothed in Christ.

However, this thesis is also about the struggle towards this high calling: the moments where you are not sure whether you have found God or whether you are still in the realm of illusions. Fundamentally, this touches upon the existential human problem of how to know whether your experience is real and truthful: whether your understanding of reality can be trusted. With the overflow of information at our disposal with the coming of the internet, these existential questions have received new meaning and relevance.

Having finished writing this thesis, I want to thank several people who have guided or helped me during the process. First of all, I want to thank dr. Elisabeth Hense for her numerous comments and suggestions throughout the process. Second, I want to thank father John Behr for acting as second reader and for his feedback on the research proposal and final draft. Lastly, I want to thank father Michael, Roghan, Michael, Candy, Timothy, André, Mijnke and Menna for being willing to proofread chapters of my thesis and for their critical remarks.

Introduction

In contemporary, “post-truth” society, where conspiracy theories seem to be thriving and where people can live in disparate truth bubbles through social media algorithms, the question of how to interpret experience or data has become of central importance. From Plato to modern psychotherapy, this question has been of prime concern to philosophers and truth-seekers throughout the ages. In particular, the question received considerable attention in early Christian desert monasticism, where delusion became a real and dangerous phenomenon.

One of the most influential figures for Christian monasticism who dealt extensively with this problem is Evagrius of Pontus—a fourth-century desert monastic and recluse, whose writings on the spiritual life have considerably influenced the monastic theology of subsequent ages.¹ His writings reveal a great fascination with the spiritual phenomenon of visions of divine light during prayer, but Evagrius also dealt extensively with the dangers of delusion, especially for monks prone to pride. His discussion on visions of demonically fabricated light has been one of the most explicit—yet least studied—expositions on delusion of early Christian mysticism.²

The most remarkable aspect of Evagrius’ treatises on visions of light during prayer is that there seems to be a great discrepancy within his work. On the one hand, in the treatises *On Thoughts* (Περὶ Λογισμῶν) and *Reflections* (Σκέμματα) he discusses Trinitarian light-visions with near-scientific precision. On the other, Evagrius seems to be being extremely suspicious towards light-visions in *On Prayer* (Περὶ Προσευχῆς), where he instead discusses the possibility of demonically manipulated visions of light.³ This discrepancy is even more surprising given the thematic proximity of these three Evagrian treatises, even to the point where the Benedictine scholar Columba Stewart has suggested viewing these three works as a “trilogy on (...) prayer”.⁴

Status Quaestionis

Scholarly inquiry into Evagrius has largely overlooked this discrepancy in Evagrius, with two exceptions. Firstly, Stewart wrote:

In at least one way, *On Prayer* stands apart from the way Evagrius writes about prayer in his other works. Almost everywhere else he describes an experience of seeing light during prayer.

¹ Evagrius has shaped monastic theology both in East and West, through the teachings of John Cassian. Placide Deseille, *La Spiritualité Orthodoxe et la Philocalie*, (Paris : Éditions Albin Michel : 2003) 26.

² While delusion was a common theme in stories about desert monastics , Evagrius’ prayer trilogy is one of the rare instances where delusional light-visions are discussed in such great depth.

³ Sinkewicz was the first to provide the title of *Reflections* for the treatise previously known as *Skemmata*. Evagrius of Pontus, *The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz, Oxford Early Christian Studies, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 210.

⁴ Columba Stewart, “Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 2 (2001): 182.

The only references to this “light of the mind” (...) in *On Prayer* are warnings against the way demons manipulate it to suggest the illusion of spiritual progress.⁵

Secondly, Kevin Corrigan mentions the possibility of delusional light-visions: “Evagrius is ambivalent, probably because the cause of vision is not guaranteed; the mind may be manipulated by demons and can need angelic visitation to restore its own light (cf. *Pr.* 73, 74)”.⁶ Nevertheless, both Stewart and Corrigan do not provide an analysis of the passages on delusional light-visions in *On Prayer*. Casiday, likewise, while he quotes *On Prayer* 74, where Evagrius mentions the demonically manipulated vision of light around the *nous*, does not further analyze this passage.⁷ On the other hand, Irénée Hausherr has provided some analysis of *On Prayer* 73-4 in his influential *Les Leçons d’Un Contemplatif*, but he mainly remains on the level of signaling parallels within Evagrius’ works and does not develop his analysis any further.⁸ Paul Géhin, in his notes on Evagrius’ *Chapitres sur la Prières* similarly points out Evagrius’ parallels for *On Prayer* 73-4, without further analyzing the passage.⁹ Hence, a sustained analysis on the passages on demonic light-visions in Evagrius is still missing.

By contrast, the scholarly literature on Trinitarian light-visions in *On Thoughts* and *Reflections* is vast. The main contributions to this segment of the field are of Antoine Guillaumont, William Harmless and Raymond Fitzgerald, Columba Stewart, Julia Konstantinovskiy, Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, Augustine Casiday, and Ann Conway-Jones.¹⁰ The main discussion between these authors concerns the origins of Evagrius’ descriptions of light-visions and the origin of this light within the Evagrian framework. Guillaumont, for example, in his article “La vision de l’intellect par lui-même”, has suggested that Evagrius’ descriptions of light-visions, while based on personal experience, are communicated through philosophical—mainly Plotinian—language.¹¹ Stewart and Konstantinovskiy,

⁵ Stewart, “Imageless”, 184.

⁶ Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius, and Gregory: Mind Soul and Body in the 4th Century*, (Farnham/ Burlington: Ashgate, 2009) 171.

⁷ Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius Ponticus: Beyond Heresy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 179.

⁸ Irénée Hausherr, *Les Leçons d’Un Contemplatif: Le Traité de l’Oraison d’Evagre le Pontique*, (Paris: Beuchesne, 1960) 104-8.

⁹ Evagrius of Pontus, *Chapitres sur la Prière*, ed. Paul Géhin, Sources Chrétiennes 589, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2017) 287-9, note 73-4.

¹⁰ Antoine Guillaumont, “La vision de l’intellect par lui-même dans la mystique Évagrienne”, *Études sur la Spiritualité de l’Orient Chrétien*, Spiritualité Orientale no. 66, (Bégrolles-en-Mauges : Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1966) 143-150. William Harmless and Raymond R. Fitzgerald, “The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The Skemmata of Evagrius Ponticus,” *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 498-529. Stewart, “Imageless,” 173-204. Julia Konstantinovskiy, “Chapter 4: The Intellect’s Vision of Light”, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009) 77-107. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, “The Limit of the Mind (NOYΣ): Pure Prayer according to Evagrius Ponticus and Isaac of Nineveh,” *Journal of Ancient Christianity* 15, no. 2 (2011): 291-321. Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 179-184. Ann Conway-Jones, ““The Greatest Paradox of All”: The “Place of God” in the Mystical Theologies of Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrius of Pontus,” *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 5, no. 2 (2018): 259-279.

¹¹ Guillaumont, “La vision de l’intellect,” 148-9.

however, have brought more nuance to the discussion of the influences on Evagrius' descriptions of light-visions, by arguing for the importance of Scripture instead of philosophy on this particular aspect of his teachings.¹² The other question is that of the origin of the light contemplated during light-visions, i.e. whether it comes from God, the *nous* (the faculty of the soul that prays and, when purified, contemplates God during prayer), or both. This question particularly occupied Evagrius, as he underwent an eighteen-day long journey through the Egyptian desert to ask the elder John of Lycopolis about his understanding of the origin of the light.¹³ Various scholars have argued that Evagrius, unsatisfied with the answer of the elder, tried to answer the question himself, though they have different interpretations as to what Evagrius' conclusion was.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the possibility of demonic origination has largely been neglected in these discussions.

Apart from these inquiries into Evagrius' light-mysticism, scholarly literature has also studied the role of virtues such as compunction and humility in Evagrius to alter the common perception of Evagrius as overly Stoic.¹⁵ This outdated perception of Evagrius portrays him as advocating an "almost inhuman" ascetic ideal beyond human feeling and emotion that is incompatible with the Christian message of love.¹⁶ While these re-evaluations of the role of emotive virtues in Evagrius study many of the same texts as the literature on Evagrian light-mysticism, these two strands of research have never been connected.

Research problem

This brief survey of the secondary literature on Evagrius' ascetical-mystical theology reveals several problems. First of all, while Evagrius' discussion on visions of light within his prayer trilogy contains a discrepancy of Evagrius' initial fascination and later suspicion towards light-visions, this

¹² Stewart, "Imageless," 194-5. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 97-102.

¹³ Harmless and Fitzgerald, "Sapphire," 512. Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 181.

¹⁴ Harmless and Fitzgerald, "Sapphire," 513. Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 181-2. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 94-7.

¹⁵ Kevin Corrigan and Yuri Glazov, "Compunction and Compassion: Two Overlooked Virtues in Evagrius of Pontus," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 22, no. 1 (2014): 61-77. Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 159-164.

¹⁶ Corrigan and Glazov, "Compunction and Compassion," 62. Corrigan and Glazov mention Von Balthasar's "Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Pontikus" as prime example, but also reference Andrew Louth, Rowan Williams, and Antoine Guillaumont as proponents of this Stoic characterization. They, however, only provide page numbers for where this characterization can be found in Balthasar and it remains unclear where in Louth, Williams and Guillaumont this can be found. What is more, Williams seems to be suggesting exactly the opposite as he writes: "when *apatheia* is attained, 'love' results". The Stoic portrayal of Evagrius likewise seems to be absent from Louth's analysis of Evagrius in *Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*. However, it is plausible that Guillaumont advocates this Stoic portrayal of Evagrius in *Les 'Kephalai Gnostica', le Gnostique, or un philosophe au désert*, but this requires further verification. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, "Metaphysik und Mystik des Evagrius Pontikus," 31-47. Rowan Williams, *Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross*, (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2003), 66. Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) 106-7. Antoine Guillaumont, *Les 'Kephalai Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origenisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*, Patristica Sorbonensia, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1962). Evagrius of Pontus, *Le Gnostique ou à celui qui est venu digne de la science*, trans. Antoine and Claire Guillaumont, Sources Chrétiennes 356 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1989). Antoine Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert: Évagre le Pontique*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2004).

discrepancy has received little attention in Evagrian scholarship. Evagrius' passages on Trinitarian light-visions are widely studied but are one-sided as they neglect to discuss Evagrius' suspicion concerning light-visions in *On Prayer*. The passages on demonic light-visions, by contrast, have not yet been studied in-depth, as the notes of Géhin and Hausherr on the subject only remain on the level of signaling parallels. Moreover, the literature on Evagrius' ascetical-mystical theology is divided between those studying his light-mysticism and those studying emotive virtues in Evagrius' texts on prayer.

The problem of the current literature on Evagrius' light-visions is that it does not provide a full picture of his teaching on the subject, due to a lack of attention paid to demonic light-visions. This one-sided approach is, furthermore, methodologically insufficient, as it is precisely through the contrast that studying demonic light-visions provides that it becomes clear what authentic light-visions are and what they are not. The problem of these two completely alienated strands of research—one on Evagrius' light-mysticism, the other on the emotive virtues of compunction and humility—is that they have never been connected, while they study the same texts (*On Prayer* being the common denominator). In this thesis I principally argue that Evagrius' light-mysticism cannot be properly understood without recourse to his descriptions of demonic light-visions. I, furthermore, argue that Evagrius' discourse on demonic light-visions and on compunction and humility in *On Prayer* are inherently intertwined.

Research questions

The fundamental question that this thesis tries to answer is:

- “How does the conjunctive study of Evagrius' teaching on demonic light-visions and their remedies in *On Prayer* and Trinitarian light-visions in *Thoughts-Reflections* help to better understand Evagrius' teaching on and attitude towards light-visions?”

This research question has two components: how the conjunctive study illumines our understanding of Trinitarian light-visions *and* demonic light-visions in Evagrius.

In order to answer this fundamental question, I will first answer the following sub-questions:

- First: “what are the important elements of Evagrius' life, works, and terminology relevant to the discussion of his teaching on light-visions?”
- Second: “What is Evagrius' teaching on Trinitarian light-visions in *Thoughts-Reflections*?”
- Third: “What is Evagrius' teaching on demonic light-visions in *On Prayer*, and how can demonic light-visions be distinguished from Trinitarian light-visions?”
- And fourth: “How do the themes of compunction and humility in Evagrius' work *On Prayer* relate to his teaching on light-visions?”

Aims of this study

Through studying both Trinitarian and demonic light-visions, this thesis aims to arrive at a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of Evagrius' light-mysticism. The holistic inquiry into Evagrius' teaching on light-visions is two-fold: fundamentally, it aims to provide a balanced account of Evagrius' descriptions of Trinitarian light-visions, arguing for the importance of both Scripture and philosophy in his Trinitarian light-mysticism, and evaluating various possibilities regarding the origin of the light that is contemplated during light-visions. Moreover, this thesis aims to provide a sustained analysis of Evagrius' descriptions of demonic light-visions in *On Prayer* that has hitherto been lacking. By studying both Trinitarian and demonic instances of light-visions in Evagrius' writings, this thesis aims to provide a more comprehensive account of Evagrius' light-mysticism, which may provide new ways of understanding light-mysticism as a whole. Thus, Evagrius' teaching on demonic light-visions will be used as an *alto-relievo* for understanding Trinitarian light-visions, as they show what Trinitarian light-visions are not.

Though contemporary Evagrian scholarship is in a heated debate concerning the justifiability of Evagrius' condemnation as a heretic by the fifth Ecumenical Council, an evaluation of Evagrian heterodoxy is beyond the scope of this research. As O'Laughlin has noted, the two camps of the Evagrian heterodoxy debate come to different conclusions regarding Evagrius' orthodoxy, because they focus on different parts of the Evagrian *corpus*, studying either his ascetical-mystical treatises or his dogmatic treatises.¹⁷ A similar problem occurs in the study of Evagrius' light-mysticism, as scholars have only studied *Thoughts* and *Reflections* in-depth, while only briefly brushing over if not completely bypassing his discussion of light-visions in *On Prayer*.

To some extent, Evagrius' status as a heretic is relevant to the study of his light-mysticism, because, for Evagrius, theology and prayer are inextricably linked. The logical consequence of this would be that flawed theology implies a deficiency in one's prayer-life. This underlines what is at stake for Evagrius in his discussion of Trinitarian and demonic visions of super-natural light: delusion is not only dangerous for one's sanity and salvation, it can lead one into to heresy. Nevertheless, it would be unfair to evaluate Evagrius' status as a heretic in this thesis, as this would necessitate a discussion of the full Evagrian corpus, while this thesis only discusses his ascetical-mystical works.

While a thesis such as this that studies a figure removed from us by sixteen centuries might appear to be completely irrelevant to the twenty-first century, the discussion of spiritual experiences and delusion can be relevant to today's society as well. Ultimately, this thesis aims to contribute to the discussion of discernment of spiritual experiences, both within a pastoral and clinical context. Evagrius' discussion of light-visions touches upon fundamental philosophical questions—such as the

¹⁷ Those in favor of interpreting Evagrius' in an orthodox way do so based on his ascetical/mystical treatises, such as the *Praktikos* or *Antirrhetikos*, while those studying his doctrinal works (principally the *Kephalaia Gnostica*) emphasize Evagrius's heterodoxy. Konstantinovsky summarizing O'Laughlin. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 6.

relation between language and experience, and the evaluation of one's interpretation of reality— questions that are of critical importance to a pluralistic, postmodern society such as ours. It is precisely Evagrius' antiquity that makes studying him all the more relevant, because texts from a different era can provide new ways of looking at contemporary problems.

Sources

The primary sources used in this thesis are Evagrius' works *On Thoughts, Reflections* and *On Prayer* (abbreviated *Thoughts-Reflections* and *Prayer*) in the translation of Dysinger.¹⁸ Dysinger's translation is chosen primarily because of its technical precision, as it systematically transliterates important concepts such as that of the *nous* (νοῦς), rather than translating them. His translation is, furthermore, the most recent translation and it incorporates several English translations, principally the ones of Sinkewicz. Moreover, Dysinger's translation, though perhaps not as polished as other translations, remains very close to the Greek, while still being readable. The references to the Greek version of the texts are, likewise from Dysinger, who draws from multiple manuscripts for his edition of the Greek text.¹⁹

The most important secondary sources to be used are those concerning light-visions and have already been introduced in the *status quaestionis*. The main secondary sources to be used for the discussion of Evagrius' teaching on Trinitarian light-visions are the books or articles of Guillaumont, Harmless and Fitzgerald, Stewart, Konstantinovsky, Bitton-Ashkelony, Casiday, and Conway-Jones.²⁰

¹⁸ Evagrius, "Peri Logismon: *De Malignis Cogitationibus*: On [Tempting-] Thoughts", trans. Luke Dysinger, accessed December 18, 2020, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Peri-Log/00a_start.htm. Evagrius, "Reflections: *Skemmata* (Σκέμματα)", trans. Luke Dysinger, accessed December 18, 2020, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm. Evagrius, "On Prayer: Περὶ προσευχῆς", trans. Luke Dysinger, accessed December 18, 2020, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm. References to other works of Evagrius will also be from Dysinger's website. Luke Dysinger, "St. Evagrius Ponticus", accessed December 18, 2020, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/00a_start.htm.

¹⁹ Concerning his Greek edition of *On Thoughts*, Dysinger writes: "the Greek text below is based on Migne, the Philokalia, and Muyltermans: it has been superceded by the critical edition of Guillaumont; and revision in accordance with the critical edition is ongoing". The critical edition Dysinger is referring to is that of Géhin and the Guillaumonts. Evagrius of Pontus, *Sur Les Pensées*, ed. P. Géhin, Claire and Antoine Guillaumont, Sources Chrétiennes 438, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998) 148-301. Evagrius, "Peri Logismon: On [Tempting] Thoughts," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 19, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Peri-Log/00a_start.htm. Dysinger lists the following works as sources for his Greek edition of *Reflections*: "Muyltermans, "Evagriana," *Le Muséon* 44, 37-68; 369-383 [Muy]. Cod. Barb. Lat. 3024. *Evagrii Monachi Capita Cognoscitiva*. Franz Diekamp, *Doctrina Patrum de Incarnatione Verbum, Ein griechisches Florilegium aus der Wende des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts*, Münster, 1981, pp. 248-267; W. Frankenberg, *Evagrius Ponticus*, "Cent. Suppl." Abhandlung der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, Neue Folge, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 452-467, (Berlin, 1912) . Sinkewicz, , (2003) *Reflections*, 210-216; 304-305". Evagrius, "Skemmata/ Reflections," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 19, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm. Concerning his Greek edition of *On Prayer*, Dysinger writes: "The Greek text below is based on: PG 79.1165-1200; *Philokalia*; and Tugwell. it [sic] has been updated according to the critical edition of Géhin (SC 589)". For the critical edition Dysinger is referring to see Evagrius of Pontus, *Chapitres sur la Prière*, 218-371. Evagrius, "On Prayer," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 19, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

²⁰ Guillaumont, "la vision de l'intellect," 143-150. Harmless and Fitzgerald, "Sapphire," 498-529. Stewart, "Imageless," 73-204. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 77-107. Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind," 291-321. Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 179-184. Conway-Jones, "The Greatest Paradox," 259-279.

Second, the analysis of Evagrius' descriptions of demonic light-visions will be primarily based on Hausherr's preliminary analysis and Géhin's notes.²¹ Thirdly, the discussion concerning the interrelation between compunction, humility and delusion will use Casiday's section on emotions in *On Prayer*, and Corrigan and Glazov's article on compunction and humility in Evagrius' works.

Methodology

There are four aspects to the methodology of this thesis. First of all, this thesis uses the classic method in Evagrian studies of using "Evagrius to interpret Evagrius"—a method used by Guillaumont, Hausherr, and Bunge (among others).²² In the case of this thesis, *On Thoughts* and *Reflections* are used to open up the opaque passages in *On Prayer* concerning demonic light-visions and *On Prayer* is used to shed light on obscurities in *Thoughts* and *Reflections*.

This thesis, secondly, treats *Thoughts* and *Reflections* on the same level, as they discuss many similar topics while treating *On Prayer* as a more mature work than the previous two. Stewart, Harmless, and Fitzgerald have pointed out the many overlapping passages in *Thoughts* and *Reflections* that are identical, but they have drawn different conclusions from this.²³ Stewart has taken these overlapping passages to suggest that *Thoughts* was composed before *Reflections* as "three of the sentences [in *Reflections*, TB] are also found in *On the Thoughts* as parts of longer chapters".²⁴ Harmless and Fitzgerald, on the other hand, offered two explanations: the first, in line with Stewart, that *On Thoughts* preceded *Reflections*; the second, by contrast, that *Reflections* was written before *On Thoughts* as a "preliminary sketch".²⁵ Regardless of which preceded which, the overlap in the two works suggests that they were written around the same time.

However, in *On Prayer*, Evagrius develops many themes of *On Thoughts* and *Reflection* into greater depth—suggesting *On Prayer* to be the fruit of more mature consideration. Evagrius himself brings attention to *On Prayer*'s more developed status as he writes in *On Thoughts* that the explanation for "why dwelling on ideas of sensory objects destroys true knowledge of God" will be developed in *On Prayer*.²⁶ Casiday and Guillaumont have argued that "*Prayer* is at least no earlier than *Thoughts*", while Sinkewicz suggests that both works were "being written or at least planned at the same time".²⁷ Sinkewicz is right in suggesting that Evagrius must have had *On Prayer* in mind

²¹ Hausherr, *Leçons*, 104-8. Evagrius, *Chapitres sur la Prières*, 287-9, note 73-4.

²² Harmless and Fitzgerald, "Sapphire", 507. Bunge similarly stated: "Il n'y a pas de meilleur interprète d'Évagre, qu'Évagre lui-même" (There is no better interpreter of Evagrius than Evagrius himself). Gabriel Bunge, "Hénade ou monade? Au sujet de deux notions centrales de la terminologie évagrienne", *Le Muséon* 102 (1989): 90.

²³ Stewart, "Imageless," 183. Harmless and Fitzgerald, "Sapphire," 508.

²⁴ Stewart, "Imageless", 183.

²⁵ Harmless and Fitzgerald, "Sapphire", 508.

²⁶ Evagrius, "*On Thoughts* 22," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 11, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Perilog/00a_start.htm.

²⁷ Augustine Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 219, note 40. Guillaumont wrote, similarly: "le traité *Sur les Pensées* doit être considéré, au moins dans sa recension courte, comme antérieur à

while writing *On Thoughts*, as he, otherwise, would not have mentioned it, but this does not exclude the possibility that *On Thoughts* was written before *On Prayer*.²⁸ Apart from the link between sensory ideas and the knowledge of God that *Prayer* discusses more deeply than *Thoughts*, *On Prayer*, in general, seems to be a more refined work, dealing with many issues probed in *Thoughts* and *Reflections*, but in greater depth and clarity.

Thirdly, this thesis uses close textual analysis of the texts concerning light-visions in Evagrius' prayer trilogy, by paying specific attention to the vocabulary he uses and the connotations and implications of specific words and terms. Given the abundance of research on light-visions in *Thoughts* and *Reflections*, chapter two will primarily discuss Evagrius' teaching on Trinitarian light-visions in these two works through the lens of the debates in secondary Evagrius scholarship. These debates concern the influence of philosophy and Scripture on Evagrius' teaching on light-visions and Evagrius' own position concerning the origin of the light contemplated during light-visions. Nevertheless, chapter two will also incorporate a textual analysis of primary texts, especially to evaluate the positions of secondary scholarship.

Because of the lack of a sustained analysis of demonic light-visions in *On Prayer*, chapter three will primarily consist of close textual analysis. The chapters of *On Prayer* were coded according to their main themes and an index of the most relevant passages concerning delusion has been made (see Appendix). The notes of Géhin and Hausherr were, moreover, used to spot parallels for Evagrius' discussion of demonic light-visions in *Prayer* 73-4. Chapter four will, likewise, primarily consist of a close textual analysis of primary texts with reference to secondary literature—mainly Casiday's exposition prayer and the emotions, and Corrigan and Glazov's article on compunction.

Fourth, it must be noted that this thesis approaches Evagrius primarily through a philological-theological lens, rather than a political or psychological framework. This lens seems to be most relevant, as this thesis has Evagrius' mystical theory in the foreground. Nevertheless, historical, philosophical and psychological issues will be discussed where appropriate. To enhance technical precision, I will systematically transcribe important terms such as *nous*, rather than translating it with "mind" or "intellect", as these translations misleadingly suggest intellectuality, while the *nous*, in Evagrius' works, is a mystical faculty, whereby the human being is able to meet the divine in prayer. Throughout this thesis, Greek words will be transcribed, while giving the Greek between brackets where needed.

celui *Sur la prière*". Antoine Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 165. Sinkewicz, note 32, *Evagrius of Pontus*, 270.

²⁸ Dysinger, however, argues that the cross-reference "implies that it [*On Prayer*, TB] is a treatise he has already written", but this is not necessarily the case, for Evagrius might also have written *On Thoughts* with *On Prayer* in mind, rather than having actually written *On Prayer*. Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 26.

Main hypothesis

The main hypothesis of this thesis is that Evagrius' discussion on delusional light-visions in *On Prayer* brings his teachings on Trinitarian light-visions "down to earth", providing a counter-balance for the lofty states described in *Thoughts* and *Reflections*. This does not necessarily mean that *On Prayer* was written prior to *Thoughts-Reflections*, but rather that it functions as a counter-balance to the descriptions of lofty spiritual experiences in *Thoughts-Reflections*.

Overview

In this thesis, I will introduce in chapter one elements of Evagrius' life, works and terminology that are relevant for the discussion of the subsequent chapters. In chapter two, I will discuss Evagrius' teaching on Trinitarian light-visions in *On Thoughts* and *Reflections*. In chapter three, I will discuss Evagrius' teaching on demonic light-visions in *On Prayer* and how demonic light-visions can be distinguished from Trinitarian light-visions. Thus, chapter three provides an *alto-relievo* that helps us to better understand Evagrius' teaching on Trinitarian light-visions, as discussed in chapter two. In chapter four, I will continue to discuss Evagrius' teaching on demonic light-visions by demonstrating how the themes of compunction and humility in *On Prayer* are intimately related to Evagrius' discussion of demonic light-visions and delusion in this work.

Chapter 1. Evagrius of Pontus: Life, Works, and Terminology

This chapter introduces Evagrius' life, his works, and his general terminology. The first section will discuss Evagrius' life and his condemnation as a heretic in 553; the second section will discuss Evagrius' works and thought; and the third section will introduce key terms in Evagrian terminology—*katastasis*, *noemata*, and *prayer* (προσευχή)—relevant to the discussion of chapters two and three. Sections one and two give special attention to influences on Evagrius, as this will be particularly important in the coming two chapters.

1.1 Life and Condemnation of Evagrius

Born and raised in the Roman province of Pontus around 345, Evagrius went to Constantinople at a later age, where he was ordained a lector by Basil the Great and a deacon by Gregory of Nazianzen, both of whom are supposed to have “played a significant role in Evagrius’s early formation”, though this is contested.²⁹ Regardless of who tutored him, it is clear from Evagrius’s writings that he had enjoyed an excellent education in Greek philosophy, mathematics, and rhetoric.³⁰ Palladius’ quasi-hagiographical account of Evagrius’ life mentions that Evagrius was “intoxicated with vainglory” and that a moral crisis—a love affair with a wealthy woman—led Evagrius to flee into the desert, encouraged by a vision of an angel.³¹ In the Egyptian desert, Evagrius was steeped in the culture of early desert monasticism, where he was under the spiritual guidance of the two Macarii—Macarius the Great and Macarius the Alexandrian.³² Soon, Evagrius himself became a respected spiritual guide, sought by many. With these disciples Evagrius had lively discussions on the various trials and temptations that these desert monastics faced.³³ Apart from philosophy and practical ascetic wisdom, Evagrius was deeply immersed in Scripture through the monastic offices and meditation on Scriptural

²⁹ While Konstantinovsky boldly asserts that Gregory and Basil “played a significant role in Evagrius’s early formation”, Bunge writes that “rien ne permet de vérifier ce détail” concerning Gregorian formation (formation by Basil seems to be even less certain). Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 13. Gabriel Bunge, *Akèdia : La Doctrine Spirituelle d’Évagre le Pontique sur l’Acédie*, trans. Adalbert de Vogüé, *Spiritualité Orientale*, no. 52, (Bégrolles-en-Mauges : Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 1991), 21. A more detailed exposition of Evagrius’ life can be found in the books just mentioned by Konstantinovsky and Bunge. See also Mark DeCogliano, “The Quest for Evagrius of Pontus: A Historiographical Essay,” *The American Benedictine Review* 62, no. 4 (2011): 387-401.

³⁰ Evagrius opens his famous chapters *On Prayer* with a lengthy and complicated discussion on the symbolic meaning of numbers, suggesting a great affinity with arithmetic. The often philosophically laden terms used in Evagrius works suggest profound immersion in Antique philosophy and his eloquence and Heraclitan-like aphoristic brevity, suggests that he had been educated in rhetoric, though this can also be contested, as his style seems to be so different from the lengthy expositions usual in his time.

³¹ Palladius, “38. Evagrius 8,” *Lausiaca History*, trans. Robert T. Meyer, (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1965) 112. The importance of vainglory in Evagrius’ life will also prove important in the discussion on demonic light-visions.

³² David Brakke, “The Gnostic Evagrius Ponticus” in *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006) 50. For the Macarian influence on Evagrius see Bunge, “Évagre et les deux Macaire,” *Irénikon* 56 (1983): 323-60.

³³ Brakke mentions that the Coptic version of the Palladian *vita* of Evagrius mentions that Evagrius “would lead all-night discussion groups on Saturday evening, in which monks would reveal their thoughts and share methods of coping with them” and Brakke suggests that the discussions with these monks “must have been the primary source” for Evagrius’ demonology. Brakke, “Gnostic”, 50-51.

passages.³⁴ He, furthermore, spent his days copying ancient texts—another indication of his profound knowledge of Scripture—, providing spiritual direction and writing.³⁵

While Evagrius was a respected spiritual guide during his life and in the early years afterward, the tides soon began to turn against him, leading to his ultimate condemnation by the fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 AD for his association with Origenist teachings, most notably Origen’s idea of universal salvation (*apokatastasis*) and the pre-existence of souls.³⁶ Modern scholarship debates the justifiability of this condemnation—i.e. whether what Evagrius is condemned for can actually be found in his writings or whether these condemnations are directed against a form of Evagrianism alien to Evagrius himself. However, this question is beyond the scope of this thesis.³⁷ As this thesis only studies Evagrius’ mystical works it would be unfair to judge Evagrius’ status as a heretic without reference to his doctrinal works.

1.2 Works and Thought of Evagrius

Apart from his trilogy on prayer, Evagrius also wrote another, perhaps more famous trilogy, constituted of the *Praktikos*, *Gnostikos*, and *Kephalaia Gnostica*—the latter of which plays a central role in the scholarly debate concerning Evagrius’ condemnation as a heretic. In these three works, Evagrius lays out a three-fold spiritual method, where the spiritual aspirant has to go through the stage of *praktikos*, ascetic practice and purification, to the state of *gnostikos*, of illumination with divine knowledge (*gnosis*). Both elements of the spiritual life play an important role in his trilogy on prayer, where Evagrius discusses both the struggle with the thoughts and passions (especially in *On Thoughts*) and the beginnings of illumination—both literal illumination by the light of the Holy Trinity and gnostic illumination with divine knowledge. Evagrius’ influential classification of the eight evil thoughts (*logismoi*) in his *Praktikos* also underlies *On Thoughts* and *Reflections*, where he develops

³⁴ Stewart notes that the “Coptic version of Evagrius’ life records that he fought off sleep by spending most of the night walking in his courtyard “meditating and praying,” “making his intellect search out contemplations of the Scriptures.” Stewart, “Imageless,” 185.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 184-5. Harmless and Fitzgerald, furthermore, note that Evagrius “made his living as a calligrapher and copyist”. Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire,” 500.

³⁶ For a detailed history of the events leading up to Evagrius’ condemnation see Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 14-22.

³⁷ The main question of this debate centers around the reliability of a Syriac version of the *Kephalaia Gnostica* (*KG*), discovered by Guillaumont, that coincides the anathema’s of the fifth ecumenical council. Bunge has fervently rejected the reliability of this Syriac version of the *KG* and has argued in favor of Evagrius’ orthodoxy. Those following Guillaumont’s interpretation argue for the justifiability of Evagrius’ condemnation as a heretic, are, for example Clark and O’Laughlin; Casiday is one of the main followers of Bunge in arguing against the heterological interpretation. Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1992). Michael O’Laughlin, “Origenism in the desert: anthropology and integration in Evagrius Ponticus”, (Th.D. diss, Harvard University, 1987). See especially Casiday’s most recent work *Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius Ponticus: Beyond Heresy*. An excellent (though colored) overview of the current debate in secondary Evagrian scholarship can be found in the following two articles of Casiday. Augustine Casiday, “Gabriel Bunge and the Study of Evagrius Ponticus: Review Article”, *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 48, no.2 (2004): 249-297. Augustine Casiday, “On Heresy in Modern Patristic Scholarship: The Case of Evagrius Ponticus,” *The Heythrop Journal* 53, no. 2 (2012): 241-252.

how the various evil thoughts interact and how they can be remedied. His classification of the eight thoughts also ties in with his emphasis on the importance of *apatheia*, an originally Stoic term denoting “freedom from domination by the passions”, in the spiritual life.³⁸

The importance Evagrius placed on Scripture can not only be deduced from the numerous citations from or allusions to Scripture in all his works but also from his lengthy commentaries, the so-called *scholia*, on the Psalms, Job, and other Scriptural texts—many of which have, unfortunately, been lost.³⁹ Next to Scripture and Hellenic Philosophy, Evagrius’ immersion into desert monasticism is also present in his writings, where multiple passages bear strong resemblance with the literary genre of *Apophthegmata*, short practical stories about monks or what they taught.⁴⁰ Apart from the treatises already mentioned, Evagrius wrote many letters and was in correspondence with important figures of his time (not in the least Melania the elder and Rufinus). His chapters *On Prayer* are a prominent example of a treatise that was originally written as a letter, but it is contested to whom it was addressed.⁴¹

While there is no established chronology of Evagrius’ works, various attempts of a relative chronology have been made. Guillaumont, Casiday (following Guillaumont), and Stewart believe the trilogy of *Praktikos*, *Gnostikos*, and the *Kephalaia Gnostica* to be the first trilogy and consider the prayer trilogy to be written “toward the end of his life”.⁴² Dysinger, however, contests this by pointing out that “evidence that the *Kephalaia Gnostica* predates *Peri Logismon* [*On Thoughts*, TB] is presently lacking” and instead argues that *On Thoughts* was written before *Kephalaia Gnostica*.⁴³ Regardless of whether all three works of the prayer trilogy were written after all three works of the

³⁸ Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer*, 28.

³⁹ Dysinger observes that Evagrius’ *scholia* on the Psalms is his longest preserved work. He, furthermore, discusses that Evagrius “probably also wrote scholia on the Song of Songs and perhaps on other biblical books”. Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer*, 23.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Praktikos* 91-100 and *On Prayer* 106-112. While Louth, Harmless, and Fitzgerald only identify *Praktikos* 91-100 as *Apophthegmata*-like, Dysinger also classifies certain passages in *On Prayer* (from 106 onwards) that recount stories of monastics undistractedly enduring physical temptations during prayer as *Apophthegmata*. I would suggest that a classification of these Evagrian *Apophthegmata* in *On Prayer* stop at 112, as that is the last chapter that recounts such stories. Andrew Louth, “The literature of the monastic movement”, *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frances Young, as. Augustine Casiday, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 378. Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire,” 505. Evagrius, “On Prayer,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 18, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

⁴¹ Sinkewicz suggests that Evagrius wrote his chapters *On Prayer* to Rufinus, as the correspondent had to be “someone advanced in the spiritual life” and “able to appreciate (...) the complexities of number symbolism”. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, 184.

⁴² Casiday, following Guillaumont, writes: “Evagrius wrote *Praktikos* and *Gnostikos* between 383 and 393, but *Prayer*, *Antirrhethikos* and *Skemmata* ‘toward the end of his life’ (c. 399)”. This is a slightly imprecise paraphrasing of Guillaumont, who suggested that after 394, Evagrius wrote the second redaction of *Praktikos*, followed by the first redaction of *On Thoughts*, succeeded by *On Prayer* (in turn followed by the second redaction of *On Thoughts*), and Guillaumont only mentions *Antirrhethikos* (a work where Evagrius explains his method of counter-attacking the demons with the use of Scriptural texts) and Evagrius’ *Letter to Melania* to have been written “vers la fin de la vie d’Évagre”. Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 169-170. Stewart, suggests that the prayer trilogy was written after “at least the first two parts of Evagrius’ more famous trilogy”, i.e. after *Praktikos* and *Gnostikos*. Stewart, “Imageless,” 182.

⁴³ Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer*, 26, note 76.

Praktikos-Gnostikos trilogy, it seems that especially *On Prayer* was written towards the end of Evagrius' life, as many of the themes of other works culminate in *On Prayer*, suggesting it to be the "fruit of his mature consideration".⁴⁴

Evagrius, notably, uses a distinct style of *kephalaia*: short, aphoristic chapters that are seemingly disjointed.⁴⁵ Andrew Louth comments on this style by stating: "The idea of brief chapters recalls earlier examples of 'gnomic' wisdom, for example, the book of Proverbs, or the sayings of such a one as Heraclitus, but more significantly, it reminds one of the sayings of the Desert Fathers".⁴⁶ While these chapters may seem to be disjointed, Evagrius interweaves these various disjointed *kephalaia* with key words and concepts, so that a running thread, a narrative or philosophical arc, can be seen behind this style. Such a narrative arc can be seen especially in *On Prayer*, where Evagrius often discusses a theme in multiple sequential chapters, that gradually build toward the next theme.⁴⁷ *On Prayer* can, furthermore, be seen as a consistent attempt to answer the question posed in the beginning of the treatise concerning the Evagrian method of prayer.⁴⁸ Thus, while Evagrius' style might seem disjoint at first glance, a closer look, in fact, reveals "vast coherent landscape" as Harmless and Fitzgerald have put it.⁴⁹ The way in which Evagrius weaves his *kephalaia* together via key words and concepts will become clear in the following chapters.

The problem with Evagrius' aphoristic style, however, is that it is often taken as indication of secret, esoteric teaching. Recent scholarship, however, seems to be more and more favorable towards the characterization of Evagrius as a "spiritual guide", who revealed his teachings according to the degree of spiritual advancement of his recipient.⁵⁰ This latter interpretation is especially relevant for the discrepancy in Evagrius' prayer trilogy concerning the discussion of demonic and Trinitarian light-visions, as one possible explanation of this discrepancy could be related to the spiritual proficiency of the reader. The discussion of the various influences on Evagrius' light-vision teaching in chapter two provides an alternative interpretation of the meaning of Evagrius' enigmatic style.

⁴⁴ Stewart, "Imageless," 183.

⁴⁵ There are, nevertheless, also differences in Evagrius style. *On Thoughts*, for instance, consists of multiple-paragraph chapters, while his *Reflections* are more gnomic in character.

⁴⁶ Louth, *Origins*, 102.

⁴⁷ These themes are principally: compunction/tears, anger, watchfulness, delusion and prayer.

⁴⁸ Namely "what stable state [καταστάσεως, TB] must the *nous* possess to be capable of stretching out unwaveringly toward its own Master and converse with him without any intermediary?". Evagrius, "On Prayer 3," trans. Dysinger, accessed January 4, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

⁴⁹ Harmless and Fitzgerald, "Sapphire," 507.

⁵⁰ The most recent example of this "school" of Evagrian characterization is Costache's article, in which he writes: Evagrius's "supposedly metaphysical speculations in *Chapters* were written for advanced students, whom he trained in heuristic pedagogy, to read between the lines and to decode puzzles". Duru Costache, "A Note on Evagrius' Cosmological and Metaphysical Statements", *Journal of Theological Studies* 71, no. 2 (2021 forthcoming) flaa143: 12, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flaa143>. Other examples of this "school" of Evagrian characterization are Darling Young and Casiday, who suggested that Evagrius' writings were aimed "to stimulate meditation", and that his Gnostic Chapters were a "training-ground for understanding". Robin Darling Young, "Evagrius the Iconographer: Monastic Pedagogy in the Gnostikos", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 1 (2001): 62-63. Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 27.

1.3 Evagrian Terminology

In order to understand key passages on light-visions in Evagrius' prayer trilogy, it is first necessary to explain the meaning of key terms in Evagrius's writings—*nous*, *noemata*, *katastasis*, and *proseuchē*. These will be discussed in the following section.

1.3.1 *Nous*

The term "*nous*" (νοῦς) was already used by Aristotle and other Greek philosophers. While in Ancient Philosophy it could sometimes be used both as the intuitive faculty or the discursive reason, in the writings of Christian ascetics it was almost exclusively used as a technical term for denoting the intuitive faculty, contrasted with the *dianoia* or *logos* (discursive reason). Ware defines the *nous* as "the spiritual understanding; that is to say, man's ability to apprehend truth through direct insight and intuition".⁵¹ He further dwells on the difference between the *dianoia* and the *noesis*; the latter being the activity of the *nous*, through which it noetically intuits divine knowledge:

whereas *dianoia* means discursive thinking or reasoning from premises to a conclusion, as in mathematics, *noesis* signifies a direct act of inward vision, a sudden flash of insight whereby—not through argumentation but by immediate awareness—the human being understands intuitively the world of eternal truth.⁵²

For Evagrius, the *nous*, rather than the heart, is the faculty that prays, as suggested by his famous definition of prayer: "prayer is the (...) conversation of the *nous* with God".⁵³ Evagrius, furthermore, describes prayer as the "highest noetic [activity] of the *nous* (ἄκρα νοήσις νοός)" and calls the *nous* the "temple of the Holy Trinity".⁵⁴ Harmless and Fitzgerald interpret the last statement as meaning that the *nous* is "image of God within us, that which is most like its creator." This interpretation finds its support in *On Thoughts* 19, where Evagrius explicitly calls the *nous* the "image of God".⁵⁵ In any case, for Evagrius, the *nous* is the supreme faculty of the soul, able to encounter God in prayer and contemplation.

⁵¹ Kallistos Ware, "Nous and Noesis in Plato, Aristotle and Evagrius of Pontus," Proceedings of the Second International Week on The Philosophy of Greek Culture: Kalamata 1982, Part II, (Location of Publication Unknown: Hellenic Society for Philosophical Studies, 1985), 159.

⁵² Ware, "Nous and Noesis", 160. In this quote, Ware characterizes the difference between *dianoia* and *noesis* in Plato, but it also holds true for Evagrius.

⁵³ Evagrius, "On Prayer 3," trans. Dysinger, accessed January 4, 2021. Dysinger adds "intimate" before "conversation," but the word "intimate" is absent in the Greek.

⁵⁴ Evagrius, "On Prayer 35," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 15, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm. Evagrius, "Reflections 4," trans. Dysinger, accessed January 4, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm.

⁵⁵ Harmless and Fitzgerald, "Sapphire", 513. "On Thoughts 19," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 13, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Perilog/00a_start.htm.

1.3.2 Noema

Related to the terms of *nous* and *noesis*, is that of *noema* (plural: *noemata*/νοήματα), a term of Stoic and Aristotelian origin denoting a concept or mental image in Evagrius' work.⁵⁶ The varying translations of *noema* in English translations of Evagrius shows the complexity of the term, where some have translated it as “thought”, others as “concept” and again others as “depiction”, or “representation”.⁵⁷ These *noemata* “stamp” or “imprint” the *nous*, obstructing its capacity for noetic vision.⁵⁸

The term *noema* in Evagrius' works is usually contrasted with that of *logismos* (λογισμός, etymologically related to λόγος), where the first would be neutral and derived from the senses, while the latter would denote thoughts of demonic origin. However, Evagrius is “not perfectly consistent in the distinction”.⁵⁹ While Evagrius' famous theory of the eight evil thoughts—gluttony, unchastity, avarice, sadness, anger, *acedia*, vainglory, and pride—concerns *logismoi*, *logismoi* can also be neutral, untinged by demonic influence or passion, in cases where Evagrius mentions “simple thoughts” (ψιλοί λογισμοί).⁶⁰ While *noemata*, like “simple” *logismoi*, are neutral, Evagrius, nevertheless, advocates that pure prayer (and the vision of divine light) requires the complete removal of all thoughts or *noemata*, so that the “naked” *nous* becomes able to contemplate the divine in prayer.⁶¹ In *On Thoughts* 17 he further describes how the ascetic must “drive away the concepts [*noemata*, TB] of wolves”, i.e. the *noemata* of demonic origin with anger (*thumos*), while they have to “lovingly tend the sheep”, i.e. good *noemata*, with the faculty of desire (*epithumia*).⁶² This passage shows how the concept of *noemata* in Evagrius' work is closely intertwined with Evagrius' tripartite understanding of the soul, borrowed from Plato, in which the soul has three faculties: the rational faculty (*logistikon*), the desire faculty (*epithumitikon*) and the power of indignation or anger (*thumikon*).⁶³ The *noemata* of wolves in

⁵⁶ Antoine Guillaumont, “Introduction,” *Sur les Pensées*, 14-15. For the background of Evagrius' theory of the mind see Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 35. For the philosophical background of the *noemata* see Guillaumont, “Introduction,” *Sur les Pensées*, 14-17.

⁵⁷ For example, Sinkewicz translates *νοήματα* in *On Prayer* 70 as “mental representations”. Bamberger translates the same phrase as “concepts” and in the *Philokalia* translation it is translated as “thoughts”. Evagrius the Solitary [=Evagrius of Pontus], “On Prayer 70”, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. Sinkewicz, 200. Evagrius Ponticus, “Chapters On Prayer 70”, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger, (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1970) 66. Evagrius the Solitary, “On Prayer 71”, *The Philokalia: Complete Text Compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, vol. 1, (London: Faber & faber, 1979) 64.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Thoughts* 2, 4, 25, 41, 42 and *Reflections* 17, 55.

⁵⁹ Stewart, “Imageless”, 187.

⁶⁰ Evagrius, “*Praktikos* 6,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 13, 2021,

http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 35.

⁶¹ Cf. *On Prayer* 71 and *Reflections* 2. Evagrius uses the expression “naked *nous*” primarily in his *Kephalaia Gnostica* (I.65; III.6, 15, 17, 19, 21, 70), but the idea underlies Evagrius' understanding of prayer and the *katastasis* of the *nous* in all his works.

⁶² Evagrius, “*On Thoughts* 17,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 13, 2021,

http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Perilog/00a_start.htm.

⁶³ Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer*, 31.

Thoughts 17 further blurs the distinction between *noemata* and *logismoi*, by suggesting that *noemata* can also come from demonic suggestion.

As *noesis* constitutes an act of “inward vision”, *noemata* likewise have a strong visual character. This visual character of *noemata* is particularly well-explained by Harmless and Fitzgerald, as they describe *noemata* as “mental (...) 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”.⁶⁴ While *logismoi* usually are of demonic origin, *noemata* are generally derived from the senses, but can, incidentally, also come from memory and temperament.⁶⁵

1.3.3 *Katastasis*

The term *katastasis* (κατάστασις, literally, “state”) in Evagrius’ writings is a key term linking various passages on light-visions in *On Thoughts* and *Reflections*. Perhaps the best description of *katastasis* is given by Evagrius himself in *On Prayer* 2, where he writes: “A soul purified through the fullness of the virtues establishes in the *nous* a position of steadiness, rendering it receptive of the desired state (καταστάσεως, TB)”.⁶⁶ Thus, *katastasis* denotes a state in which the *nous* is in a “position of steadiness”, i.e. in a settled, stable, or fixed condition, and it stands in contrast with the “wandering *nous* (νοῦν μὲν πλανώμενον)”, where the *nous* is carried all over the place by thoughts.⁶⁷ The word for wandering, *planomenon* (πλανώμενον), comes from the verb *planao* (πλανάω), denoting wandering, but also, more figuratively, leading astray or deceiving.⁶⁸ The substantive related to this verb is *planē* (πλᾶνη), which is the Greek word for delusion.⁶⁹ Thus, the *katastasis* of the *nous* is essentially opposed to the deluded state and delusion in general. In a position of stability, free from all thoughts, the *katastasis* of the *nous* is related to Evagrius’ definition of pure prayer, to be discussed below. Ware, Harmless and Fitzgerald contrast *katastasis*—the true and stable position of the *nous*—with *ekstasis*, where the *nous* would go outside of itself.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Ware observes that “if we look beyond words to their content, it becomes clear that for Evagrius “pure prayer of the intellect”, involving as it does a suspension of normal conceptual thinking, has certainly an “ecstatic” aspect”.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire”, 515.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Reflections* 17.

⁶⁶ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 2,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 13, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm. See also Evagrius’ definition of prayer in *Reflections* 26: “Prayer is a state [κατάστασις, TB] of the *nous* destructive of every earthly thought”. Evagrius, “*Reflections* 26,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 13, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm.

⁶⁷ Evagrius, “*Praktikos* 15”, trans. and ed. Dysinger, accessed January 5, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/50_secondary/00a_start.htm.

⁶⁸ The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon (LSJ), “πλᾶν-άω”, *Thesaurus Linguae Graeca*, project directed by Maria Pantelia, accessed April 20, 2021, <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu.ru.idm.oclc.org/ljsj/#eid=85993>.

⁶⁹ Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, “Glossary”, *The Philokalia*, 362.

⁷⁰ Ware, “*Nous* and *Noesis*”, 162. Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire”, 514. Bitton-Ashkelony, similarly, writes that Evagrius’s teaching on prayer “does not promote any ecstatic behavior”. Bitton-Ashkelony, “The Limit of the Mind,” 299.

⁷¹ Ware, “*Nous* and *Noesis*”, 162.

1.3.4 *Proseuchē*

Evagrius' concept of true, or pure prayer (ἀληθής/καθαρά προσευχή) is closely linked to the terms discussed above.⁷² For Evagrius, true or pure prayer is a state of the *nous*, in which the *nous* is completely free of all thoughts, forms, or images (*noemata*). In this state, the *nous* exclusively focuses its attention on God, often leading to contemplation. Bunge argued that “pure prayer” needs to be understood as being different from “true prayer” in Evagrius' works, as the first is more often used in his *Praktikos*, while he uses the latter more frequently in *On Prayer*.⁷³ Consequently, Bunge suggests that “pure prayer” is pure because it is free from passion, while “true prayer” is not only free from passion, but also free from all *noemata*.⁷⁴ However, this distinction does not hold. The strongest evidence against this is *On Prayer* 71, where Evagrius associates pure prayer with the “putting aside” or “shedding” of all *noemata* (ἀπόθεσις νοημάτων).⁷⁵

Regardless of whether prayer is called true or pure, it seems that the word προσευχή in Evagrius' works is essentially connected with the type of prayer that is free from all passion and *noemata*. As Harmless and Fitzgerald have noted, Evagrius reserves προσευχή for the “wordless, imageless mystical ascent to God”.⁷⁶ The goal of prayer, for Evagrius, is to have an “unstamped *nous*”. This idea is linked to his work as a calligrapher: “Evagrius the professional calligrapher believed that certain representations, especially those from the eye, were capable of imprinting themselves on the wax of the mind”.⁷⁷ Through continually laying aside all *noemata* during prayer, the *nous* becomes able to pray truly and purely, with unwavering attention on God.⁷⁸ It is in this state of unwavering attention that the *nous* ascends towards God in prayer and enters into a conversation with God.⁷⁹ Thus, Προσευχή is a specific term in Evagrius' works, associated with the most sublime form of prayer, in which the *nous* ascends to God in mystical contemplation, beyond words or *noemata*.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed Evagrius' life and the condemnation of Evagrius as a heretic by the Ecumenical Council of 553 AD, his works and thought, and key terms in his writings. The first two sections showed that Evagrius was well-versed in Greek philosophy, Scripture, monastic wisdom, but also received Cappadocian teaching via Gregory of Nazianzen and Basil the Great. The section on

⁷² The expression of “true prayer” is only used twice in Evagrius' chapters *On Prayer* and then always in the genitive form: ἀληθοῦς προσευχῆς (*Prayer* 65, 76, 113). More often, he uses the expression “to pray truly” (ἀληθῶς προσεύξασθαι) – namely eight times (*Prayer* 10, 41, 54, 56, 61, 80, 153).

⁷³ Bunge, “From Greek to Syriac,” 141.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷⁵ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 71,” trans. Dysinger, accessed April 16, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

⁷⁶ Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire,” 506.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 515.

⁷⁸ Cf. *On Prayer* 71.

⁷⁹ *On Prayer* 3, 36.

Evagrius' works and thought, furthermore, showed that Evagrius wrote some works as general treatises, probably written for and circulated amongst the monks who sought his guidance, while other works were addressed only to one person in the form of a letter. The question of the relative chronology of the different works of Evagrius has been addressed briefly, and I have argued that regardless of which trilogy preceded which, *On Prayer* is one of Evagrius's more mature works.

Lastly, this chapter has introduced key terms of *nous*, *katastasis*, *noemata*, and *proseuchē* in Evagrius's works relevant to the discussion of the following chapters. For Evagrius, the *nous* is the faculty that prays and contemplates the divine, when it is in its true and stable state (*katastasis*). This *katastasis* is contrasted with a state of *ekstasis*, where the *nous* would go outside itself, and it related to Evagrius' concept of *noemata* or "mental representations", as the *nous* in its true and stable state (*katastasis*) is free from all *noemata*. These terms amalgamate in Evagrius' concept of true/pure prayer, where the *nous* is in a state (*katastasis*) free from all thoughts or images (*noemata*) and taken up into contemplation of the divine.

Chapter 2. Trinitarian Light-Visions in *Thoughts-Reflections*

This chapter discusses Evagrius' teachings and descriptions on light-visions in *Reflections* and *On Thoughts*. In order to do so, this chapter first introduces the context in which these light-visions occur in Evagrius' work, by explaining the specific type of prayer during which light-visions may occur with reference to Evagrius' definition of four types of prayer in *Reflections* 27-30. Second, I will discuss the requirements that Evagrius mentions for being able to experience light-visions: *apatheia* and the deprivation of *noemata*, and the philosophical background of both. Third, Evagrius' teaching on Trinitarian light-visions will be explained in light of the scholarly debate on the influences on Evagrius' light-mysticism and on the origin of the light seen during light-visions. Fourth, the origin of the light contemplated during light-visions will be discussed and the main positions in Evagrian studies concerning this issue will be mentioned (namely, whether the light comes from God, the *nous*, or both). A fourth option of the light coming from demons will be mentioned only briefly, as it will be further discussed in chapter three.

2.1 Context of Light-Visions

Within Evagrius' writings, light-visions occur within a very specific context, not one of physical space or time, but rather of a spiritual state and an opportune time: the "time of prayer" (τὸν καιρὸν τῆς προσευχῆς).⁸⁰ Evagrius chose his words carefully as the Greek words he uses—*kairos* and *proseuchē*—have a very specific meaning. The word *kairos* has a rich philosophical background: in Antiquity, it was opposed to another type of time called *chronos*, where the *kairos* referred to the opportune time (for example for trade or sacrifice; similar in meaning to today's usage of "timing") and *chronos* to time in the sense of chronology, seasons, duration and interval. Thus, Smith explains their difference by writing that *καίρως* referred to quality and *χρονος* to quantity.⁸¹ In Scripture, *kairos* is repeatedly associated with divine visitation, thereby giving it a mystical quality. For example, Psalm 118:126 (LXX), (it is time for the Lord to act) utilizes the word *kairos* for time and so associates *kairos* with divine intervention.⁸²

The other specific term used in the expression of the "time of prayer" is the one used for "prayer": *proseuchē*. As touched upon in chapter one, *proseuchē* has a specific meaning in Evagrius' works, where it is reserved for the ultimate type of prayer, in which the *nous* ascends to God in noetic contemplation. While *proseuchē* is not the only type of prayer in Evagrius works, it is the only type of prayer that is associated with light-visions. Furthermore it, seems to be Evagrius' favorite type of prayer as almost every instance in which he discusses true or pure prayer, he is referring to *proseuchē*.

⁸⁰ *On Thoughts* 2, 26, 30, 39, 40. *Reflections* 4, 6, 22.

⁸¹ For an elaborate discussion of the philosophical meaning of *kairos* in Antiquity see John E. Smith, "Time, Times and the 'Right Time'"; *Chronos and Kairos*", *The Monist* 53, no. 1, (January 1969): 1-13.

⁸² Psalm 118:126. A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta*, vol. 2, ed. 9, (Stuttgart: Württemberg Bible Society, 1935) 1-164. Retrieved from: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu.ru.idm.oclc.org/Iris/Cite?0527:027:232717>.

The most important passage that gives insight into the different types of prayer according to Evagrius is *Reflections* 27-30, where Evagrius immediately linked *proseuchē* to a vision of divine light:

27. Prayer [προσευχή, TB] is the state of the *nous* [illuminated] by the sole light of the Blessed Trinity.

28. A petition [δέησις, TB] is a conversation of the *nous* with God requesting supplication, encompassing help or requesting good things.

29. A vow [εὐχη, TB] is a willing promise of good things.

30. An intercession [ἔντευξις, TB] is an invocation presented to God for the salvation of others by one who is greater.⁸³

In this passage, Evagrius refers to four types of prayer, three of which can also be found in 1 Timothy 2:1: “First of all, then I urge that supplications (*deēseis*), prayers (*proseuchas*), intercessions (*enteuxeis*), and thanksgivings (*eucharistias*) be made for everyone”.⁸⁴ Given the terminological convergence, Stewart, Harmless, and Fitzgerald see *Reflections* 27-30 as an allusion to the Epistle verse, but it is also possible that Evagrius was simply reflecting on the terms that were used for prayer in his time.⁸⁵ Since *proseuchē* is often simply translated as “prayer”, it might seem that *proseuchē* is some kind of umbrella term, encompassing the other three types of prayer. However, in Evagrius’ works *proseuchē* is not a general appellation for prayer, but a specific term that refers to a type of prayer in which the *nous*, free from all thoughts and images, contemplates God.⁸⁶ Furthermore, by linking *proseuchē* to divine illumination, Evagrius is suggesting prayer does not qualify as *proseuchē* unless the *nous* is in a state of luminosity. In Evagrius, light-visions and προσευχή are inextricably linked.

In defining *proseuchē* as the state in which the *nous* is illumined by the divine, Evagrius uses the word *katastasis*, a term referring to the true state of the *nous* understood as a state where the *nous* is completely free from all *noemata* and, hence, able to completely direct its attention toward God. The word *katastasis* connects this definition of prayer to the other passages in which Evagrius uses the

⁸³ Evagrius, “*Reflections* 27-30,” trans. Dysinger, accessed January 13, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm

⁸⁴ The quote from Timothy including the words in brackets is from Harmless and Fitzgerald. Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire”, 506.

⁸⁵ Harmless and Fitzgerald see *Reflections* 27-30 as a commentary or *scholion* on 1 Timothy 2:1, while Stewart calls it a “nod” to the same Scriptural verse. Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire”, 506. Stewart, “Imageless”, 186. While the correspondence of three of the four terms suggests that Evagrius had this Pauline passage in mind, it is strange that Evagrius does not comment on *eucharistias* and instead adds a definition of *euche*, which is lacking in the Scriptural verse.

⁸⁶ Though there are many passages where *proseuchē* simply refers to prayer in general (cf. *Prayer* 27, 28, 34, Prol. 2), because of its association with “true” and “pure” prayer, *proseuchē* seems to be inherently intertwined with this particular state of prayer. This is particularly true for *Reflections* 27, quoted above, where the state of noetic illumination is connected not to “pure” or “true” prayer, but to *proseuchē* itself.

same word.⁸⁷ In this way, it functions as a signal word, associating various seemingly disconnected Evagrian aphorisms with multiple passages throughout Evagrius' works.⁸⁸ The deprivation of *noemata*, furthermore, resonates with the various passages within *On Prayer*, where Evagrius describes true prayer as a state beyond words and images.⁸⁹ Yet the absence of *noemata* creates tensions with Evagrius' famous definition of *proseuchē* in *On Prayer* 3, where he defines *proseuchē* as the "conversation of the *nous* with God".⁹⁰ While *proseuchē* is on the one hand beyond words and images, it at the same time involves an intimate conversation between the *nous* and God. The word Evagrius employs that is translated as "conversation" is *homilia* (ὁμιλία). This can mean "converse or communion with God", but also connotes "verbal communication" and "intercourse".⁹¹ While *homilia* in Latin primarily implies a one-way street, a homily of speech in which one person tries to bring a message across, in Greek *homilia* implies interchange rather than one-directional traffic. Yet, paradoxically, *proseuchē* is not an interaction through words, of the *nous* speaking to God and God talking back, as the translation "conversation" suggests, but an interaction beyond words and concepts. After all, as Bitton-Ashkelony mentions, in Antiquity, *homilia* was understood as an "association of two distinct things".⁹² In other words, in *homilia*, God and the *nous* become one. Ultimately, in προσευχή, God shares his being with the *nous*, not only in imbuing it with the divine light but also through initiation into divine mysteries.

What might be confusing, however, is that while Evagrius in *On Prayer* defines *proseuchē* as the "conversation of the *nous* with God", in *Reflections*, he defines δέησις by using the same expression. In contrast to *On Prayer*, in *Reflections*, Evagrius elaborates on what that conversation exactly entails in the case of *deēseis*: "A petition [δέησις, TB] is a conversation [ὁμιλία, TB] of the *nous* with God requesting supplication, encompassing help or requesting good things".⁹³ Here, *homilia* does not create friction, as petitions do include words in the form of supplications and requests.

What is perhaps even more confusing is how Evagrius borrowed his definition of *proseuchē* and *deēseis* as the "conversation of the *nous* with God" (*Prayer* 3/*Reflections* 28) from Clement of Alexandria.⁹⁴ While several scholars have observed that Evagrius borrowed his famous definition of

⁸⁷ Reflections 3, 4, 22, 26, 27. *On Thoughts* 39. In *On Thoughts* 9 and 32, *katastasis* takes on the meaning of a "heavenly state" (9) or simply the state of the solitary (32).

⁸⁸ Cf. *On Prayer* 54, 55, 71. *Reflections* 26.

⁸⁹ See, for example, *On Prayer* 67: "Do not give [any] shape to the Divine in yourself when you pray, nor should you permit any form to stamp an impression on your *nous*: instead, approach immaterially what is immaterial; and you will understand". Evagrius, "*On Prayer* 67," trans. Dysinger, accessed February 3, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

⁹⁰ Evagrius, "*On Prayer* 3," trans. Dysinger, accessed February 3, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

⁹¹ G.W.H. Lampe, *A Greek Patristic Lexicon*, (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1961), 951.

⁹² Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind," 299.

⁹³ Evagrius, "*Reflections* 28," trans. Dysinger, accessed January 13, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm

⁹⁴ *Prayer* 3, *Reflections* 28. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7.7.39.6, trans. William Wilson, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, (Buffalo, NY: Christian

prayer in *Prayer 3* from Clement, they have failed to notice the terminological discrepancy between the two. In fact, Clement of Alexandria uses the expression not to define *deēseis* or *proseuchē*, but *euchē* (εὐχή), which, in Clement’s case takes on the meaning of prayer in general, rather than a vow.⁹⁵ Therefore, the discrepancy between Evagrius’ definition of prayer and that of Clement, suggests that Evagrius corrected Clement’s definition by making it more terminologically precise. Thus, *Reflections 27-30* can be seen not only as a commentary on 1 *Timothy 2.1*, but also as a subtle correction of what Evagrius perceived as a lack of terminological precision in Clement of Alexandria.

2.2 Requirements for experiencing light-visions

2.2.1 *Apatheia*

In *Reflections 2*, Evagrius writes that in order to behold the *nous*’s true state (*katastasis*), which as we know is associated with the vision of the Triune light, the *nous* must be free from all *noemata*.⁹⁶ Furthermore, Evagrius specifies that this state cannot be attained without *apatheia*, which can be translated as dispassion, passionlessness, or impassibility.⁹⁷ Dysinger defines *apatheia* as “freedom from domination by the passions”, and Louth refers to *apatheia* as a “state of calmness”.⁹⁸

The background of Evagrius’ theory on the passions and *apatheia* is Stoicism, in which the passions are seen as pathological and irrational mental states from which the truly wise must become free.⁹⁹ This results in *apatheia* being not a state of apathy or complete lack of emotion, like a robot, but of being reasonable and free from compulsive behavior and desire.¹⁰⁰ While Evagrius lists eight passions (which coincide with his eight demonic thoughts or *logismoi*), Stoicism lists four: pain, pleasure, desire, and grief.¹⁰¹

The misunderstanding that plagues Stoic *apatheia* as being overly rational and indifferent similarly haunts Evagrius, whose writings have often been understood as advocating an almost inhuman passionlessness that was considered to be incompatible with Christian love.¹⁰² However, Evagrius himself defines *apatheia* not as complete indifference, but as a “quiet state of the reasoning

Literature Publishing Co., 1855), revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, accessed April 21, 2021, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0210.htm>.

⁹⁵ Bitton-Ashkelony, “Limit of the Mind”, 296. Stewart, “Imageless”, 191. Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 137. Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory*, 166.

⁹⁶ See also *Reflections 20, 23, and Thoughts 40*.

⁹⁷ Cf. *Reflections 2*. Bunge lists “Freiheit von dem Leidenschaften und den Feinden” (freedom from passions and enemies) as a requirement for seeing the divine light, but Evagrius never explicitly seems to list freedom from enemies as a requirement, if this is to be understood as freedom from demonic attacks. By contrast, the one in a delusional/demonic light-vision believes to have “no longer any opposing energy at work within” and it is precisely this belief that makes such a vision delusional (*On Prayer 74*). Gabriel Bunge, *Das Geistgebet: Studien zum Traktat De Oratione des Evagrius Pontikos*, (Köln: Luth-Verlag, 1987) 62.

⁹⁸ Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer*, 28. Louth, “The literature”, 378.

⁹⁹ Louth, “The literature”, 378.

¹⁰⁰ Brad Inwood, *Stoicism: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), 84-5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 84-5.

¹⁰² Cf. Corrigan and Glazov, “Compunction and Compassion”, 62-3.

soul composed of gentleness and temperance”.¹⁰³ Thus the calming of the passions does not lead to a state of radical insensitivity, but it purifies the ascetic of compulsive and self-centered behaviors and desire, such as anger and feelings of superiority (pride). Becoming less and less moved by such passions creates an attitude of openness and inner tranquility beneficial to the visitation of grace.

2.2.2 Deprivation of all *noemata*

The second requirement for the vision of divine light is the deprivation of all *noemata*. This encompasses all thoughts and mental images—a state which Evagrius refers to as that of the “naked nous” in the *Kephalaia Gnostica* (KG).¹⁰⁴ Guillaumont notes the Stoic and Aristotelian heritage of *noemata*, where they are understood as the basis of sensible knowledge.¹⁰⁵ While the *nous* has to be stripped of all *noemata*, this does not mean that *noemata* are essentially bad. Some *noemata* come from God and they need to be herded by the *nous* like a shepherd protects his sheep, while at the same time protecting them from the “wolves”, i.e. the *noemata* that have a demonic origin.¹⁰⁶ In *On Prayer*, Evagrius makes the distinction between simple, that is untouched by passion, and impassioned *noemata*, but he writes how even simple thoughts are an obstacle to pure prayer, as they distract the *nous* from prayer.¹⁰⁷ He even considers the contemplation of the *logoi* (inner meaning) of created beings problematic as such contemplation still stamps the *nous*.¹⁰⁸ The constant letting go of all *noemata* is required for the vision of the divine light to create an inner space that allows the *nous* to be filled with Triune luminosity.

2.3 Influences on Evagrius’ Teachings on Light-Visions

Virtually all scholars agree that Evagrius based his teaching on his personal experience in the desert.¹⁰⁹ Yet, there is a debate on the influence of Scripture and philosophy on his teaching. Guillaumont, for example, argued that though Evagrius based himself on a “real and personal” experience, he communicated this very experience through philosophical language, primarily marked by Plotinus. While accepting the surface similarities, Stewart, Bitton-Ashkelony, and Konstantinovsky nuanced the

¹⁰³ Evagrius, “*Reflections* 3,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 3, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. KG I.65, III.6, 15, 17, 19, 21, 70. See also *Prayer* 56: “The attainment of freedom from passion (*apatheia*) does not [necessarily mean] one is already truly praying: it is possible to have simple thoughts (*noemata*), but be taken up with [lit. *distracted by*] [investigating] their stories, and thus still be far from God”. Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 56,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 3, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/01_prayer_all.htm#119_immateral_nous_at_prayer.

¹⁰⁵ Guillaumont, “Introduction”, *Sur les Pensées*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁶ *Thoughts* 17. Guillaumont, “Introduction”, *Sur les Pensées*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 56,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 3, 2021,

http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/01_prayer_all.htm#119_immateral_nous_at_prayer

¹⁰⁸ *Prayer* 57

¹⁰⁹ Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire,” 520. Bitton-Ashkelony, “The Limit of the Mind,” 303. Guillaumont, “La vision de l’intellect,” 148-9. Stewart, “Imageless,” 201. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 101. Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory*, 171-2.

importance of the influence of Plotinus, though Stewart had instead argued for the importance of Scripture on Evagrius teaching on light-visions.¹¹⁰ In this section I will explain Evagrius' teaching on light-visions through the lens of this debate. First, I will discuss the Scripturally based aspects of his teaching and secondly the philosophically (including Christian 'philosophy') based elements, in order to discuss the interrelation between experience, Scripture, and philosophy.

2.3.1 Scriptural influence

When it comes to the Scriptural influence on Evagrius's teaching of light-visions, two main Scriptural tropes can be seen as underlying and holding together his light-vision descriptions: that of the "place of God" and "sapphire" light. For example in *On Thoughts* 39, Evagrius writes:

When the *nous* has stripped off the old man and put on [that which comes] from grace, (cf. Col 3:9-10) then it will see its own state at the time of prayer, like a sapphire or the color of heaven, which Scripture calls the place of God that was seen by the elders under Mount Sinai.¹¹¹

And in *Reflections* 2, Evagrius writes: "If any would see the state of the[ir] *nous*, let them deprive themsel[ves] of all concepts (*noemata*)[:] and then they will see themsel[ves] like a sapphire or the color of heaven".¹¹² Evagrius is here referring to the passage in Exodus, where Moses, together with Aaron, Nadab, Abiud, and the seventy elders of Israel ascended Mount Sinai and, having ascended, they saw the "place of God" (Exodus 24.9-11). Yet, while the Septuagint apophatically describes the Israelites to have seen the "place of God", or the "place where the God of Israel stood"¹¹³, the Hebrew asserts that the Israelites "saw the God of Israel".¹¹⁴ The Septuagint continues by describing that under the feet of God was "as it were" "a paved work of sapphire stone and the appearance of the heaven's firmament in its purity".¹¹⁵ Another possible source for "sapphire" is Ezekiel 1:24-28:

Then behold, a voice came from above the firmament above their head. There was as it were the appearance of a sapphire stone, and the likeness of a throne upon it. Upon the likeness of a throne,

¹¹⁰ Stewart, "Imageless," 195. Bitton-Ashkelony, "The Limit of the Mind," 303. Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 102.

¹¹¹ Evagrius, "*On Thoughts* 39," trans. Dysinger, accessed February 4, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Perilog/00a_start.htm. Scriptural references are inserted by Dysinger.

¹¹² Evagrius, "*Reflections* 2," trans. Dysinger, accessed February 4, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm.

¹¹³ Exodus 24:10, St Athanasius Academy Septuagint (SAAS), *The Orthodox Study Bible*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 2008) 97. Throughout this thesis Old Testament quotes are taken from the St Athanasius Academy Septuagint (SAAS).

¹¹⁴ Stewart, "Imageless," 196. Harmless and Fitzgerald, "Sapphire," 518-9. Conway-Jones, "The Greatest Paradox of All," 267.

¹¹⁵ Exodus 24:10, SAAS.

there was as it were the appearance of a man above. (...) This was the vision of the likeness of the Lord's glory.¹¹⁶

What is remarkable in both Exodus 24:9-11 and Ezekiel 1:24-28 is the insertion of “as it were” and “likeness”.¹¹⁷ Both Scriptural passages wrap a theophanic vision in symbolic language that conveys a likeness rather than a direct correspondence between the words used and the reality they point to. Instead, the theophanic experience is approximated via *similes*. Similarly, Evagrius communicates his mystical experience by pointing to its likeness, through symbolic cues taken from Scripture. He never states that the vision of the true state of the *nous* is sapphire-colored, but that it is like (παρεμφορῆ) sapphire or the color of heaven.

While *On Thoughts* 39 and *Reflections* 2 do not explicitly refer to the vision of the luminous *nous*, the use of the word “state” (*katastasis*) links them with other passages in which Evagrius uses the word *katastasis* to describe the true state of the *nous* in which it is imbued with the “light of the holy [sic] Trinity”.¹¹⁸ Thus, there are various signal words or tropes in Evagrius' description of light-visions which weave the seemingly disconnected *kephalia* (aphoristic chapters) together.

Though still slightly enigmatic in *On Thoughts* 39 and *Reflections* 2, in *Reflections* 25 it becomes clearer what the “place of God” actually refers to: “The ‘*place of God*’ is therefore the reasoning soul, and *his dwelling* [is] the luminous *nous*”.¹¹⁹ In this *kephalion*, Evagrius is reflecting on the verse in *Psalms* 75:3 “in peace is His place established and his [sic] dwelling on Zion”.¹²⁰ By identifying the “place of God” to be the “rational” or “reasoning” soul (ψυχὴ λογικὴ), Evagrius interiorizes the Scriptural circumlocution and situates the place of theophanic encounter within the soul.¹²¹ He, furthermore, states that the “luminous *nous*” is the dwelling-place (κατοικητήριον) of God. This is spelled out even further in *Reflections* 34, where he calls the *nous* the “temple of the Holy

¹¹⁶ Ezekiel 1:24-28, SAAS.

¹¹⁷ In Exodus 24:11: “Under his feet was, as it were, a paved work of sapphire stone and the appearance of heaven's firmament in its purity” (SAAS).

¹¹⁸ Evagrius, “*Reflections* 4,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 9, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm. Dysinger is not fully consistent with capitalizing the word “holy”.

¹¹⁹ Evagrius, “*Reflections* 25,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 4, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm. Dysinger italicized “place of God” and “his dwelling” to signal that these expressions are Scriptural references.

¹²⁰ *Psalms* 75:3 as translated by Dysinger in *Reflections* 25. Evagrius, “*Reflections* 25,” trans. Dysinger, accessed April 19, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm. Dysinger is not consistent here with capitalizing ‘his’.

¹²¹ Dysinger's translation of ψυχὴ λογικὴ as “reasoning soul” is slightly misleading, as it suggests a soul in the process of reasoning or analysis. In Evagrius' works ψυχὴ λογικὴ generally refers to a distinction between rational, irrational, and vegetative souls that comes from Aristotle. Cf. Kallistos Ware, “The Soul in Greek Christianity,” *From Soul to Self*, ed. M. James C. Crabbe, (London/New York: Routledge, 1999) 55-6.

Trinity”. Where in Jewish temple worship, the temple was the dwelling-place of the *Shekinah* of the Lord, in Evagrius the dwelling-place of the divine becomes the luminous *nous*.¹²²

A third important element of Scriptural intertextuality in Evagrius' descriptions of light-visions is that of anagogical, or upward-moving, imagery. The repeated references to Exodus invoking the ascent of Moses on Mount Sinai to meet the Lord underlie many of Evagrius' *dicta*. In *Reflections* 4, Evagrius calls the *katastasis* of the *nous* a “noetic (...) height [ὕψος νοητὸν, TB] like the color of heaven, upon which the light of the holy [sic] Trinity comes at the time of prayer” and in *Reflections* 23, Evagrius asserts that the *nous* is unable to see the “place of God” unless it has been “raised higher” (ὕψηλότερος) than all practical *noemata* and passions—a passage almost identical in content to *Thoughts* 40.¹²³ In *On Prayer* 36, Evagrius defines prayer (προσευχή) as the “ascent of the *nous* to God”. These instances of upward-moving imagery create an interesting tension between *ekstasis* and *katastasis*, as they suggest a movement of going outside of oneself. By contrast, in its *katastasis*, the *nous* does not go outside itself, but fulfills its truest purpose: to become a dwelling-place for the divine and to reflect its glorious luminosity.¹²⁴ It is precisely in this *katastasis* that the *nous* transcends all earthly cares and is raised towards the divine. Thus, the imagery of upward-movement is not supposed to be taken literally, but symbolically, thereby playing with the numerous instances of anagogical imagery in Scripture, where ascending mountains are symbols to point to an encounter with the divine.

From these passages, it has become clear that Evagrius communicated his experience through Scriptural language and symbols, but does not mean that Scripture only shaped the way Evagrius wrote about his experience, but Evagrius' experience was also shaped by Scripture.¹²⁵ According to Dysinger, apart from the common prayer rule of desert monastics at his time of reading twelve psalms twice a day, Evagrius engaged in “nearly perpetual psalmody and biblical meditation throughout the day”.¹²⁶ As Corrigan asserted, the *nous*, in its luminosity shares in the light of God “refracted (...) through the prism of Scripture”.¹²⁷

2.3.2 Philosophical influence

Though Evagrius' indebtedness to Greek philosophy for his overall framework and terminology is well-established, the influence of philosophy on Evagrius' descriptions of light-visions remains a

¹²² As Stewart notes, the “relocation of biblical topography to an inner landscape” was not uncommon in early Christian writings. Most notably, Paul calls the body the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). Yet, the specific terminology of the “luminous *nous*” as the ultimate meeting-place between God and man is particular to Evagrius.

¹²³ Evagrius, “*Reflections* 4,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 4, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm.

¹²⁴ Louth, similarly, writes: “This is the significance of his rejection of any understanding of union with God as ecstasy: the mind does not go out of itself at the summit of the mystical ascent, rather it realizes its true activity and, functioning purely and effectively as mind, it contemplates God and knows Him, for which purpose it was fashioned”. Louth, *Origins*, 113.

¹²⁵ Stewart, “Imageless,” 201. Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory*, 172.

¹²⁶ Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer*, 15.

¹²⁷ Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory*, 172.

matter of debate. Scholars such as Stewart and Conway-Jones seem to suggest Evagrius' descriptions of light-visions are marked more by Scriptural symbols than by philosophy.¹²⁸ Yet Guillaumont did not deny the importance of Scriptural imagery, nor the importance of experience, but simply pointed out that Evagrius communicated his experience through philosophical, mainly Plotinian, language.

The main similarities that Guillaumont saw between Evagrius and Plotinus are that both describe an experience where the *nous* sees itself illumined by a supernatural or mystical light and where it is impossible to say whether this light is “interior” or “exterior” to the *nous*.¹²⁹ That is to say, it is impossible to know whether the light comes from the *nous* or elsewhere. Konstantinovsky listed three main similarities between Evagrius and Plotinus, the most important of which was that Plotinus' language of union profoundly influenced the mystical imagery of early Christianity.¹³⁰ Other similarities between the two were that in both authors, words inevitably fail to express mystical experience—an element which qualifies them both as “mystics”.¹³¹ Furthermore, Konstantinovsky remarked that both Evagrius and Plotinus “share the view that experience alone cannot answer important questions about experience” and that experience is always subject to cognition, as “raw experience is not epistemologically sufficient”.¹³² Experience always has to be subjected to rational thinking and reflection in order to understand that experience, which is something they both do in great depth. In other words, experience and philosophy are inherently intertwined.¹³³

However, there are also important differences between the two. For Konstantinovsky, the most important difference is that while Evagrius' light-visions are Trinitarian, Plotinian light-visions are solipsistic.¹³⁴ In Evagrius' writings, the light contemplated by the *nous* reflects the luminosity of the Trinity and enables God to dwell in the *nous*, thereby allowing the *nous* to receive a glimpse of the divine. Yet in Plotinus, a light of the *nous* does not establish a link with “something extraneous” to itself but instead allows the *nous* to enter more deeply into itself. The object of contemplation and marvel is, therefore, not the divine Other, but the inmost self, which rather than going outside itself in divine rapture and *ekstasis* goes radically inward in *entasis*.¹³⁵ Plotinus' mysticism can thus, rightly, be called “*autoerotic*” and solipsistic, as it encloses the person in its individuality.

Another difference between Evagrius and Plotinus concerns their various understandings of union or *henosis* (ἕνωσις). While Plotinus might certainly have influenced subsequent Patristic

¹²⁸ Stewart, “Imageless,” 195. Conway-Jones writes: “for the sapphire color of the light, Evagrius relies not on his own experience, nor on neoplatonist ideas, but on the biblical record”. Conway-Jones, “The Greatest Paradox of All,” 274.

¹²⁹ Guillaumont, “La vision de l'intellect,” 149.

¹³⁰ Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 99-100.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 102.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 102. Stewart, similarly, noted the difference between Evagrius and Plotinus by writing that Plotinus describes the “the light seen by the νοῦς (...) as proper to itself and not as something other”. Stewart, “Imageless,” 195, note 106.

¹³⁵ Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 100.

thinking on union with the divine, the way Evagrius conceives of this union seems to be different from Plotinus in that union in Evagrius does not imply ecstasy or satisfaction.¹³⁶ As Louth remarks: “there is no ultimate satisfaction, no final union, no ecstasy in which the soul is rapt up out of the temporal sequence and achieves union”.¹³⁷ While Louth observes the impossibility of “ultimate satisfaction” in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, the statement also applies to Evagrius. Like Gregory, Evagrius seems to suggest that prayer goes hand in hand with endless desire. Conway-Jones interprets a passage from the *Kephalaia Gnostica* as an Evagrian version of *epektasis*, but a similar idea of never-ending desire can also be seen in *On Prayer* 188, where Evagrius writes: “Blessed is the *nous* that, praying without distraction, receives a continually increasing yearning for God”.¹³⁸ Thus, while different elements in Evagrius' writing suggest Plotinian influence, there are important differences that underline the theological focus of Evagrius' mysticism, mainly the contrast between solipsism and Trinitarianism and the different understandings of union between God and man. The most important similarity, however, is that for both the “experiential is inextricable from the conceptual” and that they both use “symbolic language” to refer to “experiences that language cannot contain”.¹³⁹

2.3.3 Synthesis

Based on these observations, I find a discussion of Evagrius' light-mysticism in terms of either Scripture or philosophy insufficient and would instead argue that Evagrius does not wrap his experience in language that is either Scriptural or philosophical, but rather that his teaching on light-visions forms a close synthesis of Scripture, philosophy and experience.¹⁴⁰ Konstantinovsky postulation that “raw experience is not epistemologically sufficient” is an important one, as Evagrius' account of light-visions is not a phenomenological description, but rather a conceptual mediation of such an experience: Evagrius frames his experience in symbolic language that is both Scriptural and philosophical.¹⁴¹ In other words, communication of experience necessitates the mediation of a conceptual framework, be it Biblical or Hellenic, but one might even argue that experience itself is always mediated via language the moment it is reflected upon. This would question the possibility of “raw experience”—a fundamental question of philosophy and mysticism alike.

¹³⁶ Bitton-Ashkelony asserts that Evagrius's “doctrine of prayer does not (...) lead to a union with God in the classic sense of *henosis* (ἕνωσις)”. Bitton-Ashkelony, “The Limit of the Mind,” 299.

¹³⁷ Louth, *Origins*, 89.

¹³⁸ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 188,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 5, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm. Conway-Jones, “The Greatest Paradox of All”, 272.

¹³⁹ Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 101, 99.

¹⁴⁰ While Evagrius' writings also show a strong reliance on Christian thinkers as Clement of Alexandria (for example for his definition of prayer), the influence of Christian thinkers on his descriptions of light-visions is minimal in comparison to that of Scripture and philosophy.

¹⁴¹ Bunge mentions that Evagrius framed the experience of a vision of divine light in “Biblich-symbolischer Sprache” (Biblical-symbolic language) and Konstantinovsky wrote that Plotinus and Evagrius fashioned their “own symbolic language to point to experiences that language cannot contain”. Bunge, *Das Geistgebet*, 63. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 99.

2.4 Origin of the Light

Another point of discussion among Evagrian scholars concerning Evagrius' theory on light-visions is that of the origin of the light. Many scholars have pointed to Evagrius' journey to the elder John of Lycopolis to underline the importance for Evagrius of the question of where the light comes from. This journey is described in *Antirrhetikos* 6.16, where Evagrius asks John of Lycopolis “whether the nature of the intellect is [itself] luminous (...) or whether some other [light] from without shines upon and illuminates it”.¹⁴² In other words, Evagrius asks the elder if the *nous* is luminous by itself, or if it is illuminated by some external principle: God. The elder gives the non-committal answer that human beings “are not in a position to judge this” and that “the *nous* also cannot be illuminated while praying without the grace of God”.¹⁴³ Several scholars have suggested that Evagrius, unsatisfied with the elder's answer, attempted to answer the question himself in his writings; these scholars have tried to reconstruct Evagrius' opinion on the matter, but they have come to different conclusions. The options listed by most scholars are that the light comes from God, the *nous*, or both. There are two main positions concerning the origin of the light: the first is that God breathes into the *nous* a “kindred light” (συγγενὲς φῶς) based on *Reflections* 2; the second considers light-visions to constitute a fusion of two distinct lights, one noetic and one divine, based primarily on *KG* II.29.

The first position is supported by Harmless and Fitzgerald, and Casiday.¹⁴⁴ Harmless and Fitzgerald, for example, argue that an ascetic in prayer sees the *nous* “become luminous because they are illumined by the light that God is”.¹⁴⁵ This interpretation is essentially based on *Reflections* 2, where Evagrius writes that it is “God who breathes into them the kindred light”.¹⁴⁶ There are, however, different ways of conceiving this participation in divine luminosity. While Harmless and Fitzgerald emphasize the distinctness of the two kindred lights, Casiday argues that the light of God becomes the “shared property” of God and the *nous*.¹⁴⁷

The second position is mainly put forth by Konstantinovsky and Alfeyev. Konstantinovsky's interpretation is, however, ambivalent. On the one hand, she writes that the *nous* “draws its light-like

¹⁴² Evagrius, “*Antirrhetikos* 6.16,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 11, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/07_Antirrheth/00a_start.htm. Dysinger, here translates νόος (from νοῦς) as intellect, instead of transcribing it.

¹⁴³ Evagrius, “*Antirrhetikos* 6.16,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 11, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/07_Antirrheth/00a_start.htm.

¹⁴⁴ Conway-Jones also seems to support this position as she quotes both Harmless and Fitzgerald, and Casiday's interpretation of *Reflections* 2. Conway-Jones, “The Greatest Paradox of All,” 271. Stewart emphasizes the ambiguity in Evagrius' writing and does not attempt to reconstruct Evagrius' personal opinion concerning the origin of the light. Stewart, “Imageless,” 193.

¹⁴⁵ Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire,” 518. While Harmless and Fitzgerald on the one hand write that “the ultimate answer is both” (i.e. that the light comes from both God and the *nous*), they later write: “the one praying sees the interior heights of the mind become luminous because they are illumined by the light that God is”, suggesting ultimate divine origination. Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire,” 513, 518.

¹⁴⁶ Evagrius, “*Reflections* 2,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 17, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm.

¹⁴⁷ Harmless and Fitzgerald, “Sapphire.” 518. Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 183.

quality not from itself but from the light of God” (similar to the interpretation of Casiday, Harmless and Fitzgerald), while on the other hand envisioning a “fusion” between the two lights”.¹⁴⁸ In line with the first interpretation, she asserts that there is a “generic relationship” between the light of God and the *nous*, where “during prayer the light of the intellect is activated by the light of the Creator”.¹⁴⁹ This first interpretation seems to be in line with that of Casiday, Harmless and Fitzgerald. However, her interpretation of a “fusion” between the two lights seems to be incompatible with this interpretation. She bases her interpretation of a “fusion” on a peculiar understanding of *katastasis* as the “first” or “former” state, where she interprets this “first state” to refer to a “pre-lapsarian state of purity lost in the fall but re-gained through *praxis* and passionlessness” and in which the intellect “awakens to its ‘own’ primordial luminosity”.¹⁵⁰

Similarly, Alfeyev conceives of the relationship between the light of God and that of the *nous* in terms of fusion, where the light of the *nous* is “mingled with the light of the Holy Trinity”, which he bases on *KG* II.29: “Just as fire potentially possesses its body, so also the *nous* potentially possesses the soul when it is entirely mixed with the light of the Blessed Trinity”.¹⁵¹ Moreover, Alfeyev translates *κατάστασις* as the “initial” state of the *nous*, seemingly in line with Konstantinovskiy’s interpretation of “primordial luminosity”.¹⁵² Casiday, strangely, asserts that Alfeyev concluded that there are “three different lights” in Evagrius: one originating from the *nous*, the other from God, and a third joining the two together, but Alfeyev never explicitly mentions such a third light.¹⁵³ Casiday might have based his interpretation of Alfeyev’s interpretation of Evagrius on Alfeyev’s insistence on mingling, but this mingling does not occur through the mediation of a third light.

Thus, there are two main positions concerning the relation between the light of God and that of the *nous*: the first arguing for the light of God being the ultimate source for the light of the *nous*, while the second suggests a fusion between two lights—one noetic and the other Trinitarian. Of these two positions, I find the position of Harmless and Fitzgerald and Casiday most compelling, as the light ultimately does not come from the *nous*, but from God. Even if one would accept the interpretation of a primordial noetic light this *nous* would be luminous precisely because it would be “filled with the light of the knowledge of God”.¹⁵⁴ Hence, God would still be the ultimate origin of the noetic light. I however, find Konstantinovskiy’s interpretation of *κατάστασις* as a pre-lapsarian first state

¹⁴⁸ Konstantinovskiy, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 98, 97.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 97. Stewart remarks on the ambiguity in Evagrius’ writings that “part of the ambiguity is that Evagrius writes both about the mind in its original created nature, in which it is filled with the light of the knowledge of God, and in its present state for which radiance is no longer natural because that original access to knowledge has been lost”. Stewart, “Imageless,” 193, note 96.

¹⁵¹ Hilarion Alfeyev, *St. Symeon the New Theologian and the Orthodox Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 229. Evagrius, “*Kephalaia Gnostica* II.29,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 11, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/02_Gno-Keph/00a_start.htm. Alfeyev’s translation of *KG* II.29 reads “mingled” rather than “mixed”.

¹⁵² Alfeyev, *St. Symeon*, 228.

¹⁵³ Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 180.

¹⁵⁴ Stewart, “Imageless,” 193, note 96.

unconvincing, as she fails to cite passages in the Evagrian *corpus* where he explicitly connects the luminous *nous* to a primordial state before the fall. Instead, I would argue that the noetic light is “proper” to the *nous*, because the *nous* in its proper state (*katastasis*), free from all *noemata*, reflects the light of the Holy Trinity.¹⁵⁵

Furthermore, I do not consider *KG* II.29 to be necessarily incompatible with ultimate divine origination, as the passage does not state that the light of the *nous* becomes mingled with the light of the “Blessed Trinity” but simply that the *nous* itself can become saturated with the Trinitarian light.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, this passage can also be interpreted in the sense that the *nous* mirrors the divine luminosity in its *katastatic* transparency.¹⁵⁷

Lastly, while most scholars have only discussed three options of origination—God, the *nous*, or both—Evagrius’ works also suggest a fourth possibility, namely that the light comes from the demons. This fourth option will be discussed at length in chapter three, through an analysis of the passages in *On Prayer* that discuss demonically manipulated visions of light.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued for the important influence of both Scripture and philosophy in Evagrius’ descriptions of light-visions. Apart from Scripture and philosophy, the influence of Christian writers, mainly Clement of Alexandria, on his Trinitarian light-visions has been observed. Instead of considering either Scripture, philosophy or theology to be the most important influence on Evagrius’ light-mysticism, I have argued that Evagrius wraps his experience in symbolic language, using Scriptural, philosophical and theological tropes to signal divine immanence. In that sense, Evagrius’ teaching on Trinitarian light-visions is a synthesis of these various influences and his personal experience.

Subsequently, I have discussed the various options for the origin of the light: God, the *nous* or both, and I have signaled the presence of a fourth possibility—the demons—that will be discussed in chapter three. After having discussed the arguments of the secondary literature, I have argued that the light, ultimately, comes from God, or rather, the Holy Trinity, and that the *nous* in its true state (*katastasis*), free from thoughts and images, becomes transparent and is able to reflect the light of the

¹⁵⁵ Bunge is one of the few scholars who believe that the light, according to Evagrius, ultimately comes from the *nous*, but for the arguments listed above I find this interpretation unsatisfactory: the instances where Evagrius mentions the *nous*’s “proper light” should be understood as referring to the *katastasis* of the *nous*, rather than claims concerning its ultimate origin. Bunge, *Das Geistesbetet*, 66.

¹⁵⁶ Evagrius, “*Kephalaia Gnostica* II.29,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 11, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/02_Gno-Keph/00a_start.htm

¹⁵⁷ Casiday tried to refute Alfeyev’s conceptualization of three lights: one of God, the other of the *nous* and a third one uniting the two. However, I cannot find the presence of such a “third light” in Alfeyev’s analysis of Evagrian light-mysticism. Casiday has a point in noting that Evagrius’ writings are not set in stone and that he might have altered his opinion in between writing different works, but seeing as there is no consensus concerning the relative chronology of Evagrius’ works, it is impossible to say which position he adopted near the end of his life. This is especially problematic with regards to the discrepancy between *Reflections 2* and *KG* II.29. Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 180. Alfeyev, *St Symeon*, 229.

Holy Trinity. I have suggested that Konstantinovskiy and Alfeyev's interpretation of a fusion between two lights is based on an erroneous reading of *KG* II.29, as the passage does not mention a noetic light being mixed with a divine light, but simply states that the *nous* has the potentiality to become "entirely mixed with the light of the blessed Trinity".¹⁵⁸ Furthermore I have argued against Konstantinovskiy's interpretation of *katastasis* as referring to a primordial, pre-lapsarian state of the *nous*, as Evagrius never connects noetic light to a pre-fall Eden. Instead, I have argued that the light is proper to the *nous*, because the *nous* in its proper state (*katastasis*) reflects the light of the Holy Trinity, being made transparent through the shedding of all *noemata*.

Apart from the influences on Evagrius' Trinitarian light-vision teachings and the origin of the light, I have discussed the context in which such light-visions occur (i.e. the "time of prayer") and the requirements for experiencing such light-visions (*apatheia* and the deprivation of all *noemata*). I have, furthermore, mentioned the possibility of a fourth option for the origination of the light: namely that the light may come from the demons. This fourth possibility will be discussed in the following chapter.

Evagrius never explicitly states that mystical experience is ineffable. On the contrary, he tries to communicate mystical experience in *Thoughts-Reflections*, but he does so in symbolical language. This is not to say that Evagrius deliberately tried to cloak esoteric experience only to be understood by the select few, but rather that he in *Thoughts-Reflections* tries to understand experience through the prism of Scripture. His objective in these treatises is not to communicate the "what" of light-visions, but their meaning. They are a theological reflection on mystical experience rather than an anthropological inquiry into the phenomenon of light-visions among Egyptian fourth-century desert monastics.

What is more, Evagrius' use of symbolic language resembles the logic of language as a whole: commonly established symbols are used to refer to a sensory, conceptual, or noetic reality. Konstantinovskiy's point of the epistemological insufficiency or "raw experience" extends to language as a whole. In the words of Stephen Katz: "neither mystical experience nor more ordinary forms of human experience give any indication or grounds for believing that they are unmediated. *All* experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex ways".¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Evagrius, "*Kephalaia Gnostica* II.29," trans. Dysinger, accessed February 11, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/02_Gno-Keph/00a_start.htm. Alfeyev's translation of *KG* II.29 reads "mingled" rather than "mixed".

¹⁵⁹ Stephen Katz, "General Editor's Introduction," *Comparative Mysticism: An Anthology of Original Sources*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 5.

Chapter 3. Demonic Light-Visions in *On Prayer*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Evagrius not only believed God and the *nous* to be possible sources for light-visions, he also warned against the danger of delusional visions of light, caused by the interference of demons. In this chapter, I will discuss Evagrius' teaching on the dangers of delusional light-visions in *On Prayer* and his teaching on compunction and humility as a counter-measure for the cause of such delusional visions. In doing so, I will first discuss the background of Evagrius' teaching on demonically induced light-visions, by discussing the influence of Scripture, Origen, and desert monasticism on demonic delusion. Subsequently, I will analyze the most important passages in *On Prayer* concerning delusional light-visions, namely *Prayer* 73-4, and passages thematically associated with it (*Prayer* 67-8).

3.1 Background of Evagrius' Teaching on Demonic Light-Visions

Evagrius, of course, did not develop his teachings on the spiritual life in a vacuum. Instead, he drew on the tradition of Biblical exegesis, Origen, and early Christian desert monasticism.

3.1.1 Scripture

The Old Testament contains four cases where demons are explicitly mentioned: Tobit 6:8, 15-17, Psalm 90:6 that speaks of the "demon of noonday", Psalm 95:5 that asserts that "all the gods of the nations are demons" and Isaiah 13:21 that prophesies that "demons will dance" in Babylon.¹⁶⁰ Apart from these literal instances, the many cases in which "enemies" are mentioned in the Psalms were often interpreted as referring to the demons in the early Church. Evagrius himself is an example of this tradition as he frequently interprets verses within the Psalm in the same manner.¹⁶¹

In the Gospels, demons are understood not only as spiritual enemies but as enemies that can possess humans and drive them into madness.¹⁶² "Prayer and fasting" are presented as tools of combat against some demons and the apostles are given the power to exhort demons.¹⁶³ The many instances in which Christ drove out demons caused great consternation in the Jewish community at that time and the question arose whether this authority over demons was a sign of Jesus' association with them (by the power of "Beelzebul") or God.¹⁶⁴ Thus, Jesus' authority over demons became a question of Messianic authenticity.

In many ways, the later stories of desert monastics, among whom Anthony and Evagrius, echoed the trials of Jesus' in the desert (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13), where Satan tempts Jesus in a three-fold manner after he had fasted for forty days in the Judean desert. Evagrius interprets these

¹⁶⁰ Tobit 6.8, 15-17, SAAS, 571. Psalm 90:6, SAAS, 746. Isaiah 13:19-22, SAAS, 1069.

¹⁶¹ *Thoughts* 10, 30, 37. Among the many instances in *On Psalms* see Evagrius, "On Psalms 6.5, 12.3," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 8, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/08_Psalms/00a_start.htm.

¹⁶² Mt 8.28-34, Mt 12.22; Lk 8.26-39, 11.24-26.

¹⁶³ Mt 17.21.

¹⁶⁴ Mk 9.34, 11.22-45.

three temptations—turning stones into bread, the subjugation of the whole world to Jesus and the challenge to jump off the Temple—as echoing the three demons that attack in the first wave: gluttony, avarice, and vainglory.¹⁶⁵ Evagrius then takes Christ commanding the devil to “get behind him” as an example of the impossibility of banishing the devil “unless we despise these three [tempting-]thoughts”.¹⁶⁶

3.1.2 Origen

While there seems to be no passage in Origen on a demonic manipulation of light around the *nous*, Evagrius’ overall teaching on demonic interference in the spiritual life is influenced by Origen. The main idea that Evagrius took from Origen is that of the importance of demons and angels in the spiritual life. In *On the First Principles*, Origen asserts that human will alone cannot accomplish evil deeds (nor good ones) without the enticement of evil powers.¹⁶⁷ The role of angels and demons is also evident in the key passage concerning demonic manipulation of light in *On Prayer*, where demons are said to arouse a delusional vision of light, which can only be dissolved through the help of the angels.¹⁶⁸ Origen, furthermore, developed the idea that the main criteria for the discernment of spirits are the presence of inner peace or turmoil and the presence of good or evil deeds.¹⁶⁹ These two criteria essentially come down to the basic criterion of discernment of “recognizing a tree from its fruits”.¹⁷⁰

3.1.3 Desert Spirituality

Written between 356 and 362, Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony*, an incredibly influential work for (early) desert monasticism, is likely to have been read by Evagrius.¹⁷¹ In Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony*, visions of light are both described in a positive and negative manner, coming from God or the demons, just as in Evagrius’ prayer trilogy.¹⁷² In chapter 39, Athanasius describes how Anthony was once visited by demons bearing an “appearance of light”, who said to him that they had come to give him light.¹⁷³ Anthony, however, closed his eyes in prayer, and immediately the demonic light disappeared. Yet, while Evagrius describes a vision of light around the *nous*, such specificity is absent in the *Life of*

¹⁶⁵ *Thoughts* 1.

¹⁶⁶ Evagrius, “*On Thoughts* 1,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 18, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Perilog/00a_start.htm.

¹⁶⁷ Origen, *On the First Principles* 3.2.2, ed. and trans. John Behr, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) 385. Elisabeth Hense, *Early Christian Discernment of Spirits*, (Zürich: Lit Verlag, 2016) 99.

¹⁶⁸ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 74-5,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 25, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm. Stewart, “Imageless”, 194.

¹⁶⁹ Hense, *Early Christian Discernment*, 99-100.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Luke 6:43-45; Matthew 7:16.

¹⁷¹ Robert C. Gregg, “Foreword”, *Life of Anthony*, (New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980), xi.

¹⁷² For a positive description of a non-delusional, i.e. authentic, light-vision see *Life of Anthony* 10: “For when he looked up, he saw the roof being opened, as it seemed, and a certain beam of light descending toward him. Suddenly the demons vanished from view, the pain of his body ceased instantly, and the building was once more intact”. Athanasius, *Life of Anthony* 10, (New York/Ramsey/Toronto: Paulist Press, 1980), 39.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, *Life of St Anthony* 39, 60.

Anthony and while Evagrius' explanation for such visions points to the demonic manipulation of a place in the brain, the *Life of Anthony* provides the explanation that such visions are only the "initial elements and likenesses of the fire prepared for them" (i.e. the demons).¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, for both Evagrius and Anthony the vision of demonically induced light is inauthentic, as only the light from God has true being: demonic light is only a false attempt at mimicking this divine light and, thereby, lead the ascetic astray.¹⁷⁵

Likewise, the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* include a story about "Abba Anthony", where the possibility of delusional visions is discussed.¹⁷⁶ While it is uncertain whether Evagrius had read the written *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (a.k.a. *Apophthegmata*), the several *Apophthegmata*-like passages in his corpus suggest that he was familiar with the genre.¹⁷⁷

In the sayings concerning "Abba Anthony", a story is recounted where monks come to seek Anthony to ask him the question of whether their visions about the future come from God or the demons. Abba Anthony finally convinced them that they come from the demons by telling them a detail of their journey that they could not have known (namely that their donkey had died on the way), which the demons had revealed to him.¹⁷⁸ While this passage discusses a prophetic vision of the future rather than a light-vision, it nevertheless suggests that a general suspicion against spiritual visions was widely shared in Egyptian monasticism.

3.2 Demonic Light-Visions in *On Prayer*

In this section, I will provide a close textual analysis of Evagrius' teaching on delusional light-visions, hitherto lacking, by going through the passages in *On Prayer* just mentioned. First, I will discuss the phenomenology of delusion with regards to Evagrius' description of demonic light-visions in *On Prayer*. These descriptions will be compared to instances in *On Thoughts* where Evagrius mentions other types of delusion. Secondly, I will discuss two fundamental differences between demonic and Trinitarian light-visions revolving around formlessness vs. "localizing the Divine" and contemplation vs. conceit.

3.2.1 Phenomenology of Demonic Light-Visions

While expositions of Evagrius' light-mysticism in secondary literature almost exclusively revolve around Trinitarian light-visions, the clearest description of the phenomenology of light-visions is found in Evagrius' description of demonic light-visions in *On Prayer* 73-4. Here Evagrius describes

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 24, 50.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 24, 50.

¹⁷⁶ "Anthony 12", *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. Benedicta Ward, (Spencer, Massachusetts: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 8-9.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. *Praktikos* 91-100 and *Prayer* 106-112

¹⁷⁸ "Anthony 12", *Sayings*, 8-9.

the strange phenomenon of a vision of “light around the *nous*” manipulated by the demons by touching a “place in the brain”:

73. Once the *nous* is praying purely unwaveringly, and truly, [completely] apart from the [passions], the demons no longer insinuate themselves from the left, but from the right. They set before it the glory of God and shape it in the form of things beloved by the senses, so that [the *nous*] will believe it has perfectly achieved its goal concerning prayer. An admirable and ascetical (*praktikos*) man explained that this is caused by the passion of vainglory and by the demon that attaches itself to [a particular] place in the brain and makes the veins pulsate.¹⁷⁹

74. I believe the demon touches that place [thus] manipulating the light surrounding the *nous* however he wishes; and in this way, the passion of vainglory produces a [tempting-]thought (*logismos*) that shapes the *nous* so that it will foolishly [try to] localize the divine, essential knowledge. This sort of person is not troubled by carnal and impure passions; rather he seems to stand purely before [God]. So he presumes there is no longer any opposing energy at work within him: and therefore he assumes he sees a divine apparition; one that [actually] comes from the demon who very cunningly manipulates by means of the brain the light conjoined [to the *nous*], thus shaping [the *nous*], as we have said.¹⁸⁰

Three aspects of this quote need to be underlined. First, the fact that Evagrius writes that the ascetic “assumes he sees a divine apparition”. This phrase underscores that, for Evagrius, a demonic light-vision is illusory: the ascetic *assumes* to be visited by the divine, while he only sees an imitation of the divine light, fabricated by the malicious demons. It also accentuates the problem of a demonic light-vision, namely that the ascetic mistakenly believes it to be a divine visitation.

Second, the expressions that the demons touch a “certain part of the brain”. By “manipulating the light surrounding the *nous*”, the demons create a false experience of luminosity that attempts to mimic the vision of Trinitarian light to lead the ascetic astray.¹⁸¹ Evagrius’ description of demons touching a certain place in the brain may recall modern neurological explanations of spiritual phenomena, but it is unclear what Evagrius exactly meant by this statement and how it might relate to the findings of contemporary neurology. Further interdisciplinary research into the medical knowledge of Antiquity and modern neuroscience is required.

¹⁷⁹ Evagrius, “*On Prayer 73*,” trans. Dysinger, accessed January 25, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

¹⁸⁰ Evagrius, “*On Prayer 74*,” trans. Dysinger, accessed January 25, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

¹⁸¹ For an analysis of the physiology of delusion see David T. Bradford, “9.4 A Psychosis of Pride and Vainglory,” in *The Spiritual Tradition in Eastern Christianity: Ascetic Psychology, Mystical Experience, and Physical Practices*, Studies in Spirituality 26, (Leuven/Paris/Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2016) 227-230.

Remarkably, Evagrius does not mention any physical factors in relation to Trinitarian, and in his opinion, real light-visions. Moreover, in *Thoughts-Reflections*, Evagrius only uses the expression of the “light surrounding the *nous*” once (*Thoughts* 30).¹⁸² While Evagrius mentions noetic illumination in *Thoughts-Reflections*, he never uses such descriptive terms in these works as he does in *On Prayer*.¹⁸³ Thus, to more clearly expose the phenomenology of Evagrius’ light-mysticism necessitates beginning with his descriptions of demonic light-visions and then turning to Trinitarian light-visions.

In any case, demonic and Trinitarian light-visions are phenomenologically similar: both concern a vision of light around the *nous*, or, more succinctly, a vision of the *nous* being illumined by divine or seemingly divine light. The only phenomenological difference between the two is that demonic light-visions also involve pulsating veins, whereas Evagrius never mentions such a phenomenon in the context of Trinitarian light-visions.

3.2.2 Cause of Demonic Light-Visions

The third aspect of Prayer 73-4 that needs to be underlined is the fact that Evagrius calls the passion of vainglory (*κενοδοξία*) to be the cause of demonic light-visions. The word *κενοδοξία* consists of two components: *κενο*, from *κενός* meaning “empty, and *δοξία*, from *δόξα* meaning glory. In *Prayer* 73, he mentions that the demons “set before it [i.e. the *nous*, TB] the glory of God”. This glory, however, is empty, because the vision of light only attempts to mimic the light of the Trinity. Thus, the glory set before the *nous* in a demonic light-vision is a false or “vain” glory.

In some way, it is strange that Evagrius calls vainglory the cause of demonic light-visions, because in his treatise called *Praktikos*, he defines vainglory as “hunting for glory among men”, i.e. seeking empty human glory rather than divine glory.¹⁸⁴ What he describes in *Prayer* 73-4, however, seems to have nothing to do with seeking human praise, but rather with thinking to have achieved a high level of spiritual proficiency, by being endowed with the vision of divine light. Perhaps vainglory in the context of *Prayer* 73-4 should be understood as closely related to the passion of pride. The English *Philokalia* translation of the same passage conveys this by translating *κενοδοξία* with “self-esteem”.¹⁸⁵

Though *On Prayer* is the only treatise in which Evagrius discusses demonic light-visions, he does mention other types of delusion in *On Thoughts*. In *Thoughts* 21, 23, Evagrius describes

¹⁸² Evagrius, “*On Thoughts* 30,” trans. Dysinger, accessed April 1, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Perilog/00a_start.htm.

¹⁸³ For example, *Reflections* 27 calls prayer “the state of the *nous* [illuminated] by the sole light of the Blessed Trinity”, but this does not provide a clear description of the phenomenology of light-visions. Evagrius, “*Reflections* 27,” trans. Dysinger, accessed April 1, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm.

¹⁸⁴ Evagrius, “*Praktikos* 13,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 4, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm.

¹⁸⁵ Evagrius the Solitary, “*On Prayer* 73-4,” *The Philokalia*, 64.

delusional experiences in the form of “visions of terror”, “nocturnal flashes of lightning”, “burning air”, “voices” and “ethereal forms of horse-drawn chariots” and “Ethiopians” filling the house.¹⁸⁶ In these two chapters, pride is both the cause and effect of these delusional experiences, as the overwhelming terror that they instill causes the ascetic to fall into “madness, succumbing to megalomania; and through fear he forgets his [merely] human state”.¹⁸⁷ In *Prayer 97*, Evagrius, similarly, describes the hearing of “noises, crashes, voices, and tortured [screams]”, but where the ascetic, in contrast to *Thoughts 23*, does not “cave in or surrender his rationality” through recourse to the antirrhetic use of Scripture—i.e. to recite verses of Scripture to ward off demonic suggestions.¹⁸⁸ Interestingly, Evagrius does not mention madness or irrationality in his description of demonic light-visions. They mainly seem to be dangerous, not necessarily for one’s sanity, but for one’s spiritual health, as they lead to a false sense of self-satisfaction.

Thus, based on the discussion of 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 it can be inferred that there are three dimensions to Evagrius’ description of demonic light-visions: physical, emotional, and spiritual. The physical dimension is his description of the physiology of demonic light-visions, caused by demons touching a part of the brain and resulting in “pulsating veins”. The emotional dimension is that of the root of delusion: vainglory or pride—if passions are to be understood as the patristic counter-part for our modern understanding of emotions. Lastly, the spiritual dimension lies in the fact that demonic light-visions are caused by demonic intervention which is aimed to mimic the light of the Holy Trinity. The effects of demonic light-visions have both emotional and spiritual dimensions: self-satisfaction and an erroneous attempt to localize the divine.

3.3 Difference between Trinitarian and Demonic Light-Visions

In the following sections, I will discuss the fundamental differences between Trinitarian and demonic light-visions. I will argue that their fundamental differences lie in the effects or “fruits” that they have on the ascetic: Trinitarian light-visions lead to contemplation and transformation, while demonic light-visions lead to conceit and an erroneous attempt to localize the divine.

3.3.1 Fruits of Trinitarian Light-Visions

3.3.1.1 Contemplation

Bunge has suggested the intimate relation between divine knowledge and divine light in Evagrius who calls the contemplation of the light of the Holy Trinity a “*symbole de la connaissance de la Trinité*”.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Evagrius, “*On Thoughts 21, 23*,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 1, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Peri-Log/00a_start.htm.

¹⁸⁷ Evagrius, “*On Thoughts 23*,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 1, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Peri-Log/00a_start.htm.

¹⁸⁸ Evagrius, “*On Prayer 97*,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 1, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm

¹⁸⁹ Gabriel Bunge, “La montaigne intelligible: De la contemplation indirecte à la connaissance immédiate de Dieu dans le traité *De oratione* d’Évagre le Pontique,” *Studia Monastica* 42 (2000): 12.

Konstantinovsky, similarly, called light-visions “an instance of gnostic states”, i.e. states transporting the *nous* to the realm of divine knowledge (*gnosis*).¹⁹⁰ Stewart, moreover, pointed out that Evagrius often “refers to divine knowledge as light” in his *Scholia on the Psalms*. While this may be especially true for his *Scholia on the Psalms*, it shows the intimate relationship between gnostic and noetic illumination in Evagrius’ works.¹⁹¹

3.3.1.2 Transformation

This knowledge of the divine is not external, as Conway-Jones stated, but experiential, obtained through “inner transformation”, i.e. through the purification and illumination of the *nous*.¹⁹² This transformative effect of light-visions can be seen especially in *Thoughts* 39, as Bitton-Askhelony pointed out.¹⁹³ In *Thoughts* 39, Evagrius writes:

When the *nous* has stripped off the old man and put on [that which comes] from grace (cf. Col 3:9-10) then it will see its own state at the time of prayer, like a sapphire or the color of heaven, which Scripture calls the place of God that was seen by the elders under Mount Sinai (cf. Exod. 24:20).¹⁹⁴

As has been established in chapter two, the Scriptural tropes of “sapphire or the color of heaven” and the “place of God” refer to light-visions, through the term *katastasis* linking various Evagrian expressions. Thus, the “own state” seen at the time of prayer refers to the luminous state of the *nous*, which comes about when the *nous* has “stripped off the old man and put on [that which comes] from grace”.¹⁹⁵ The state of grace, here, refers to the state of the new man, the whole human being transformed and refashioned. The requirement of “stripping off the old man” in *Thoughts* 39 should be interpreted as paralleling the requirement of *apatheia* in *Reflections* 2.¹⁹⁶ The passions form a second nature that cloaks the true nature of man. Through stripping off this “old self”, the new man is revealed. Along these lines, Bunge writes: “It cannot be stated more clearly that all *Christian* mysticism belongs to the realm of *grace* and to the renewal (*Neuschöpfung*) of mankind that Christians partakes of in Christ”.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁰ Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 39.

¹⁹¹ Stewart, “Imageless,” 193.

¹⁹² Conway-Jones, “The Greatest Paradox of All,” 272.

¹⁹³ Bitton-Askhelony, “Limit of the Mind,” 301.

¹⁹⁴ Evagrius, “*On Thoughts* 39,” trans. Dysinger, accessed April 8, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Perilog/00a_start.htm.

¹⁹⁵ Evagrius, “*On Thoughts* 39,” trans. Dysinger, accessed April 8, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/04_Perilog/00a_start.htm.

¹⁹⁶ *Reflections* 2 states that seeing the proper state of the *nous* requires *apatheia*. Evagrius, “*Reflections* 2,” trans. Dysinger, accessed April 8, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm.

¹⁹⁷ Translation mine from the German: “Deutlicher kann man nicht sagen, daß alle *christliche* Mystik in den Raum der *Gnade* und der uns in Christus zuteilgewordenen *Neuschöpfung* gehört. „Mystik“ ist für den Christen

In his *Kephalaia Gnostica*, Evagrius indicates the connection between contemplation and transformation: “Just as the senses are changed by receiving different qualities, so too the *nous* is changed by constantly gazing upon [richly-]diverse contemplations”.¹⁹⁸ Perhaps even more significantly, in one of his letters, Evagrius writes: “a pure heart receives the imprint of another heaven, where the vision is of light and of the “spiritual place,” where the *logoi* of beings are seen and where the holy angels gather among those who are worthy”.¹⁹⁹ The “spiritual place” mentioned in this letter refers to the “place of God” in *Thoughts-reflections* associated with Trinitarian light-visions. Not only do *logismoi* and *noemata* stamp the *nous*, Trinitarian light-visions also leave their imprint, thereby radically transforming the human being.²⁰⁰

3.3.2 Fruits of Demonic Light-Visions

3.3.2.1 Conceit

While demonic and Trinitarian light-visions appear to be phenomenologically similar, their effects are vastly different. The first essential difference in the effects of Trinitarian and demonic light-visions is that the latter lead to a false sense of self-satisfaction. This can most clearly be seen in Evagrius’ statement that demonic light-visions lead the ascetic to “believe it has perfectly achieved its goal concerning prayer” and that there is “no longer any opposing energy at work within him”.²⁰¹ Supposing to have “no longer any opposing energy at work”, further, indicates a high degree of *apatheia*, but the “goal concerning prayer” indicates an even loftier spiritual state. The goal of prayer, in Evagrius’ works is to rise up to God, no longer chained by passion, thoughts or *noemata*. As we have seen in the discussion of *Thoughts-Reflections*, this pure state of the *nous* is in Evagrius’ works inherently intertwined with a vision of the *nous* being illumined by the light of the Holy Trinity.²⁰² Thus, by seeing a demonically manipulated vision of light, the ascetic believes to have reached great spiritual heights. In *Prayer* 68, Evagrius calls this attitude of self-satisfaction “conceit”, which sums up the meaning of the aforementioned demonic light-vision effects particularly well.²⁰³

Two differences between demonic light-visions in *On Prayer* and other forms of delusion, as described in *On Thoughts*, is that the first is caused by vainglory and leads to conceit, while the latter

im Grunde kein „außergewöhnlicher Zustand“, sonder vielmehr die *Verinnerlichung* des jedem Gläubigen geschenkten ordentlichen Standes des Gnade”. Bunge, *Das Geistgebet*, 65.

¹⁹⁸ Evagrius, “*Kephalaia Gnostica* II.83,” trans. Dysinger, accessed January 21, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/02_Gno-Keph/00a_start.htm.

¹⁹⁹ Evagrius, “Letter 39.5,” trans. Dysinger, accessed January 21, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/11_Letters/01_sel-lets.htm#LETTER_59_6.

²⁰⁰ It seems that Evagrius uses “heart” (*kardia*) and *nous* interchangeably in *Letter* 39.5, as he begins the passage with describing how the *nous* puts off the old and is born of grace.

²⁰¹ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 73-4,” trans. Dysinger, accessed January 25, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

²⁰² Cf. *Reflections* 4.

²⁰³ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 67-8,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 26, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

is caused by pride and leads to madness and megalomania (cf. *Thoughts* 23). However, if one looks beyond the different diagnosis of vainglory versus pride, demonic light-visions are not that different in this regard from other types of delusion such as megalomania and conceit. After all, both involve forgetting one's measure and place and instill a sense of greatness in the deluded ascetic.

3.3.2.2 Localizing the Divine

The second essential difference in the effects of Trinitarian and demonic light-visions is that demonic light-visions attempt to localize the divine, while Trinitarian light-visions are radically formless. In *Prayer* 73-4, Evagrius mentions that the demons shape the *nous* “in the form of things beloved by the senses”, “so that it will foolishly [try to] localize the divine, essential knowledge [θείας καὶ οὐσιώδους γνώσεως, TB]”.²⁰⁴ Géhin and Hausherr pointed out the expression of “essential knowledge” is an expression Evagrius frequently uses throughout his works.²⁰⁵ Bunge, furthermore, commented on this expression by identifying “connaissance essentielle” as referring to the Holy Trinity. Guillaumont, likewise, equates “divine essential knowledge” with the divine itself, by stating that knowledge is the essence of God.²⁰⁶

In *Prayer* 68, Evagrius uses the more direct expression of “localizing the Deity”:

68. Guard against the snares of the enemies (...) For sometimes while you are praying purely and undisturbed, suddenly there stands before you some strange and alien form to lead [you] astray into conceit, [by] rashly localizing the Deity (τοπάζοντα τὸ θεῖον, TB) in order to persuade you that the Deity is quantifiable: whereas the Deity is not quantifiable and is without shape.²⁰⁷

This erroneous attempt to “localize the Divine” goes hand in hand with a persuasion that the “Deity is quantifiable”. In *Prayer* 67, Evagrius, similarly, warns against giving shape to the divine: “67. Do not give [any] shape to the Divine in yourself when you pray, nor should you permit any form to stamp an impression on your *nous*: instead, approach immaterially what is immaterial; and you will understand”.²⁰⁸ More succinctly, in *Prayer* 116, Evagrius writes: “116. The beginning of [deceptive] wandering of the *nous* is vainglory; by it the *nous* is moved to try to circumscribe the divine in shape

²⁰⁴ *Prayer* 73-4.

²⁰⁵ Géhin, *Chapitres Sur la Prières*, 289, note 74. Hausherr, *Leçons d'Un Contemplatif*, 107.

²⁰⁶ Guillaumont writes: “Dieu est donc celui qui « est » ou qui « a » la science «essentielle ». La science est l'essence de Dieu” (God is, thus, he who “is” or “has” essential knowledge). Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, 341.

²⁰⁷ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 68,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 26, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

²⁰⁸ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 67,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 26, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

and form”.²⁰⁹ And in *Prayer* 117, Evagrius writes: “blessed is the *nous* that, at the time of prayer, has acquired perfect formlessness.”²¹⁰

What these passages refer to is an erroneous attempt to shape, form, or localize the divine, which goes back to the condemnation in Exodus 20:4 of making images of God, who is beyond circumscription. For Evagrius, a genuine encounter with God in prayer can only happen when the *nous* is completely free of all images and forms and, thus, the encounter with the Living God should also be free of all attempts to form, shape, or localize the divine.

So far, I have suggested that an essential difference between demonic and Trinitarian light-visions is that demonic light-visions involve an erroneous localization of the divine, while the latter do not. However, one might wonder whether Evagrius' expression of the “place of God” associated with Trinitarian light-visions does not also involve, to some extent, localizing the divine. *Thoughts-Reflections* is not the only place where Evagrius uses this paradoxical expression. He also mentions the “place of God” in *On Prayer*, but more frequently he adopts the expression of the “place of prayer” in this particular treatise.²¹¹ Stewart has suggested the equivalency of these expressions and interpreted them both as an allusion to light-visions via the Biblical trope of the “place of God” (cf. Exod. 24:10-11).²¹²

Paradoxically, in *Reflections* 20, Evagrius asserts that the *nous* “when it [attains] to prayer” “is in formlessness [ἀνειδέω, TB], which is called the “place of God”.”²¹³ Dysinger notes that one Syriac manuscript of *Reflections* 20 has “formless light” rather than “formlessness”. In any case, *Reflections* 20 puzzlingly associates the “place of God”, which might suggest a locus, and, hence, form, with “formlessness”. Conway-Jones has reflected on the paradox of the expression of “place of God”: “the “place of God” is not a place which can be measured, or described in quantitative terms. They are following a tradition going back to Philo, in which the “place of God,” paradoxically, designates God’s lack of spatial containment”.²¹⁴ For the logic behind this, Conway-Jones refers to Evagrius’ *On the Faith*, where he writes: “number is a property of quantity; and quantity is linked to bodily nature; therefore, number is a property of bodily nature”.²¹⁵ She continues the quotation from *On the Faith* with “By contrast, ““One and Only [ἡ μὸνὰς καὶ ἐνὰς]’ is the designation of the simple and uncircumscribed essence [τῆς ἀπλῆς καὶ ἀπεριλήπτου οὐσίας]”.”²¹⁶ Thus, the uncircumscribable essence of God cannot be quantified or localized because such quantification belongs to the physical

²⁰⁹ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 116,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 26, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

²¹⁰ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 117,” trans. Dysinger, accessed February 26, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

²¹¹ *On Prayer* 58 mentions the “place of God”. *On Prayer* 57, 72, 102, and 152 mentions “the place of prayer”.

²¹² Stewart, “Imageless,” 196.

²¹³ Evagrius, “*Reflections* 20,” trans. Dysinger, accessed April 2, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/05_Skemm/00a_start.htm.

²¹⁴ Conway-Jones, “The Greatest Paradox of All,” 274.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 271-2.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 272.

realm. Transcendence cannot be bound by a locus. The Scriptural trope of the “place of God” should, therefore, not be understood as demarcating the location of God, but rather the place where God dwells. This is not to be understood in exclusive terms, but rather as a symbol for divine immanence.

Another aspect that might appear incongruous between *On Prayer* and *Thoughts-Reflections* is that in *On Prayer* 114 Evagrius advises his reader not to seek “form or shape or color” during prayer. This dissuasion seems to be in tension with the passages in *Thoughts-Reflections*, where Evagrius mentions “sapphire or the color of the sky” in connection to light-visions. Yet, what *Prayer* 114 underlines is not the impossibility of perceiving such forms or color, but of the importance of not seeking them so as not to fall into delusion.²¹⁷ Ultimately, localizing the divine involves an attempt to capture God in form, shape, or place, while a Transcendent God fundamentally resists any such quantification.

Thus, while Trinitarian light-visions lead to contemplation and transformation, demonic light-visions lead to conceit and a false localization of the divine. From this it can be inferred that Trinitarian light-visions do not involve a disposition of self-satisfaction, but rather that Trinitarian contemplation goes hand in hand with an attitude of awe that does not lead the ascetic to forget their own state as creature. The false localization of the divine is connected to a disposition of self-satisfaction as it pridefully tries to confine the divine to a locus. This confinement can be seen as an attempt to “tame” or capture the divine in concepts of images, thereby transgressing the condemnation of making images of God in Exodus 20:4.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed demonic light-visions in *On Prayer*. In this chapter, I have first discussed the Scriptural, Origenist, and Desert Monastic background of Evagrius’ teaching on demonic light-visions. Subsequently, I have analyzed *Prayer* 73-4, where Evagrius gives the most explicit description of the phenomenology of demonic light-visions. As these demonic light-visions mimic Trinitarian light-visions, the description of the phenomenology of light-visions in *Prayer* 73-4 can be used to better understand the phenomenology of Trinitarian light-visions: that they constitute a vision of light around the *nous*. From the discussion of the physiology of demonic light-visions, it became clear that further research is necessary into this topic, especially concerning the ancient medical knowledge of the brain.

Subsequently, I continued the analysis of *Prayer* 73-4 to discuss the cause of demonic light-visions: vainglory. However, a closer look at *Prayer* 73-4 revealed that in this case, vainglory is intimately related to pride or a sense of spiritual haughtiness. I have compared *Prayer* 73-4 with passages in *Thoughts*, where Evagrius mentions other types of delusion and postulates pride as their cause. Thus, I have concluded that vainglory and pride are at the root of spiritual delusion in Evagrius’ works.

²¹⁷ See also *Prayer* 115.

Based primarily on *Prayer 73-4* and its parallel *Prayer 68-9*, I have argued that the main difference between demonic and Trinitarian light-visions lies in their effects. While Trinitarian light-visions lead to contemplation of God and to a complete renewal of the self, demonic light-visions lead to conceit and an erroneous attempt to “localize” the divine. This attitude of conceit consists primarily in the ascetic’s belief to have accomplished to “goal of prayer”, i.e. to have attained great spiritual heights. I have, further, interpreted localizing the divine in light of the many passages in *On Prayer* where Evagrius emphasizes the importance of formlessness in the soul’s approach to God and I have contrasted the localization of the divine in demonic light-visions with the formlessness associated with Trinitarian light-visions. These consequences of demonic light-visions show what Trinitarian light-visions are not and provide an alto-relievo, highlighting important aspects of Trinitarian light-visions that might otherwise be overlooked. From *On Prayer* it can be inferred that Trinitarian light-visions *do not* involve an attitude of spiritual haughtiness and do not lead the ascetic to believe to have accomplished the goal of the spiritual life. Moreover, the “place of God” in *Thoughts* and *Reflections* should not be understood as the locus of God, as this would involve a localization of the divine. Rather, the expression is a Scriptural trope indicating a divine-human encounter.

Chapter 4. Counter-Measures against Delusion: Compunction and Humility

In this chapter, I will argue that Evagrius' discussion of compunction and humility in *On Prayer* is intimately related to the theme of demonic light-visions, by demonstrating how these emotive virtues function as counter-measures against delusion. In order to do so, I will first establish the Evagrian basis for understanding compunction and humility as remedies against vainglory and pride (the causes of delusion), based on Evagrius' work called *Praktikos*. Subsequently, I will closely analyze the passages in *On Prayer* on compunction and humility to demonstrate how these passages are related to the theme of delusion in *On Prayer*.

4.1 Compunction and Humility in the *Praktikos*

As mentioned before, Evagrius considers vainglory to be the root of delusional light-visions and pride the root of other types of delusion. In *Praktikos*, Evagrius defines vainglory as "hunting for glory among men", which is accompanied by the desire to publish one's efforts.²¹⁸ As remedies for vainglory, Evagrius mentions the use of other evil thoughts (*logismoi*), such as sexual immorality to "use a nail to drive out a nail"²¹⁹. This tactic is particularly helpful against the temptation of presuming that "there is no longer any opposing energy at work" within oneself, associated with demonic light-visions.²²⁰ However, the ultimate remedy, according to Evagrius, is to employ "humility to drive away the [tempting-]thought of vainglory".²²¹

Apart from vainglory, the passion of pride also seems to be relevant for Evagrius' accounts of delusional light-visions, as the effect of such visions is conceit. The problem with a delusional vision of light, as laid out in *Prayer* 73-4, is that the ascetic believes to have reached an advanced spiritual state. The cultivation of humility is paramount in combatting such a conceited disposition, as Evagrius not only advises humility to counter vainglory but also to remedy the passion of pride in *Praktikos*.²²² In *Praktikos* 33, Evagrius directly associates the remembrance of "old trespasses" (compunction) with humility and advocates this practice as a remedy against pride: "Remember your former life and your old trespasses(...). Thoughts [*logismoi*] of this sort will instill humility and deny entry the demon of pride".²²³

²¹⁸ Evagrius, "*Praktikos* 13," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 4, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm.

²¹⁹ Evagrius, "*Praktikos* 48," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 4, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm.

²²⁰ Evagrius, "*On Prayer* 74," trans. Dysinger, accessed April 8, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

²²¹ *Praktikos* 58.

²²² For example in the prologue to the *Praktikos*, Evagrius writes: "Recitations like these produce humility and uproot the primordial vice of pride that cast down to the earth Lucifer, the Dawn-Rising [Star]". Evagrius, "*Praktikos* prologue 2," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 4, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm.

²²³ Evagrius, "*Praktikos* 33," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 4, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/01_Prak/00a_start.htm.

While Kevin Corrigan and Yuri Glazov conceived of the relationship between humility and compunction in sequential terms (humility coming first and compunction second), they should be understood as two emotive virtues that mutually intensify one another.²²⁴ Corrigan and Glazov base this interpretation on *Praktikos* 57, where Evagrius mentions compunction and humility as the effects of a peaceful state of the soul, but the enumeration of these effects not necessarily implies a sequence. Instead, compunction and humility should rather be understood as going hand in hand and providing the fuel for the intensification of the other. What is more, Corrigan and Glazov, themselves, incorporate humility in their definition of compunction, which they define as a “piercing or puncturing of the soul with tears, repentance, and a deep sense of humility”.²²⁵

4.2 Compunction and Humility in *On Prayer*

4.2.1 *Compunction*

From these passages of the *Praktikos*, it has become clear that both compunction and humility can be seen as counter-measures against the fundamental problems of delusion: vainglory and conceit. While Casiday believes compunction to belong only to the first state of the spiritual life, which he calls the “movement into God”, Corrigan and Glazov consider compunction of constant necessity in all states of spiritual growth.²²⁶ In a way, both are right, as Evagrius mentions compunction both as the first stage of spiritual prayer and as a disposition at higher stages. For example, in the beginning of *On Prayer*, Evagrius writes: “First, pray to receive tears, so that by means of mourning (*penthos*) you may be able to calm the savagery inherent in your soul, and by *confessing your offence to the Lord* (Ps 32.5), obtain forgiveness from him”.²²⁷ But at a later point in *On Prayer*, Evagrius seems to suggest that compunction needs to be a constant factor of the spiritual life: “78. When you imagine you no longer need tears for sins in your prayer on account of sin, examine how far you have moved from God, when you are bound to always be in him; and you will weep even more fervently.”²²⁸ Based on this passage, Casiday has argued that the amount and intensity of tears are an index for one’s closeness to God.²²⁹ Consequently, spiritual progress does not involve an eradication of all emotion or feeling, but rather an intensification of them through the cultivation of virtue.²³⁰

²²⁴ Corrigan and Glazov write: “The germination of the seed starts from its very groundedness (humility); and, being pierced through and through (compunction), and watered by the memory of its position (i.e., repentance or the co-effect of compunction, namely, tears)”. Corrigan and Glazov, “Compunction and Compassion,” 65.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

²²⁶ Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 161. Corrigan and Glazov, “Compunction and Compassion,” 66.

²²⁷ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 5,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 1, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm. Dysinger added the word *penthos* between brackets and italicized the words from the Psalm.

²²⁸ Evagrius, “*On Prayer* 78,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 1, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

²²⁹ Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 162. While Casiday advances this thesis by mainly referring to joy and desire, it is also true for compunction and spiritual mourning.

²³⁰ Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 162. While Casiday advances this thesis by mainly referring to joy and desire, it is also true for compunction and spiritual mourning.

In the next passage, Evagrius continues his discussion of compunction:

79. Yes, when you recognize your measure, you will be take [sic] pleasure in mourning, calling yourself, like Isaiah, wretched, like an unclean person with unclean lips, living in the midst of a people similarly [unclean] (Is 6:5) So how in the face of this can you stand boldly before the Lord Sabbaoth?²³¹

This passage can be interpreted as referring to both compunction and humility, as it involves recognition of one's measure (humility), but also mourning over this one's "wretched" condition.²³² It, furthermore, suggests the problematic calling of the prophet: to stand in the presence of God. A sublime calling, both terrifying and awe-inspiring, making the prophet aware of his own limit.

Also near the end of his treatise, Evagrius mentions compunction. In *Prayer* 144, he writes: "The well-informed man is one who, until he has attained perfect repentance, endures the painful memory of his own sins and the just reuality [sic] exacted for them in the everlasting fire."²³³ Thus, it seems that for Evagrius mourning over one's sins needs to be a constant factor in the spiritual life to maintain a sense of one's spiritual poverty. In this way, the humble attitude of compunction functions as a both preventive and remedial measure against the spiritual haughtiness that is the cause and consequence of delusion.

4.2.2 Humility

The passages in *On Prayer* on humility (*Prayer* 96, 102, 121, 135, 136, 145, 148) all advocate that a disposition of humility is needed to conquer the demons. For example, in *Prayer* 121, Evagrius writes: "Blessed is the monk who considers himself *the offscouring of all* (1Cor. 4:13)" and in *Prayer* 102: "Pray, not like the Pharisee, but like the publican in the holy place of prayer, so that you too may be justified by God (Lk 18:10-14)."²³⁴ The latter can be interpreted as referring both to compunction and humility, as the publican, painfully aware of his sinful state, did not dare to look towards heaven.²³⁵ Casiday interprets this passage in Evagrius as showing how a "critical self-awareness can issue forth in tears, thus revealing a connecting between cognition and emotion".²³⁶

²³¹ Evagrius, "On Prayer 79," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 1, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm

²³² Corrigan and Glazov, "Compunction and Compassion," 75. For an elaborate analysis of compunction and Isaiah 6, see *ibid.*, 74-6.

²³³ Evagrius, "On Prayer 144," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 1, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm

²³⁴ Evagrius, "On Prayer 121, 102," trans. Dysinger, accessed March 1, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm

²³⁵ Cf. Lk 18:13.

²³⁶ Casiday, *Reconstructing*, 160.

Of the chapters on humility, *Prayer 136* is the most relevant in combatting delusion, as it goes against its core problem of falsely believing to have acquired a lofty spiritual state: “136. Do not imagine that you have acquired virtue until you have first been prepared to shed blood for it. For it is necessary to resist sin unto death aggressively (Heb. 12:4) and blamelessly (1 Cor 1:8), according to the divine apostle.”²³⁷ Here, Evagrius advocates to use the martyrdom ideal as a means of measurement (κανών) for spiritual progress. As long as the ascetic has not attained the martyr ideal, they have not truly obtained virtue. In other words, as long as the ascetic has not died a martyr’s death, they have not accomplished the goal of the spiritual life. In this radical passage, Evagrius provides the ultimate remedy against delusion: by continually keeping the martyrdom ideal in mind, the ascetic will not succumb to the temptation at the core of demonic light-visions of believing to have accomplished the goal of prayer.

However, the word “prepared” in *Prayer 136* suggests that it is not necessary to actually shed blood in order to attain to virtue. Rather, the ascetic needs to be *prepared* to “shed blood”: he needs to be willing to shed blood, constantly prepared to die for virtue. This emphasis on being constantly prepared for martyrdom suggests the necessity of spiritual vigilance or watchfulness (νήψις). It can, furthermore, be seen as an indication that Evagrius’ discussion on watchfulness and delusion in *On Prayer* are inextricably linked. In any case, the radical humility advocated for in *Prayer 136*, together with the passages on compunction function as counter-measures against the core problems of delusion: spiritual haughtiness and imagining to have accomplished the goal of prayer.

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how Evagrius’ discussion of compunction and humility in *On Prayer* is intimately related to the theme of delusion in this work. In this way, I have shown the common ground of the two strands of research—the first focusing on Evagrius light-mysticism and the latter on the role of emotive virtues in his work. Just as Evagrius’ discussion of demonic light-visions in *On Prayer* is intimately related to his discussion of Trinitarian light-visions in *Thoughts-Reflections*, so also is his discussion of compunction and humility inherently intertwined with the theme of delusion in his works. These three components form an intricate whole and need to be understood in relation to one another.

The connection between compunction, humility and delusion has been made based on passages in the *Praktikos* where Evagrius advocates the cultivation of compunction and humility to remedy pride and vainglory. Seeing as pride and vainglory are the cause of demonic light-visions and delusion in general, compunction and humility can, hence, be seen as counter-measures against delusion. From this perspective, I have interpreted various passages in *On Prayer* discussing

²³⁷ Evagrius, “*On Prayer 136*,” trans. Dysinger, accessed March 1, 2021, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm

compunction and humility. The passages on compunction were used to argue for the necessity of cultivating a constant disposition of compunction. The necessity of cultivating a mournful, repentant disposition is of utmost importance, not only in the early stages, but throughout the spiritual life.

The analysis of humility in *On Prayer* mainly focused on *Prayer* 136, which I have interpreted as the most ultimate remedy against delusion. In *Prayer* 136, Evagrius emphasizes the importance of constantly keeping the martyrdom ideal in mind so as not to imagine to have “acquired virtue”. I have demonstrated how this passage counters the fundamental problem of demonic light-visions: the supposition to have arrived at great spiritual heights. I have, furthermore, interpreted Evagrius’ call to be constantly prepared to shed blood for the acquisition of virtue in relation to the concept of watchfulness—a topic which certainly merits further research. In any case, by analyzing the passages in *On Prayer* on compunction and humility, I have shown how these passages are related to the theme of delusion. From this, we can conclude that delusion plays a far more important role in *On Prayer* than has hitherto been noticed. Indeed, the theme of delusion underlies the entire treatise *On Prayer*: it lies at the very heart of Evagrius’ teaching on prayer. Within the context of Evagrius’ light-mysticism, his discourse on compunction and humility can be understood as bringing his teaching on the noetic heights of mystical experience “down to earth”.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to answer the question of how the conjunctive study of demonic and Trinitarian light-visions in Evagrius' prayer trilogy can help us to better understand his teaching on and attitude towards light-visions. In this thesis, I have argued that Evagrius' accounts of light-visions in *Thoughts* and *Reflections* cannot be properly understood without also discussing his descriptions of demonic light-visions in *On Prayer* and vice versa.

Recapitulation

Chapter one introduced and contextualized Evagrius' light-mysticism by discussing relevant aspects of his life, works, and terminology. The terms *nous* (the faculty of the soul that, when purified, contemplated God during prayer), *noemata* (mental concepts of a visual character), *katastasis* (the proper and stable state of the *nous*), and the concept of "pure prayer", free from all thoughts, forms, and images, were discussed.

Chapter two discussed Trinitarian light-visions in *On Thoughts* and *Reflections* through the lens of the debates of secondary Evagrian scholarship. I have argued that both philosophy and Scripture are influential on Evagrius' teaching on light-visions and that he wraps the description of his personal experience of divine light in symbolic language. Thus, Evagrius' teaching on Trinitarian light-visions is a theological reflection on his experience, rather than an anthropological inquiry into the phenomenon of light-visions among fourth-century desert monastics. Expressions such as the "sapphire", or "the color of the sky" are Scriptural tropes to denote a theophany, rather than indications of the actual color of the light. Thus, Evagrius not so much tries to convey the particularities of his experience to his readers, but he rather reflects on the meaning of these visions. This further underlines Konstantinovsky's observation that "raw experience" is epistemologically insufficient: that interpretation is always necessary to answer the questions concerning experience.²³⁸ In this way, the discussion on Trinitarian light-visions in Evagrius' works touches upon fundamental questions relevant to all ages.

The other debate discussed in chapter two is that of the origin of the light that ascetics may contemplate during light-visions. As many scholars have observed, Evagrius, in his writings on light-visions, tried to answer the question he once posed to an elder John of Lycopolis: whether the light contemplated during light-visions comes from God, the *nous*, or both. In this thesis, I have argued that Evagrius also postulates a fourth option: that the light comes from the demons, which I discussed extensively in chapter three. Of the three options mentioned by other scholars—God, the *nous*, or both—I have argued that the light ultimately comes from God and that the light can only be called "proper" to the *nous*, because the *nous*, in its proper state (i.e. *katastasis*) reflects the light of God. It is

²³⁸ Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus*, 102.

in its true state or *katastasis* that the *nous* can truly be called the “image of God”, as it is in this state that the *nous* becomes transparent and, like a mirror, is filled with the divine light.²³⁹

As for the option of demonic origin, chapter three discussed the various passages in *On Prayer* concerning instances of a false vision of light, manipulated by the demons to delude the ascetic into believing this light is the light of God. The main findings of this chapter are a) that there are many more passages in *On Prayer* that touch upon light-mysticism than one might, at first glance, assume and b) that the fundamental difference between demonic and Trinitarian light-visions is that the first leads to self-satisfaction and a false attempt to localize the divine, while the second leads to contemplation of the divine mysteries.

Chapter three, furthermore, argued that the topic of delusion is fundamental to *On Prayer*, like a red thread running through the entire treatise. I have argued that the many passages concerning humility and compunction in *On Prayer* are connected to the theme of delusion as they function as both preventive and remedial counter-measures against delusion. Ultimately, Evagrius’ emphasis on the need for the cultivation of a constant disposition of compunction and humility (from the Latin *humus*, earth) in the spiritual life brings his teaching on light-visions “down-to-earth”, providing a counter-balance for the dangers of lofty spiritual experiences. This does not necessarily mean that *On Prayer* was written after *Thoughts-Reflections*, though I consider it likely given the more mature and in-depth character of the treatise. It does, however, underline the importance of including both *Thoughts-Reflections* and *On Prayer* in discussions of Evagrius’ light-mysticism.

Main Findings

In this thesis, I have tried to answer the question of how the conjunctive study of Evagrius’ teaching on demonic and Trinitarian light-visions helps us to better understand his teaching and attitude towards light-visions. Thus, in this thesis, I have demonstrated how the conjunctive study of Evagrius’ accounts of demonic and Trinitarian light-visions in his prayer trilogy is mutually illuminating: studying these two aspects of Evagrius’ light-mysticism in conjunction helps us to arrive at a better comprehension of both.

There are four ways in which the conjunctive study enlightened certain aspects of Evagrius’ teaching on Trinitarian light-visions. First, Evagrius’ description of demonic light-visions in *Prayer* 73-4 is the clearest description of the phenomenology of a light-vision: a vision of light around the *nous*. In *Thoughts*, Evagrius only once mentions the “light surrounding the *nous*”, but most of the passages on light-visions in *Thoughts* and *Reflections* are rather enigmatic, as he cloaks his experience in symbolic language.²⁴⁰ Any exposition of Evagrius’ teaching on light-visions would be much clearer

²³⁹ As Louth points out, this understanding of the soul in the image of God with reference to the metaphor of a mirror was common among the early Fathers of the Church. Louth, *Origins*, 79.

²⁴⁰ Cf. *Thoughts* 30.

by starting with the phenomenological description of *Prayer* 73-4 and then turning to the more enigmatic passages in *Thoughts* and *Reflections*.

Second, demonic light-visions highlight important aspects of Trinitarian light-visions. Most importantly, studying both demonic and Trinitarian light-visions together has shown the importance of formlessness for Evagrius in the spiritual life. The problem of demonic light-visions is that they erroneously try to ascribe form to the divine, which Evagrius calls “localizing the Divine”. Evagrius’ radically apophatic warnings in *On Prayer* against ascribing form, shape, color, or location to the divine highlight the relevance of formlessness in Evagrius’ descriptions of light-visions in *Thoughts-Reflections*. It, furthermore, underlines that the expression of the “place of God” in *Thoughts-Reflections* should not be understood as a literal indication of the locus where God resides, which would amount to “localizing the Divine”, but as a Scriptural trope signaling divine immanence.

Third, demonic light-visions provide an *alto-relievo* for understanding Trinitarian light-visions: they show what Trinitarian light-visions are not. Apart from trying to localize the divine, demonic light-visions, furthermore, instill a sense of self-satisfaction in the ascetic. By seeing a demonically manipulated vision of light, the ascetic believes to have achieved the “goal of prayer” and becomes conceited. Significantly, Evagrius mentions no such self-satisfaction in the context of Trinitarian light-visions. Instead, Trinitarian light-visions take the ascetic up into contemplation of the divine mysteries.

Fourth, studying Evagrius’ discussion of demonic light-visions in *On Prayer* has shown that Evagrius’ light-mysticism is more complex than it might seem at first glance because the “cause of the vision is not guaranteed”: it is ambivalent whether the vision is real or illusory.²⁴¹ Thus a “hermeneutic of suspicion” plays a crucial role in the discussion on light-visions: suspicion plays a fundamental role in Evagrius’ interpretation of experience, and he also frames experience itself through the lens of suspicion.

The conjunctive study of demonic and Trinitarian light-visions not only illumines our understanding of Trinitarian light-visions in *Thoughts-Reflections*, it has also proven to better our understanding of demonic light-visions in *On Prayer*. Studying these two aspects of Evagrius’ light-mysticism has demonstrated that there are many more passages in *On Prayer* that revolve around the topic of light-visions than one might assume at first glance. Key themes such as formlessness and humility are intimately related with Evagrius’ discussion of demonic light-visions, revealing delusion to be a running theme throughout *On Prayer*. In this way, this thesis’ conjunctive study has shown that delusion is a fundamental theme underlying the whole of *On Prayer*.

The interweaving of different passages through key terms or themes also happens in *Thoughts-Reflections*, where especially the term “*katastasis*” and the Scriptural tropes of the “place of God” and “sapphire or the color of the sky” link many seemingly disjointed passages. These different Evagrian

²⁴¹ Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory*, 171.

kephalaia all show different aspects of the *katastasis*, of the true state of the *nous*. These passages are not connected simply because they all contain a similar word (*katastasis*), which happens to be a key term in Evagrius' works, but because they show different aspects of this *katastasis*. The Scriptural tropes can be interpreted as likewise referring to noetic luminosity (i.e. to light-visions), because they are connected to the true state, the *katastasis*, of the *nous*. While previous scholars have interpreted these passages as referring to light-visions, they have not explicitly explained why they associate such passages with the vision of light around the *nous*. Throughout this thesis, I have tried to bring attention to this process of interpretation through keywords and tropes. In this way, reading Evagrius is very much like a process of "decoding" encrypted language, where key terms and tropes provide the key to crack the code.²⁴²

Evagrius' enigmatic language has often been interpreted as signaling some kind of hidden esoteric teaching. While this interpretation may have some value in discussing Evagrius' doctrinal works such as the *Kephalaia Gnostica*, it is unsatisfactory with regards to Evagrius' prayer trilogy. In *Thoughts-Reflections*, it does not seem as if Evagrius tried to "hide" his exposition of light-visions, because there is nothing inexplicit about them: Evagrius openly describes the state in which the *nous* is illumined by the "light of the Holy Trinity".²⁴³ Rather, Evagrius' use of symbolic language in these works should be understood as the mystic's way to understand spiritual experiences and to convey the meaning of it to his disciples.

Further Research

While in the introduction I pointed out the discrepancy between Evagrius' fascination with light-visions in *Thoughts-Reflections* and his suspicion towards them in *On Prayer*, this tension is not resolved. Further historical research is needed to explain the "why" of this discrepancy: did Evagrius alter his opinion between writing *Thoughts-Reflections* and *On Prayer*? If yes, conclusive evidence concerning the relative chronology of Evagrius' prayer trilogy is paramount. The answer may also lie in the readers of the three treatises: *Thoughts-Reflections* were intended for a wider monastic audience, while Evagrius wrote *On Prayer* to a singular correspondent. Perhaps Evagrius knew that his correspondent of *On Prayer* was prone to pride or vainglory and that he, therefore, sent him a treatise in which delusion plays such a principal role. Or perhaps he did not discuss delusion in *Thoughts and Reflections* because he knew it would be a topic too advanced for his readers. A less convincing explanation for the discrepancy would be that Evagrius had a disillusioning experience between writing *Thoughts-Reflections* and *On Prayer*. This, however, suggests that Evagrius was not fully aware of the danger of delusion while writing *Thoughts-Reflections*, which would contradict his reputation of being an experienced spiritual guide. After all, if delusion was indeed such a common theme as the survey of desert monasticism in chapter three suggested, then it would be improbable that

²⁴² Harmless and Fitzgerald, "Sapphire," 507.

²⁴³ Cf. *Reflections* 4.

a highly experienced spiritual guide was not aware of the possibility of delusional spiritual experiences. In any case, further historical research into these works is required.

Apart from the unresolved tension, another point for further inquiry is the Evagrian basis for Konstantinovskiy's interpretation of a "pre-lapsarian" noetic luminosity, i.e. that the *nous* before the fall ("lapse") was in a state of noetic luminosity. The problem with this interpretation is that Konstantinovskiy failed to cite passages from the Evagrian corpus that would suggest primordial noetic luminosity, nor does she mention Origen—on which her reading of Evagrius is undoubtedly based. Instead, she appears to ground her interpretation in an understanding of *katastasis* as referring to a "former" state. Further research, especially into the *Kephalaia Gnostica*, is necessary to determine to what extent there is an Evagrian basis for such an Origenist interpretation.

Another point for further research is that of the physiology of demonic light-visions. In chapter three I have briefly reflected on the significance of Evagrius' statement that the demons generate a false noetic light by manipulating the brain, as the word used may also refer to the head more generally. Further research into the medical knowledge of Antiquity is required to provide further insight into the meaning and significance of Evagrius' descriptions of the physiology of delusion.

As indicated in chapter three, the discussion of *On Prayer* 136, where Evagrius advocates the martyrdom ideal as an inspiration for humility is profoundly related to the theme of delusion. The emphasis in *Prayer* 136 that one has to be *prepared* for martyrdom at any time further underlines the importance of watchfulness in relation to delusion. This interrelation between watchfulness and delusion in *On Prayer* requires further research that may provide further insight into the role of demonic light-visions in this particular Evagrian treatise.

Implications

The most important finding of this thesis with regards to contemporary society is that of the essential role of interpretation in Evagrius' discussion of light-visions in his prayer trilogy. Not only are his descriptions of light-visions in *Thoughts-Reflections* mediated through Biblical-philosophical language, interpretation also plays a fundamental role in Evagrius' discussion of demonic light-visions. The problem of a demonic light-vision, apart from the fact that Evagrius considers them unreal and illusory, is in the interpretation of the deluded ascetic who believes to have achieved high spiritual grounds. Moreover, while Evagrius does not explicitly state this, interpretation is necessary to discern "authentic" light-visions from false imitations, i.e. whether they lead to self-satisfaction and a false localization of the divine or to reverence and contemplation. Thus, the conjunctive study of the two aspects of Evagrius' light-mysticism has revealed that experience always seems to be mediated through language and interpretation. This touches upon fundamental questions that play an important role in modern philosophy. Evagrius, then, can be used as a case study to further these philosophical debates.

Apart from the philosophical implications, the findings of this thesis can also be used as an impetus for further discussion among theologians, chaplains, psychiatrists, and psychologists on the boundary between spiritual illusion and psychosis. Further reflection is necessary to determine to what extent discernment based on signs of pride or humility may be helpful in clinical contexts. In any case, the finding that spiritual illusion is essentially linked to an attitude of self-satisfaction and can be remedied through cultivating the virtue of humility sheds an interesting light on the theme of one's perception of reality. It would imply that any interpretation of reality tinged by pride has the danger of being erroneous. This moral evaluation of truth is radically different from contemporary evaluations of truth, and challenge the binary opposition between morality and reality.

While the findings of this thesis may be helpful in pastoral settings, they cannot be applied directly and have to be carefully examined. After all, Evagrius did not write his prayer trilogy as a handbook for spiritual directors on how to distinguish authentic from delusional light-visions. It would be an oversimplification to assume that spiritual experiences that have some hint of pride are necessarily inauthentic. One can imagine a situation in which a person has had an authentic spiritual experience, but at a later stage succumbs to thoughts of vainglory or pride.²⁴⁴ While the fundamental difference between demonic and Trinitarian light-visions lies in the narrative of the ascetic—i.e. whether they interpret the experience as a sign of spiritual superiority—this does not mean that the truth lies in the eyes the beholder. For Evagrius, Trinitarian and demonic light-visions are ontologically different. For him, only the light of God has real being: the demonic manipulation of light around the *nous* is only an elusive attempt to mimic this divine light—no more than a mirage.

Nevertheless, there are a few points that we can take away from this thesis. First, that communication of spiritual experience is essentially mediated through conceptual or symbolic language and that the interpretation of one's spiritual experience is paramount. Second, that spiritual experiences need to be subjected to a "hermeneutic of suspicion": they need to be reflected upon critically, as they, even within a religious paradigm as Evagrius's, may also be illusory. Third, Evagrius did not write his prayer trilogy as a manual for discernment of spiritual experience. Thus, great caution is required in translating his works to contemporary practice.

In the introduction, I mentioned the rise of conspiracy theories. It seems that today, we are in a hermeneutical crisis centering on the question of how to know whether someone's interpretation of data, be it sensory or societal, can be trusted. It can be helpful to look at what underlies such interpretations: i.e. whether they are grounded in a disposition of pride and vainglory, or a humble appreciation of reality as it is. Based on Evagrius' discussion of delusion, it seems that an authentic interpretation of reality is incompatible with a prideful disposition. In other words, pride and delusion (or erroneous interpretation) are inherently intertwined. This calls for a reappraisal of the relationship between morality and reality.

²⁴⁴ This is, of course, under the assumption that "authentic" spiritual experience is possible.

It seems that in many ways Evagrius' accounts of light-visions raise more questions than that they provide answers. From this study of Evagrius' light-mysticism, it has not become clear what the Evagrian mystical experience exactly constitutes. Is the light around the *nous* sapphire-colored or sky-blue? What does it mean to see a light around the *nous*? Does it imply that the *nous* can be located physically? And is this vision of light noetic or sensible: perceived by the *nous* or by the senses? These questions are perhaps an indication of the difference of Evagrius' conceptual world and that of our own. A modern Christian who has never heard of the concept of the *nous* would probably not describe their experience of divine light in terms of a "light around the *nous*," but would perhaps mention a light in the "most inward part of the soul" or in one's "deepest self". These questions, furthermore, indicate that Evagrius' accounts of light-visions are not an anthropological description of the phenomenon of light-visions among 4th-century Egyptian desert monastics, but are rather a theological reflection, mediating the Scriptural and symbolical meaning of mystical experience. Evagrius' light-mysticism in *Thoughts*, *Reflections* and *On Prayer* are like an icon, a mosaic of different shapes and colors pointing towards a reality that is to come.

Appendix

Index of Themes in *On Prayer* ²⁴⁵

Pertaining to (Delusional) Light-Mysticism:

Delusion:	67-9, 73-4, 94-5, 116, 133, 134, 136.
Demonic light-visions:	73-74, 67-9.
Compunction:	5-8, 78-79, 144.
Humility:	96, 102, 121, 135-136, 145, 148.
Formlessness:	67-9, 114-7.
Localizing the divine:	68, 74.
Place of God:	58.
Place of prayer:	57, 72, 102, 152.

Other:

Definitions of prayer:	3, 14-16, 35-6, 71.
Value of prayer:	150-153.
Beatitudes:	117-123.
Watchfulness:	70-1, 90-92, 136-8, 149.

²⁴⁵ Numbers refer to the chapter numbers in Dysinger's translation. Evagrius, "On Prayer: Περὶ προσευχῆς," trans. Dysinger, accessed December 18, 2020, http://www.ldysinger.com/Evagrius/03_Prayer/00a_start.htm.

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Summary

In this thesis, I have argued that Evagrius' teaching on light-visions cannot be properly understood without studying his descriptions of demonic, delusional light-visions and vice versa. Through studying Evagrius' description of Trinitarian and demonic light-visions conjunctively, this thesis aimed to arrive a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of Evagrius' teaching on and stance towards light-visions. The main findings of this study are that the main difference between Trinitarian and demonic light-visions lies in their effects: Trinitarian light-visions lead to contemplation and a radical transformation of the self, while demonic light-visions lead to self-satisfaction and an erroneous attempt to localize the divine. Moreover, this thesis found that the passages on compunction and humility in *On Prayer* are intimately linked with Evagrius' discourse on delusion, as they function as counter-measures against the cause and effects of delusion. Thus, this thesis found that delusion lies at the very heart of *On Prayer*, underlying the entire work. Thus, Evagrius' discussion of demonic light-visions and their remedies in *On Prayer* provides a counter-balance to his discussion of Trinitarian light-visions in *On Thoughts and Reflections*: *On Prayer* brings Evagrius' light-mysticism more "down to earth" through grounding it in humility.

Furthermore, this thesis found that Evagrius' teaching on Trinitarian light-visions in *Thoughts-Reflections* is wrapped in conceptual and symbolic language. Thus, Evagrius' communication of mystical experience is contextual and mediated through his knowledge of Scripture and philosophy. Consequentially, his teaching on light-visions should be understood as a theological reflection rather than as a phenomenological account: an icon, rather than a photograph.

The implications of these findings are first of all that, based on the passages studied in this thesis, spiritual experience always needs to be subject to critical assessment: interpreted through a "hermeneutic of suspicion". Second, that communication of experience is essentially mediated and that Evagrius' teaching on light-visions can be used as a case study of the logic of mediation, which can further the discussion of the relationship between language and experience. Lastly, the findings of this thesis can be used as an impetus for further discussion among psychiatrists and spiritual directors on the boundaries between psychosis and spiritual illusion.