The Paradoxical Effects of Attentiveness

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This paper reconstructs from the literary evidence of eastern monasticism the problems and challenges that late antique monks faced in their effort to cultivate a continual attentiveness. The historiographic reconstruction draws on cognitive research of attention, which sheds new light on the nature of these problems and helps us to recognize that misguided attentiveness could serve as the source of some of them. While the demonological psychology of Egyptian desert ascribed this paradoxical phenomenon to the sinister influence of demons, I argue that what was ascribed to demonic machinations was the very risks inherent in the effort to train attention. Cognitive research underscores the sophistication of monastic psychology *cum* demonology, which was able to fit the demons into an explanation of human cognition.

The practice and attitude of attentiveness (προσοχή, νῆψις) was an essential element in early monastic spirituality. A review of the spiritual and intellectual world of early Egyptian monasticism has led Mark Sheridan to conclude that attentiveness was at the heart of Egyptian monasticism as a whole, notwithstanding variations and diversity.[1] By cultivating a continual attentiveness late antique monks sought to develop a constant sense of divine presence and devote themselves single-mindedly to the contemplation of God. This contemplative state, sustained by prayer and psalmody, is

closely linked to interior stillness (ἡσυχία) — a state of total concentration on God and the inner self, which arises in conjunction with the practice of attentiveness.[2]

Attentiveness is also closely related to the practice of watchfulness (νῆψις), defined by Hesychius the Priest as "a spiritual method (μέθοδος πνευματική) which, if sedulously practiced over a long period completely frees us with God's help from impassioned thoughts (ἐμπαθῶν νοημάτων), impassioned words and evil actions. It leads, in so far as this is possible, to a sure knowledge of the inapprehensible God. . . . It is, in the true sense, purity of heart."[3] As this implies, attentiveness is a habit that develops over time, as the monk gradually becomes free of the tyranny of thoughts and passions. As attentiveness becomes firmly established, it becomes a habitual awareness in the practitioner's daily life — a constant awareness of God's presence.[4]

For beginners, however, who still move through the stage of purification and have not yet rooted out the very source of troubling thoughts and emotions, attentiveness involves a continual effort to "guard the thoughts" (κατασχεῖν τοὺς λογισμούς, *cogitationes custodire*) and focus attention on the thought of God alone.[5] As Cassian explains, "A monk's whole attention (*omnis intentio*) should constantly be fixed on one thing, and the beginnings and the round-about turns of all his thoughts should be strenuously called back to this very thing—that is, to the recollection of God."[6] The practice of contemplation thus begins with attention.

Various strategies have been prescribed to assist monks to keep attention focused — for example, the invocation of the name of Christ, or the repetition of a scriptural phrase or "prayer word" — all of which use some sort of anchor to control the mind's focus of attention.[7] As Diadochus of Photike explains, the mind should

"contemplate (μελετῶσιν) this word alone at all times in its interior treasury so as not to return to the imagination."[8] By repeatedly returning the attention to God as a central object of awareness, the mind was gradually quieted and mental processes were brought under greater control. In time, the practice of bringing the attention back time and again created a mental habit. Hence what begins as a method for controlling attention gradually becomes established as a condition or state of being in which the practitioner remains calm and focused in all circumstances.[9]

Although attentiveness is much more than a strategy for controlling attention, this spiritual method does involve (at least initially) a systematic and disciplined effort at attention management. It is this facet of monastic attentiveness that I propose to examine in this paper. Admittedly, this praxis-oriented approach cannot do justice to the spiritual depth and psychological complexity of this spiritual method. As I hope to show, however, attentiveness is important for students of early monasticism not only for its spiritual, transcendental goal but also for its implications for our understanding of the concrete daily life of late antique monks.

To reconstruct the actual monastic practice from the literary evidence of the eastern monastic tradition, our point of departure is an intriguing case study reported by John Cassian in book 22 of his *Conference*s, entitled *de nocturnis illusionibus* (on nocturnal illusions). Rather than situating this case study within the framework of Cassian's discourse on nocturnal emissions, his ascetic theology, or his social program, as has been fruitfully done by others,[10] in what follows I situate it within the framework of the monastic practice of attentiveness.

Book 22 of the *Conferences* purports to record a discourse given by an Egyptian abbot named Theonas sometime during the last two decades of the fourth century.[11] In this conference Theonas tells about a monk he knew who over a long period (its length is not specified) "used to be sullied in his sleep by an unclean emission (*immundo fluxu*)" whenever he was preparing to receive communion (and only on such occasions!). This brother, Theonas stresses, "possessed a constant purity of heart and body due to his great watchfulness and humility and was never tried by nocturnal deceptions (*nocturnis ludificationibus*)," and yet his problem kept repeating with exceptional regularity and caused him much shame and distress.

The disheartened monk held back from communion "for a long time," assuming that his emissions made him ineligible for contact with the Eucharist. Eventually he raised his problem with the elders. When they examined the cause of his "disease" (*morbus*) and were assured that "there was no guilt of either soul or body," they concluded that his emissions were caused by the devil, who wanted to humiliate him and prevent him from receiving the sacrament. Having found him morally blameless, they advised him to participate in Communion. Soon after his emissions ceased.[12]

It has been noted that certain episodes in Cassian's *Conferences* "nous soient racontés de façon trop vivante pour n'être pas historiques."[13] This observation seems to apply to the story of the unfortunate monk in conference 22: his problem seems both too unique and too lifelike to be a complete invention; it has, in the words of Boniface Ramsey, "a sense of the genuine."[14] That late antique monks were preoccupied with the problem of nocturnal emissions is indicated by the frequency and the urgency of their questions on this subject,[15] as well as by the extreme

precautions that some of them took to avoid "defilement."[16] What is unusual about Cassian's case study, however, is the strict regularity of the nocturnal emissions — only on nights preceding the weekly *synaxis* and never on other occasions (this monk "was never tried by nocturnal deceptions"). The emissions seem to occur, paradoxically, exactly against the monk's efforts to avoid them. The elders themselves present this curious regularity as an "unusual fact" (*specialis exceptio*; *Coll*. 22.6.2). Another unusual fact, which indicates that the emissions were not simply a natural discharge of excess fluid, is their sudden and complete cessation as soon as the monk received the sacrament. Theonas considers this as a further sign that the emissions were caused by demonic machinations (*Coll*. 22.6.4).

To make sense of this intriguing case study, in what follows I situate it within the framework of the monastic practice of attentiveness. Nevertheless, it is not my aim to explain the actual historical events that Cassian describes so much as to throw light on the nature of the challenges that late antique monks faced in their effort to cultivate a continual attentiveness. As we shall see, Cassian's case study is but one, although especially vivid illustration of these challenges.

The first section of this paper considers the spiritual significance and practical functions of attentiveness in early monastic asceticism in relation to Cassian's discourse on nocturnal emissions. As we shall see, in Cassian's view the root problem in nocturnal emissions does not lie in the body but in the mind’s failure to exercise control over the body — and ultimately in the mind's failure to control its focus of attention. Given the importance accorded to this capacity in early monastic thought and practice, the historiographical reconstruction proposed in this paper draws on cognitive research of attentional control, which I review in the second section. As I

hope to show in the third section, research in this field offers an illuminating perspective from which to examine culturally-specific monastic ideas of attentiveness. Not only does it help us to recognize a consistency between Cassian's case study and other cases recorded in early monastic sources, but the juxtaposition of modern and early monastic theories of attention underscores the sophistication and perceptiveness of the demonological psychology developed by the Desert Fathers and their followers.

"WITHIN OUR POWER": NOCTURNAL EMISSIONS AND ATTENTIVENESS

The pursuit of chastity stands at the center of Cassian's ascetical theology. As David Brakke suggests, the intentional celibacy of the monastic life is for Cassian the principal symbol of its social distinctiveness.[17] Consequently, in what Columba Stewart describes as Cassian's "sexual version of spiritual progress,"[18] in the state of perfect chastity the monk no longer experiences emissions at all.[19] Cassian concedes, however, that monks who have not yet reached perfect chastity may experience emissions at intervals considered natural (*ex naturae necessitate*), namely once in two to four months.[20] Emissions that occurred more frequently called into question the monk's purity.[21]

In assuming that sexual urges are potentially controllable, despite their seemingly unconquerable force, Cassian follows the Alexandrian theologians. According to Clement of Alexandria, the "overwhelming impulses" (πλεονάζουσα ὁρμή) of the body are unnatural (παρὰ φύσιν) and irrational (ἀλόγους) movements. Nevertheless, these movements are "acts of the will" (τὰ ἑκούσια) which are in our control or "within our power" (ἐφ' ἡμῖν) and hence subject to moral judgment.[22] According to Clement, we are responsible for the weakness which leads to lustful

deeds, because we do not restrain ourselves.[23] Similarly, in the fourth century Antony the Great teaches that even the natural and inherent inner movement of the body "does not operate unless the soul consents, otherwise it remains still."[24] In this view, spiritual perfection entails full responsibility for one's urges and desires.

Following these writers, Cassian assumes that the motions of the body require the soul's "consent."[25] Like Antony, who taught that there are three kinds of inner movements in the body (a natural, inherent movement, one that results from overeating, and one that comes from the demons),[26] Cassian teaches that nocturnal emissions may result from one of three causes: a surfeit of food and drink, some kind of spiritual neglect, or the devil himself can bring them about to humiliate those who are otherwise progressing in purity.[27] The demons use "simple" emissions (without erotic dreams) to make a monk believe that there was in fact complicity of the will.[28] An emission brought about by the demons is not under voluntary control and does not involve moral blame.

On the other hand, a nocturnal emission that is accompanied by an erotic dream is a clear indication of spiritual neglect.[29] In this case, an emission was thought to be defiling and hence made the monk ineligible for Communion. According to Cassian, erotic dreams can be fostered by evil thoughts (*noxiis cogitationibus*) in the daytime.[30] He explains that "when the mind is empty of spiritual pursuits and practices. . . then it leads astray the person who is draped in laziness. . . or else it lusts after bits of impure thoughts." As a result of such negligence, he continues,

> it consequently happens that not only do numerous roving thoughts break into the hidden places of the mind in bold and impudent

> fashion, but also the seeds of all one's former passions remain there. . . . As long as these lie concealed in the depths of the mind they still disturb with their wanton fantasies the person who is sleeping. As a result of them the vile moisture is expelled before its customary time.[31]

In the seventh century John Climacus gives voice to this widespread belief when he writes that "a sign of complete sensuality is to be liable to emissions from bad thoughts when one is awake."[32] In this view, the root problem in nocturnal emissions does not lie in the body but ultimately in the mind's failure to exercise control over the body. Because the functions of the body were thought to reveal the character of the thoughts, nocturnal emissions could function as an indication for the monk's inner disposition.[33]

Cassian's discussion of fornication reflects an understanding of nocturnal emissions as an external manifestation of an essentially internal process of regulating one's thoughts. As Foucault observed, Cassian's account "ignores the physical act of fornication: nowhere in the various texts in which he speaks of this subject does he refer to actual sexual relations."[34] Instead, Cassian's main concern is the never-ending struggle over the movements of thoughts. The principal obstacle for the monk, as Owen Chadwick notes, "lies not in the commission of external sin, but in the slippery thoughts of his own mind."[35]

In this view, control of thoughts precedes other kinds of self-control. According to Mark the Monk,

> The cause of everything that happens to a person is something that person has thought (αἰτία ἐστιν ὁ λογισμός). I ought to have said that this includes both words and deeds, but since these do not precede thought, I attribute everything to thoughts. With thought leading the way, words and deeds follow.[36]

Since control of bodily functions begins with control of thoughts, by regulating the experiences that precede sleep the monk can (at least ideally) control his dreams at night. Accordingly, Cassian advises that "the first thing to be done" to avoid erotic dreams is "to restrain our wandering thoughts."[37] Climacus reflects a similar view when he teaches that "the beginning of chastity is refusal to consent (ἀσυγκατάθετος) to evil thoughts."[38]

The notion of consent to evil thoughts is related to an understanding of human cognition which the Desert Fathers inherited from Origen, who himself was heavily influenced by the Stoic theory of assent to mental representations. In this view, all human beings are subject to mental images or representations (φαντασίαι). Every representation has a propositional content which can be either true or false, and humans are free to give or withhold their assent to these propositions.[39] Basing himself on the Stoic theory, Origen taught that it is "within our power" (ἐφ' ἡμῖν/ *in nostra potestate*) to either assent to or dissent from representations.[40] Whether we merit praise or blame depends upon whether we give or withhold our assent to representations that produce an impulse towards good or bad action. Following Origen's adaptation of the Stoic theory, Evagrius teaches that our mental contents are ultimately up to us: it is "within our power" (ἐφ' ἡμῖν) to determine whether tempting thoughts linger and so set the passions in motion.[41]

According to David Brakke, the Stoic theory about the external source of impressions (and hence of moral conflict) provided a ready paradigm by which to understand the monk's conflict with demons.[42] In the psychology *cum* demonology developed by the Desert Fathers and systematized by Evagrius, thoughts (λογισμόι) were the typical means of demonic temptation.[43] According to Evagrius, "The monk's temptation (πειρασμός) is a thought which rises up through the passionate part of the soul (διὰ τοῦ παθητικοῦ μέρους τῆς ψυχῆς) and darkens the mind. Sin for a monk is the consent (συγκατάθεσις) of the thought to the forbidden pleasure."[44]

Hesychius the Priest offers a fuller account of the complex psychological process by which a tempting thought gradually develops into sin in action: "The provocation (προσβολή) comes first, then our coupling with it, or the mingling of our thoughts with those of the wicked demons. Third comes our assent (ἀναμίξ) to the provocation, with both sets of intermingling thoughts contriving how to commit the sin in practice. Fourth comes the concrete action — that is, the sin itself."[45] Temptation thus begins with suggestion in thought. If the thought is allowed to persist, it leads the monk from thinking about sin to actually performing it. Hence Evagrius warns that "if the mind consents (συγκατατίθεται) to sinful thoughts it draws near to sin."[46]

This account of temptation, which blurs the distinction between having bad thoughts and acting on bad thoughts, implies that control of behavior begins with control of thoughts. Cassian reflects this view when he argues that it is possible to control the number and frequency of nocturnal emissions by controlling the mind's focus of attention during the daytime.[47] Nevertheless, the story of the anonymous monk in conference 22 — who possessed a "great watchfulness" yet failed to exert the

desired control — undermines Cassian's explicit statements elsewhere. According to Columba Stewart, in conference 22 Cassian "tries to maintain the ideal of chastity, while backing off from the potentially misleading picture of conferences 12 and 13," where he argued that in the state of perfect chastity the monk remains completely indifferent to sexual matters. The reason for this accommodation, according to Stewart, "is probably the pastoral one of helping young monks prone to anxiety and despair."[48] What is important for the present purposes is that Cassian's leniency in conference 22 implies a recognition that there are limits to our capacity to control our bodily functions by controlling the mind's attention.

In light of the importance accorded to this capacity in early monastic thought and practice, a better understanding of how attentional control actually works and the ways in which this effortful process can go wrong can help us to make more accurate hypotheses about the monastic discipline of attention. As I hope to show, not only does cognitive research of attention help us recognize a consistency between Cassian's case study and other literary evidence at our disposal, but the juxtaposition of modern and early monastic theories of attention underscores the acute observational skills of the Desert Fathers and their followers. My reliance on cognitive theories, therefore, should not imply an incredulity to the truth claims of the monastic sources. It is precisely because I take them seriously that I rely on these theories, rather than dismissing monastic demonology as something completely incomprehensible to us.

Nevertheless, the use of cognitive theorizing in historical study is a controversial issue. Perhaps the main objection is that we cannot access the minds of historical persons, and that knowledge of modern minds will not help us in understanding ancient minds. It is not my aim, however, to understand ancient minds,

but rather to explore their unique reaction to and conceptualization of a ubiquitous cognitive phenomenon. Furthermore, while these objections assume that there is a fundamental difference between the minds of modern and historical people, it seems to me that the danger of anachronism should not lead us to overlook the basic interdependence of cognition and culture. While many cognitive processes are indeed highly susceptible to cultural variation, experimental work over the last decades suggests that a common core of cognitive processes and innate capacities are pre-cultural.[49] Hence although human cognition is shaped, to a large extent, by the cultural context in which it takes place, the methodological assumption I adopt in what follows is that the minds of modern and historical people are sufficiently similar in general cognitive function to warrant a meaningful comparison in some cases.[50]

COGNITIVE MECHANISMS OF ATTENTIONAL CONTROL

Self-control relies on the self's ability to alter its own states so as to advance abstract or distant goals over immediate motives.[51] In early monastic asceticism exertion of self-control (ἐγκράτεια), both physical and mental, was crucial for attaining the larger purpose of communion with God. Although different cultures construct different meanings of self-control, both modern psychology and early monastic demonological psychology stress the role of self-control in resisting temptation and developing virtuous habits. As such, this ubiquitous psychological process can serve as a point of contact between these very different explanatory models.

Self-control is defined today as the ability to override or inhibit automatic, habitual, or innate behaviors, urges, emotions, or desires that would otherwise interfere with goal-directed behavior.[52] The main categories of self-control are

impulse control (refraining from acting on undesirable impulses), affect regulation (an effort to alter one's emotional and mood states), and mental control (control over thoughts). The latter domain is based on our ability to influence our focus of attention, and hence a significant portion of what constitutes mental control is attentional control.[53] This area of self-control is particularly relevant for our understanding of the monastic practice of attentiveness.

Evidence suggests that managing attention is important in all spheres of self-regulation.[54] In a review of the empirical literature on this subject psychologists Baumeister and Heatherton note that "over and over, we found that managing attention was the most common and often the most effective form of self-regulation and that attentional problems presaged a great many varieties of self-regulation failure. . . . Self-regulatory failure ensued when attention could not be managed."[55] The authors conclude that the loss of attentional control is often the first indicator of self-control failure, whereas attention "is the first and often most effective line of defense in nearly every sphere of self-control, and so if attention can be redeployed away from the forbidden or troublesome stimuli, the problematic responses can be minimized or avoided."[56]

Self-control is thus based to a large degree on our ability to focus attention beyond the immediate stimuli. These and similar findings point to the primacy of attention as a crucial psychological process. It is widely held today that attention is the key to every other kind of self-control: to control our movements, our emotions, or anything else, we must first control our attention.[57] Cognitive research has done much to unravel the mechanisms underlying this process.

"Dual-process theories" of the mind share the assumption that every act of attentional control involves two complementary attentional processes, concentration and suppression, namely the process of deliberately trying to stop thinking certain thoughts. Since concentrating on item A depends on suppressed attention to all items that are not A, an act of concentration necessarily involves a simultaneous act of suppression. Unlike Freud's concept of repression, which is unconscious and automatic (and hence involves a denial of the existence of the repressed element), suppression involves an intentional, conscious choice not to indulge a particular thought, feeling, or action. In concentration and suppression we overcome willfully the background processes that guide our attention when we are not exerting control. This capacity is important to human survival and adaptation. Suppression is also a common way of dealing with unpleasant or distressing thoughts and emotions. Suppression is thus a vital psychological mechanism.[58]

Although most individuals are able to achieve satisfactory levels of mental control in most circumstances, our ability to control our thoughts is far from perfect. As dozens of experiments have demonstrated, trying to suppress thoughts is often ineffective, as the frequency of these thoughts increases during suppression and after it. The paradoxical outcome of thought suppression was first demonstrated experimentally by psychologist Daniel Wegner in 1987.[59] His findings show that this strategy of mental control can sometimes backfire, producing not only a failure of control but also the very mental states it is meant to avoid. It turns out that trying not to think a thought only makes it come back stronger.

Wegner's "Ironic Process Theory" attempts to explain this phenomenon. The theory assumes that each instance of mental control is implemented through the

production of two processes: an intentional, operating process that searches for mental contents yielding the desired state, and a monitoring process that searches for mental contents signaling the failure to achieve the desired state. The intentional process is susceptible to interference from distraction, and the monitoring process is designed to keep track of this. It searches for failures of control by examining preconscious mental contents, and when items indicating failed control are found, it restarts the operating process.[60]

The watchfulness of the monitor, however, is also a source of "ironic effects." Because the monitor searches for potential mental contents that signal failed control, it increases the accessibility of these contents to consciousness. If the intentional process of attention is undermined by other processes that also consume cognitive resources (such as stress, anxiety, or fatigue), the monitoring process can yield increased mind wandering.[61] Wegner explains that when cognitive load is imposed during concentration, it disrupts the functioning of the goal-directed attentional system, and hence the monitoring process has greater influence.[62] As a result, irrelevant items that are not the intended target of concentration become more accessible to consciousness.

In the same vein, trying *not* to think about something can increase the accessibility of that target to consciousness under conditions of cognitive load. According to the "Ironic Process Theory," when we try to suppress a thought, the monitoring process searches for this target because it is its appearance that indicates failed control. In other words, the monitor is aimed at a cue that serves as a constant reminder of the suppressed material, thereby increasing its accessibility to

consciousness. Stress and anxiety thus promote mental control lapses that are not random.

Not only does anxiety produce increased susceptibility to suppression lapses, but the context or environment in which suppression takes place can also serve to compound the problem. Studies have shown that unwanted, intrusive thoughts become more frequent and more intense during periods of solitude, when the person is less exposed to external stimuli.[63] Furthermore, experiments conducted by Wegner and his colleagues have demonstrated that if the individual remains in the suppression environment, he or she is more inclined to experience a rebound of reoccupation with the unwanted thought. According to Wegner, when people try to suppress a thought environmental features are often used as distractors. As a result, associations between the distracters and unwanted thoughts can form. In this way, environmental features can become powerful reminders of the unwanted thought.[64]

In particular, suppression is difficult to execute when thoughts about sex are concerned, since these thoughts quickly excite our bodies by producing sympathetic arousal of the autonomic nervous system. Wegner and his colleagues have found that physiological arousal increases during suppression of thoughts about sex: when people are asked to suppress sexual thoughts, their skin conductance level (SCL) reactivity rivals the strength of reactions that occur when they are asked explicitly to entertain those thoughts.[65] Trying not to think about sex can thus excite the body just like thinking about sex.

The processes that undermine the intentional control of mental states, therefore, are inherent in the very exercise of such control. Wegner concludes that "it

is only with enough mental capacity that suppression may be at least modestly effective."[66] Considering that suppression can be the cause rather than the cure of unwanted thoughts, Wegner and his colleagues advise: "Our simplest advice would be to avoid suppression, to stop stopping."[67] Instead of suppressing unwanted thoughts, psychiatrist Stanley Rachman recommends: "Let them simply float through your mind. Regard them as noise, just noise. Don't try to fight them off, or block them, or cancel them."[68]

Nevertheless, like other conscious and intentional processes that become automatic when subject to repetition,[69] attention is trainable. The intentional process of attention increases in automaticity with training and so becomes progressively less conscious, less effortful, and less susceptible to interruption. As a consequence, people who practice thought suppression often enough may develop such skilled and automatic intentional processes of attention that they become capable of effective suppression.[70] Such exceptional skills, according to Wegner, can be developed "by turning mental control activities into well-learned habits through repeated practice."[71]

Until this stage has been reached, however, suppression can be an extremely difficult task. Furthermore, because the very effort to eject unwanted thoughts can strengthen their power, suppressed thoughts seem to acquire a force of their own: the more one tries to suppress them, they return with greater insistence. According to the "Ironic Process Theory," the mind wanders not just away from where we aim it, but also toward what we forbid it to explore. As a result, "there is a certain predictability to unwanted thoughts, a grim precision in the way our mental clockwork returns such thoughts to mind each time we try to suppress them."[72]

Attempts to influence mental states can thus act in a direction precisely opposite the intended control. As Wegner puts it, "the 'unwanting' itself promotes the problem."[73] This paradoxical tendency of the human mind, I suggest, may account for the exceptional regularity of the emissions of the unfortunate monk in Cassian's case study: this monk may have simply struggled too hard to "exercise the most cautious watchfulness lest the integrity of flesh that we had preserved up to that time be snatched away, especially on the night that we are preparing ourselves for the communion of the saving banquet," just as he was instructed.[74] Yet his very effort not to think about sex — a tensed and anxious effort, we may presume — may have unwittingly contributed to the development and maintenance of his problem. By exempting him from responsibility for his "disease" and allowing him to partake in Communion — thereby assuaging his anxiety (whether by natural or super-natural means) — the elders were able to prompt an immediate and lasting cure.[75]

The findings about the deleterious effects of anxiety help us to appreciate both the simplicity and the sophistication of this powerful therapy. More importantly for the present purposes, research of attentional control helps us to recognize that the strange problem described in conference 22 is, in fact, not so strange; it is but one expression or symptom of the risks inherent in the effort to train attention — risks which early monastic psychology ascribes to demonic machinations.

Cognitive research of attention has broad implications for our understanding of the role of the demons in the formation of a monastic self, the importance accorded to λογισμόι in monastic thought and practice, and the nature of the challenges involved in the ascetic process of self-formation. However, in the space remaining a systematic treatment of these issues is impossible. In what follows I consider only

some of the ways in which cognitive psychology may be brought to bear on our understanding of monastic attentiveness, as it existed in the concrete daily life of late antique monks.

MISUSE OF ATTENTIVENESS

Geoffrey Harpham famously argued that "the broadest description of the project of asceticism is that it recognizes and manages drive or impulse, commonly called desire, by harnessing and directing resistance."[76] Harpham's notion of resistance to desire assumes Freud's idea of (unconscious) repression. Getting clear evidence of repression, however, is difficult, especially in historical retrospect. On the other hand, as far as suppressive strategies can be seen as the embodiment of beliefs about need to control thoughts, which themselves derive from changing social ideas of self-control, suppression is a psychological process that can be identified and studied by historians and anthropologists.[77] By talking about suppression rather than repression, therefore, we are in a better position to study the intricate, often paradoxical relationship between desire and resistance.

Moreover, whereas scholarly discussions of attentiveness in ancient philosophy and early monastic spirituality have concentrated on one aspect of this spiritual method, namely concentration — the exercise of focusing the thoughts on the present moment, on death, on the remembrance of God, etc. — the above discussion suggests that a more complete analysis of this practice should also include the complementary attentional process of suppression.[78] Concentration on the thought of God, let us keep in mind, also requires (at least initially) the concomitant endeavor to rid the mind of sinful or otherwise mundane thoughts. While it is true, as Kallistos Ware argues, that the Greek fathers were advocating "not repression but transfiguration," and that the aim

of the ascetic was "not to suppress these passions but to reorient them,"[79] yet suppression may have been a common way of dealing with unpleasant or distressing thoughts and emotions. As one of Barsanuphius's disciples confesses: "Whenever a wicked thought comes to me, my heart is moved with anger toward this thought, to the point of even shouting."[80] It seems to me that such conscious and voluntary effort to expel thoughts from consciousness can be spoken of as suppression (rather than repression).[81] Barsanuphius's reply, however, makes it clear that this is not the right way to practice attentiveness. Instead, "One should calmly invoke the name of God, and it [the thought] will be averted."[82]

The challenge of this advice, however, lies in its simplicity. Considering that sinful thoughts put the monk in danger of committing sin, it is not surprising that they could give rise to active internal and behavioral resistance. When performed in unfavorable conditions, this strategy was likely to fail. Hence in spite of Evagrius's conviction that it is possible to resist all sinful thoughts and that failure to do so results from laziness (ῥαθυμία) or negligence (ὀλιγωρία, ἀμελία),[83] in practice such failures may have resulted from well-intentioned yet ineffective effort to practice attentiveness. As Hesychius the Priest warns, watchfulness is "to be bought only at a great price."[84] Although the high cost to which Hesychius refers here involves much more than a failure to control attention, nevertheless an investigation of such mundane failures may lend us an important insight into the concrete daily lives of late antique monks.

Research of attentional control helps us to reconstruct from the monastic sources some of the factors that would have undermined the effort to maintain a continual attentiveness. Firstly, the emotional distress to which evil thoughts gave rise

would have resulted in increased susceptibility to mental control lapses. One indication of this emotional state is Evagrius's observation that

> a custom of the demons [is] after impure thoughts to instill thoughts of anxiety (ἐμβάλλειν μερίμνης) and a multitude of mental representations in the mind; choked by the thorns of anxiety, our efforts are rendered fruitless. . . . As an athlete will be hindered by his tunic, so also the mind will be easily dragged about by thoughts of anxiety (οἱ λογισμοὶ τῆς μερίμνης).[85]

Evil thoughts are thus followed by anxiety or worry, which in turn render the monk's efforts futile. The *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza, which records real dialogues that took place in the first half of the sixth century, preserves a lively account of the process in which anxiety was built up. One of their disciples complains:

> Whenever an evil thought comes to me, my heart is moved and jumps (κινεῖται καὶ ἀποπηδᾷ) as soon as it senses this, fearing that it might be dominated by the evil thought on account of its weakness. And when this happens, I feel a great burden in my soul, and so I am grieved (πολλοῦ βάρους αἰσθάνομαι ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ καὶ θλίβομαι).[86]

The experience of sinful thoughts that intruded the mind unbidden was clearly a distressful one for many monks, conscious of their sinfulness and anxious about the threat of the coming judgment. Lorenzo Perrone describes this state of mind as a "spirituality of anxiety," and suggests that anxiety about one’s salvation was the natural result of the constant exercise of self-scrutiny and consciousness of one's

sinfulness.[87] As the above quotation implies, another, more immediate consequence of the constant exercise of self-scrutiny was a heightened vigilance for the occurrence of unwanted thoughts.

In light of the findings cited above we may perhaps further speculate that the unchanging environment of the monastic cell (κελλία) — the "privileged place for the monk"[88] — could have served to make attentiveness even more difficult.[89] Although the degree of solitude and the actual practice of cell-sitting among Egyptian monks may have been exaggerated, there is little doubt that monks spent much time alone within their cells, "at the mercy of the welter of thoughts, fancies and emotions that bubble up during prolonged silence."[90] As Cassian explains, "There is nothing surprising in the fact that someone staying in a cell, whose thoughts are gathered together as if in a very narrow closet, should be suffocated with a multitude of anxieties (*anxietatum multitudine)*, which burst out of the confines of the dwelling. . . and run about everywhere like wild horses."[91] In light of this amplified mental activity and emotional distress, suppression was likely to fail unless performed with sufficient mental control skills.

In a study on the architecture of the monastic dwelling place Brooks Hedstrom suggests that the monastic cell in late antique Egypt concretely exemplifies "space as defined by an individual's hopes and actions within that space."[92] To this observation we may perhaps add that in some cases, or at certain stages of one's spiritual life, this space was also defined by the individual's fears and anxieties. As Jerome admits in one of his letters, "When I was living in the desert. . . I used to dread my very cell as though it knew my thoughts."[93] Although the need to face oneself in the solitude of

the cell involved much more than mere exertion of effort and control, susceptibility to mental control lapses would have made this demanding task even more difficult.

An additional factor that may have served to compound the problem is the ascetic practice of sleep deprivation, which has to do with the discipline of inner watchfulness and vigilance. We are told that Evagrius himself used to sleep only four hours,[94] and Cassian also recommends three or four hours of sleep at night.[95] In their study of medieval asceticism Kroll and Bachrach estimate that the ordinary daily routine of medieval monastic life probably kept monks in a state of moderate partial sleep deprivation (less than five hours of sleep per 24 hours).[96] Basing themselves on experimental studies of the effects of sleep deprivation, they argue that fatigue would have reduced the monk's attentional resources and produced detrimental psychological effects, which would become more pronounced as partial sleep deprivation became chronic.[97]

When performed in such unfavorable conditions, suppression was likely to fail, unwittingly serving to increase the frequency, salience, and intrusiveness of the suppressed material. In *La Tentation de saint Antoine* Gustave Flaubert has Hilarion tell Antony, "Hypocrite qui s'enfonce dans la solitude pour se livrer mieux aux débordement de ses convoitises! Tu te prives de viandes, de vin, d'étuves, d'esclaves et d'honneurs; mais comme tu laisses ton imagination t'offrir des banquets, des parfums, des femmes nues et des foules applaudissantes!"[98] The findings cited above, however, suggest that Antony's amplified mental activity had nothing to do with hypocrisy. Rather, as Geoffrey Harpham puts it, "one effect of such elaborate self-consciousness was to provoke episodes of demonic 'temptation'."[99]

Not only do the findings about the paradoxical effects of suppression throw light on the nature of the challenges involved in the practice of attentiveness, but they also serve to underscore the acute observational skills of the Desert Fathers and their followers, who seem to have been well aware of the counter-productive effects of attentiveness, when misapplied. Basing themselves on their own experience and introspection, they knew that an anxious, teeth-gritting effort to repel evil thoughts and the demons that lurk behind them is ineffective and even counter-productive.[100] Barsanuphius, for example, warns: "Do not contradict (ἀντείπῃς) them [the thoughts]. . . , for they will not cease from troubling you."[101] Or as Cassian admits, the more earnestly we try to fix our thoughts upon God, "the more vehemently the mind is carried away by wandering thoughts and shifting distractions."[102] Similarly, Mark the Monk insists that the only way to escape from a tempting thought is through patience and prayer; if you oppose it without these, "it only attacks you more strongly (περισσοτέρως ἐπέρχεται)."[103]

These authors seem to acknowledge that control of certain processes may elude those who make effortful attempts to attain it.[104] It may have been for this reason that the strategy of an active struggle against demonically-inspired thoughts was reserved for experienced ascetics. While at the first stage of training ascetic practitioners were advised to send thoughts away immediately, the more advanced could also attempt riskier strategies. Evagrius recommends that they allow the thought to linger in the mind and actively fight it from within and contradict it.[105] Yet this was a risky strategy. According to the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, the method of contradicting (ἀντιλέγειν) evil thoughts

> is enormous and exceptional, demanding great effort and not safe for everybody; it puts one at risk of losing one's wits (ἔκστασιν φρενῶν). . . . When a thought occurs in the soul. . . no matter when one contradicts (ἀντιλέγει) it, [it] becomes stronger and more violent (ἰσχυρότερος καὶ ῥαγδαῖος).[106]

Or as Hesychius the Priest warns,

> It is not safe to allow these thoughts to enter the heart in order to increase the mind's experience of warfare, especially to start with, when the soul still greatly enjoys these demonic provocations and delights in pursuing them. But as soon as we perceive them, we should cut them off (κόπτειν). Once the mind has matured in this excellent activity, it is disciplined and perceptive. From then on we should admit them in.[107]

In the same vein, Barsanuphius of Gaza insists that only advanced monks can engage in a direct battle against demonically-inspired thoughts, explaining that "anyone capable of resisting or waging warfare against, and not being defeated by these thoughts, allows them to enter; however, anyone who is weak and unable to do so, possibly even giving one's consent to them, should cut them off in order to flee toward God."[108] When approached by afflicted disciples, he repeatedly stresses the need to maintain calmness in the face of evil thoughts: "The way to do this is not to be convinced by and not to give consent to the evil thought, but simply to hurry toward God without turmoil (ἀταράχως). . . . If this thought enters your mind, do not be troubled (μὴ ταραχθῇς). . . and resist calmly (ἀταράχως), invoking the Lord.[109]

The common advice for beginners, therefore, is: "Watch your thoughts, and every time they begin to say something to you, do not answer them, but rise and pray."[110] Or as Macarius the Great counsels: "If a thought arises within you, never look at it but always look upwards, and the Lord will come at once to your help."[111] Similarly, Dorotheus of Gaza (quoting a saying attributed to Macarius) insists that the monk should stay calm and turn to God when afflicted by thoughts, rather than attempting to overcome them (μὴ θέλειν περιγενέσθαι λογισμῶν δαιμονικῶν).[112]

When evil thoughts arise, the monk should maintain calmness and simply bring back the wandering attention, over and over again, to the thought of God. An active, agitated struggle against evil thoughts is ineffective. As Martin Laird explains, attentiveness is "not a question of not having thoughts. . . by clenching one's jaws until the mind is furrowed and a ratiocinative blank stare is achieved. What is crucial, rather, is that we do not give our attention to these thoughts. We let them be."[113] Although an effort is required, this effort is different from force.

Yet this advice is easier said than done. Instead of calmly bringing attention back to the prayer word, as they were instructed, it appears that inexperienced monks struggled hard to expel sinful thoughts and desires from consciousness. The repeated warnings about the dangers of this method and the stress on the need to maintain calmness suggest that it was a common mental control strategy. Considering that our cognitive-emotional habits of reacting to thoughts are deeply ingrained,[114] it is not surprising that monks found it hard to remain calm in the face of evil thoughts. Yet their very anxiety could have made their fear come true.

Another aspect of this seemingly paradoxical tendency of the human mind is its susceptibility to demonic distraction particularly at the time of prayer — exactly when the effort to concentrate is most strenuous. Monastic authors frequently refer to this phenomenon, often ascribing it to demonic machinations. Evagrius, for example, observes that the mind has "a strong natural tendency" to be plundered (συλᾶσθαι) at the time of prayer.[115] He further explains that "when they [the demons] see us engaged in prayer, then do they oppose us vigorously, insinuating into our mind things which one ought not to entertain or think about during the time of prayer, in order that they may lead our mind away captive."[116] In their effort to hinder the monk's progress and make his prayer fruitless, the demons work exactly against his efforts to control his focus of attention.

Similarly, Cassian observes that the demon of fornication tends to suggest sinful thoughts to the mind "especially on those days when we want to be pleasing in the sight of God."[117] Climacus refers to a similar phenomenon when he explains that blasphemous thoughts tend to intrude the mind especially "during the holy services and even at the awesome hour of the Mysteries, blaspheming the Lord and the consecrated elements."[118] Hence he advises those suffering from blasphemous thoughts to simply ignore these thoughts, warning them of the counter-productive effects of the effort to resist this demon: "Hold this foe in contempt and you will be liberated from its torments. Try cleverly to fight it and you will end up by surrendering."[119] Both authors acknowledge that inappropriate thoughts tend to appear at the least appropriate moments, as if working against the attempt to control them.

While for Cassian sexual thoughts are particularly problematic, Climacus is especially preoccupied with the problem of blasphemous thoughts, devoting to it a

whole section in the chapter on pride in his *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Although he begins his discussion of blasphemy with the statement that "unspeakable blasphemy is the child of dreadful pride," and ends it by concluding that "he who has defeated this vice has banished pride" — yet his treatment of blasphemous thoughts throughout the chapter undermines his explicit statements. In fact, he goes out of his way to reassure his monastic audience, explaining that blasphemous thoughts are especially common among "simpler and more innocent souls, and these are more upset and disturbed by it than others. . . . To such people we could quite rightly say that what is happening to them is due not to their own undue self-esteem but to the jealousy of the demons."[120]

According to Climacus, the demon of blasphemy has "evilly and tyrannously caused the bodies of some to be worn away with grief. . . whispering that there is no salvation in store for them."[121] This distressful experience, he warns, has often caused men to go mad.[122] He reports, for example of a "zealous monk" who was constantly beset by blasphemous thoughts for two decades, during which he "wore himself out with fasting and vigils, but to no avail." Eventually this monk decided to write down his thoughts on a sheet of paper, which he handed to a certain holy man. As Climacus reports,

> The old man read it, smiled, lifted the brother and said to him: "My son, put your hand on my neck." The brother did so. Then the great man said: "Very well, brother. Now let this sin be on my neck for as many years as it has been or will be active within you. But from now on, ignore it." And the monk who had been tempted in this fashion assured me that even before he had left the cell of this old man, his infirmity (τὸ πάθος) was gone.[123]

After two decades of futile struggle — a struggle which would have served only to compound the problem — the old man was able prompt an immediate and lasting cure by assuming responsibility for his disciple's thoughts. This story demonstrates the role of the spiritual father as ἀνάδοχος (linked to ἀναδέχομαι, to take upon oneself), or a "burden bearer" in the Pauline phraseology (Gal 6.2), who assumes responsibility for another.[124] The findings about the paradoxical effects of suppression throw light on the practical facet of this powerful therapy of faith and trust. By helping his disciple to renounce his deeply ingrained sense of responsibility for his thoughts (and thereby to "banish pride"), the old man — much like the elders in Cassian's case study — was able to relieve his anxiety and make him revert within minutes to healthy ways of thinking.

Climacus's leniency toward such "innocent souls" moves in the opposite direction of the injunction in the Gospels that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are what defile a person" (Mattt 15.19-20). Climacus does his best to undo the potentially harsh psychological implications of the radical responsibility promoted by this and similar exhortations. He advises, for example: "If you have blasphemous thoughts, do not think that you are to blame. God knows our hearts (καρδιογνώστης ἐστιν) and he knows that ideas of this kind come not from us but from our enemies."[125] Already Evagrius advised: "Let us not allow ourselves to be troubled by the demon that carries the mind off to blaspheme God. . . . The Lord knows men’s hearts (καρδιογνώστης ἐστιν) and he knows that we were not guilty of such madness (μανία)."[126]

Although both authors were firm believers in the freedom of will, they acknowledged that blasphemous thoughts are not necessarily an act of will.[127]

Monastic demonology enabled them and others in the eastern monastic tradition to cope with questions regarding the etiology of this distressful experience. Recent cognitive research helps us to recognize that it is the very risks inherent in the effort to train and purify attention — and hence inherent in the ascetic process of self-formation — that were ascribed to demonic machinations. Thereby it underscores the sophistication and perceptiveness of early monastic psychology *cum* demonology, which developed its own representation of the human mind and how it works. Moreover, the findings and theories cited above help us to recognize that this demonological psychology was not only a theoretical and speculative endeavor, but it also enabled real people to articulate and cope with actual problems encountered in their daily life.

NOTES

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[1] See Mark Sheridan, "The Spiritual and Intellectual World of Early Egyptian Monasticism," *Coptica* 1 (2002): 1-51, at 51.

[2] On ἡσυχία see Vincent Rossi, "Presence, Participation, Performance: The Remembrance of God in the Early Hesychast Fathers," in *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East*, ed. James S. Custinger (Indiana: World Wisdom, 2002), 64-111.

[3] Hesychius, *On Watchfulness and Holiness* 1 (PG 93:1480); trans. G. E. H Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, *The Philokalia: The Complete Text*, vol. 1 (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), 162. The term νῆψις has its scriptural foundation in the text of 1 Pet 5.8: "Be sober, watchful (νήψατε, γρηγορήσατε)."

[4] See David E. Linge, "Asceticism and 'Singleness of Mind' in the Desert Fathers," in *Monastic Life in the Christian and Hindu Traditions*, eds. Austin B. Creel and Vasudha Narayanan (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 37-70.

[5] On this practice, see Pierre Adnes, "Garde du cœur," *DSAM* 6, col. 115.

[6] Cassian *Coll*. 24.6.1-3 (CSEL 13:680; trans. Boniface Ramsey, *John Cassian: The Conferences* [New York: Paulist Press, 1997], 829); cf. *Apophth. Patr*. N 435 (trans. John Wortley, *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers: A Select Edition and Complete English Translation* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013], 276).

[7] On these and other practices, see Columba Stewart, “Evagrius Ponticus and the Eastern Monastic Tradition on the Intellect and the Passions," *Modern Theology* 27, no. 2 (2011): 263-75.

[8] Diadochus, *Hundred Gnostic Chapters* 59 (SC 5:119); trans. Cliff Ermatinger, *Following the Footsteps of the Invisible: The Complete Works of Diadochus of Photike*, Cistercian Studies 39 (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), 28.

[9] On this process, see Linge, “Singleness of Mind." See also David Linge, "Leading the Life of Angels: Ascetic Practice and Reflection in the Writings of Evagrius of Pontus," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68 (2000): 537-68; Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land: A Guide to the Christian Practice of Contemplation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[10] For example, Michel Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy R. Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999), 188-97; David Brakke, “The Problematization of Nocturnal Emissions in Early Christian Syria, Egypt, and Gaul," *JECS* 3 (1995): 419-60; Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. 62-84; Aline Rousselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity*, trans. Felicia Pheasant (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), esp. 141-77; John Kitchen, “Cassian, Nocturnal Emissions, and the Sexuality of Jesus," in *The Seven Deadly Sins*, ed. Richard Newhauser (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 73-94.

[11] Cassian's *Conferences* are based on events that occurred during his stay in the Egyptian desert sometime during the last two decades of the fourth century and were probably composed in the second decade of the fifth century. Cassian probably did not make notes during the actual conferences but wrote them from memory, and hence his *Conferences* are not exact replications of the original discourses. Guy argued that Cassian could not have met many of the monastic elders whose acquaintance he had claimed (Jean Claude Guy, "Jean Cassien, historien du monachisme égyptien?" *SP* 8 [1966]: 363-72), but there seems to be no good reason to doubt that any of the elders existed. According to Owen Chadwick, the fact that Theonas and some of the elders in other conferences are unknown from elsewhere is an indication of the authenticity of their teaching. See Chadwick, *John Cassian: A Study in Primitive Monasticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 31. See also Steven D. Driver, *John Cassian and the Reading of Egyptian Monastic Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 6. For textual evidence suggesting that Cassian's elders were authentic figures, see Jinha Kim, "The Spiritual Anthropology of John Cassian" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2002).

[12] Cassian *Coll.* 22.6.1-4 (CSEL 13:621-23).

[13] Michel Olphe-Galliard, "Cassian (Jean)," *DSAM* 2, col. 224.

[14] Ramsey, *Conferences*, 9.

[15] E.g., Barsanuphius and John, *ep.* 168-71, 231, 240 (SC 427:568-74, SC 450:156-58, SC 450:182-86). On this subject, see François Refoulé, "Rêves et vie spirituelle

d'apres Évagre le Pontique," *Vie spirituelle supplemente* 56 (1961): 470-516, at 480; Bruria Bitton-Ashkelony and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Monastic School of Gaza* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 141-42. A recent ethnographic study of a monastery on Mount Athos reveals that the struggle with erotic dreams still threatens spiritual progress. See Marrios Sarris, "Some Fundamental Organizing Concepts in a Greek Monastic Community on Mt. Athos" (PhD diss., London School of Economics, 2000), 121.

[16] Elsewhere Cassian refers to the practice of wearing cold metal plates around the genitals to avoid nocturnal emissions (*Inst.* 6.7.2 [SC 109:272]). See also *Apophth. Patr*. N 517. Although Columba Stewart argues that Cassian refers here to the costume of Greek athletes rather than to monks (*Cassian the Monk,* 189), Cassian does seem to recommend this practice. See David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism,* Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 95. It has even been suggested that "under Cassian's monastic institutes, a monk was expected to wear mental plates all the time." See Simon Lienyueh Wei, "The Absence of Sin in Sexual Dreams in the Writings of Augustine and Cassian," *VC* 66, no. 4 (2012): 362-78, at 371. For other measures employed by late antique monks to avoid nocturnal emissions, see Rousselle, *Porneia,* 151. On sleep deprivation as a measure against erotic dreams, see Charles J. Metteer, "Distraction or Spiritual Discipline: The Role of Sleep in Early Egyptian Monasticism," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2008): 20-24.

[17] See Brakke, "Problematization," 458. See also Conrad Leyser, "Masculinity in Flux: Nocturnal Emission and the Limits of Celibacy in the Early Middle Ages," in

Masculinity in Medieval Europe, ed. Dawn M. Hadley (London: Longman, 1999), 103-120.

[18] Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 63.

[19] According to Cassian, it is possible to be "rarely soiled or indeed never polluted by the emission of this fluid" (*Coll*. 22.3.1 [CSEL 13:616]; cf. *Coll*. 22.3.3 [CSEL 13:617] and 22.6.6 [CSEL 13:624]; *Inst*. 6.10 [SC 109:274]). Similarly, Climacus argues that those who have reached spiritual perfection, "even in sleep show their contempt for the demons who approach them" (*scal*. 27 [PG 88:1116B]). According to Refoulé, this belief was common in the monastic colony of Scetis, where Cassian stayed ("Rêves," 506).

[20] Two months: *Inst*. 6.21 (SC 109:286); four months: *Coll*. 2.23.1 (CSEL 13:62).

[21] Cassian follows Evagrius, who taught that "when the natural movements of the body during sleep are free of images, they reveal that the soul is healthy to a certain extent. The formation of images is an indication of ill health" (*Praktikos* 55 [SC 171:628]; trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Oxford Early Christian Studies [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003], 107).

[22] Clement *Str*. 2.13.59.6-2.14.60.1-7 (SC 38:82-83). More broadly, in Hellenistic medical literature nocturnal emissions were linked with a loss of rational control, and their immediate cause was considered to be a *phantasia*, a dream image. See Refoulé, "Rêves," 488.

[23] Clement *Str*. 7.16.98-99 (SC 428:296-98).

[24] Antony, *ep.* 1 (trans. Samuel Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995], 199); cf. *Apophth. Patr*. Antony 22 (PG 65:84).

[25] E.g., Cassian *Inst*. 6.2 (SC 109:264).

[26] Antony, *ep.* 1 (trans. Rubenson, *Letters,* 199).

[27] Cassian *Coll*. 22.3 (CSEL 13:616-8).

[28] Cassian *Coll*. 22.6.4 (CSEL 13:623).

[29] Cassian echoes Origen's teaching (e.g., *princ*. 3.2.4 [PG 11:310]). According to the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* (20.1-3), Dioscorus taught that "seminal emissions do take place unconsciously without the stimulus of imagined forms, occurring not from deliberate choice but involuntarily. . . . They are therefore not to be classed as sinful. But imaginings are the result of deliberate choices and are a sign of an evil disposition" (ed. A. J. Festugière, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto: Édition critique du texte grec et traduction annotée,* SH 34 [Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961], 118; trans. Norman Russell, *The Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, Cistercian Studies 34 [Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1981], 105).

[30] Cassian *Inst*. 10.11 (SC 109:404); cf. *Inst*. 6.7-11 (SC 109:130-34); *Apophth. Patr*. N 592.45 (trans. Wortley, *Anonymous Sayings*, 418). Already in the first century Seneca taught that "the sleeper's visions are as turbulent as his day" (*ep.* 56.6; trans.

Richard M. Gummere, *Seneca: ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, vol. 1 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979], 376).

[31] Cassian *Coll*. 22.3.4-5 (CSEL 13:617-8); trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, 764.

[32] Climacus *scal.* 15 (PG 88:881); trans. Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell, *John Climacus: The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 172.

[33] On this subject see Brakke, "Problematization." According to Evagrius, "We shall recognize the proofs of ἀπάθεια in the thoughts by day and in the dreams by night" (*Praktikos* 56 [SC 171:630]; cf. *Praktikos* 64 [SC 171:648]).

[34] Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 191-92. Cassian divides fornication into three kinds: sexual relations with a woman, masturbation, and fornication which is "conceived in the mind and the thoughts" due to "the negligence of an unwatchful mind" (*Coll.* 5.11 and 12.2 [CSEL 13:131 and 13:336]).

[35] Chadwick, *Cassian*, 140.

[36] Mark the Monk, *A Monastic Superior's Disputation with an Attorney* 18 (SC 455:80); trans. Tim Vivian and Augustine Casiday, *Mark the Monk, Counsels on the Spiritual Life*, Popular Patristics (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), 229.

[37] Cassian *Coll*. 22.3.5 (CSEL 13:618).

[38] Climacus *scal*. 15 (PG 88:881A; trans. Luibheid and Russell, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, 172). Climacus also reports of a different view: "Some say that it is the thought of fornication that introduces passion into the body, while others… insist that evil thoughts derive from the capacity of the body to experience sensual things." He concludes that "some passions enter the body by way of the soul, and some work in the opposite way, the latter affecting people living in the world, the former assailing those living the monastic life" *(scal.* 15 [PG 88:897]). Both opinions appear in monastic literature (e.g., Evagrius, *Praktikos* 37 [SC 171:584]).

[39] On the Stoic theory, see Margaret R. Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 24-27.

[40] E.g., "Those things which happen to us from without are not in our own power (οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν); but to make a good or bad use of those things which do so happen… is within our power" (Origen *princ*. 3.1.5 [SC 268:32]; trans. ANF 4:528). While Origen relayed heavily on the Stoic theory of representations, there is an important difference: whereas the Stoics were interested in the truth-value of the representations, Origen and Evagrius are interested in their role as an indication of moral disposition. See Michel Foucault, "About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth," *Political Theory* 21, no. 2 (1993): 198-227, at 217. See also Kathleen Gibbons, "Vice and Self-Examination in the Christian Desert" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2011), 118, and David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 40.

[41] Evagrius, *Praktikos* 6 (SC 171:508); cf. *Praktikos* 80 (SC 171:668); *Apophth. Patr*. sys. 11.107 (SC 474:192).

[42] See Brakke, *Making of the Monk,* 40. Others have stressed the influence of Plotinus on the notion that thoughts are external to the self. E.g., Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul and Body in the 4th Century* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 80.

[43] Evagrius, *Praktikos* 48 (SC 171:608).

[44] Evagrius, *Praktikos* 74-75 (SC 171:662); trans. Sinkewicz, *Ascetic Corpus*, 110.

[45] Hesychius, *On Watchfulness and Holiness* 46 (PG 93:1496; trans. Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, 170); cf. *On Watchfulness and Holiness* 2 (PG 93:1481).

[46] Evagrius, *ep.* 25.2 (trans. Gabriel Bunge, *Evagrios Pontikos: Briefe aus der Wüste* [Trier: Paulinus Verlag, 1986], 236).

[47] E.g., Cassian *Coll*. 22.6.6 (CSEL 13:621-22) and 22.3.3-5 (CSEL 13:617).

[48] Stewart, *Cassian the Monk,* 83.

[49] For a review, see Richard Nisbett and Ara Norenzayan, "Culture and cognition," *Current Directions in Experimental psychology* 9, no. 4 (2002): 132-35. See also Pascal Boyer, "Cognitive Aspects of Religious Ontologies," S*cripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 17, no. 1 (2014): 53-72.

[50] For this line of argument, see Luther H. Martin, "The Promise of Cognitive Science for the Study of Early Christianity," in *Explaining Christian Origins and Early*

Judaism: Contribution from Cognitive and Social Science, eds. Petri Luomanen, Ilkka Pyssiäinen, and Risto Uro (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 51-52.

[51] See Kentaro Fujita, "On Conceptualizing Self-Control as More than the Effortful Inhibition of Impulses," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 20, no. 10 (2011): 1-15.

[52] See Mark Muraven and Elisavetaand Slessareva, "Mechanisms of Self-Control Failure: Motivation and Limited Resources," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 29 (2003): 894-906, at 894.

[53] See Roy F. Baumeister and Julie Juola Exline, "Self-Control, Morality, and Human Strength," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 19, no. 1 (2000): 29-42, at 30. See also Daniel M. Wegner, "Stress and Mental Control," in *Handbook of Life Stress, Cognition, and Health,* eds. Shirley Fisher and James Reason (Oxford: John Wiley, 1988), 685-99.

[54] "Self-control" and "self-regulation" are often used interchangeably in psychological literature. Nevertheless, self-control is a more specific concept than self-regulation, which need not be a deliberative, effortful process.

[55] Roy F. Baumeister and Todd Heatherton, "Self-Regulation Failure: An Overview," *Psychological Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1996): 1-15, at 4.

[56] Roy F. Baumeister and Julie Juola Exline, "Virtue, Personality, and Social Relations: Self-Control as the Moral Muscle," *Journal of Personality* 67 (1999): 1165-1194, at 1172.

[57] See Wegner, "Stress and Mental Control," 683. On the importance of attention in spiritual disciplines, see John W. Newman, *Disciplines of Attention: Buddhist Insight Meditation, the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, and Classical Psychoanalysis* (New York: Lang, 1996).

[58] My account is based mainly on Wegner, "Stress and Mental Control" and *idem*, "You Can't Always Think What You Want," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 25 (1992): 193-225, as well as Christine Purdon and David A. Clark, "The Need to Control Thoughts," in *Cognitive Approaches to Obsessions and Compulsions*, eds. Randy Frost and Gail Steketee (Oxford: Elsevier, 2002), 29-43.

[59] In a well-known experiment Wegner and his colleagues directed subjects either to think or not to think of white bears. Those who had initially suppressed showed a rebound of preoccupation with this thought. See Daniel M. Wegner et al., "Paradoxical Effects of Thought Suppression," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53, no. 1 (1987): 5-13. Dozens of additional studies have documented the counter-productive effects of suppression. In the case of abstinence from food, for instance, it was shown that dieting generally causes subsequent overeating, suggesting that the attempt to avoid thoughts of food lead to a later preoccupation with such thoughts. See Janet Polivy and Peter Herman, "Dieting and Binging: A Causal Analysis," *American Psychologist* 40, no. 2 (1985): 193-201.

[60] Daniel M. Wegner, "Why the Mind Wanders," in *Scientific Approaches to Consciousness*, eds. Jonathan Cohen and Jonathan Schooler (New Jersey: Laurence Elbaum, 1997), 295-315.

[61] For example, emotional distress is accompanied by an elevated number of unpleasant intrusive cognitions. See Stanley Rachman, “Part I. Unwanted Intrusive Cognitions,” *Advances in Behavior Research and Therapy* 3, no. 3 (1981): 89-99, at 92.

[62] According to the "Attentional Control Theory" put forward by Eysenck and Calvo, anxiety produces increased susceptibility to mental control failures because anxiety consumes attentional resources. See Michael Eysenck et al., “Anxiety and Cognitive Performance: Attentional Control Theory,” *Emotion* 7, no. 2 (2007): 336-53.

[63] See Rachman, “Intrusive Cognitions.”

[64] Daniel M. Wegner et al., “Polluting the Stream of Consciousness: The Effect of Thought Suppression on the Mind’s Environment,” *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 15, no. 2 (1991): 141-52, at 150.

[65] See Daniel M. Wegner et al., "The Suppression of Exciting Thoughts," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 58, no. 3 (1990): 409-418. See also Wegner, "Think What You Want."

[66] Wegner, "Why the Mind Wanders," 305.

[67] Daniel M. Wegner and David Schneider, “Mental Control: The War of the Ghosts in the Machine,” in *Unintended Though,* eds. James S. Uleman and John A. Bargh (New York: Guilford Press, 1989), 300.

[68] Stanley Rachman, *The Treatment of Obsessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 96.

[69] See, for example, Martin S. Hagger et al., "The Strength Model of Self-Regulation Failure and Health-Related Behaviour," *Health Psychology Review* 3, no. 2 (2009): 208-238, at 216-17.

[70] See Daniel M. Wegner, "Ironic Processes of Mental Control," *Psychological Review* 101 (1994): 34-52.

[71] Wegner, "Ironic Processes," 49.

[72] Richard Wenzlaff and Daniel M. Wegner, "Thought Suppression," *Annual Review of Psychology* 51, no. 1 (2000): 59-91, at 60.

[73] Wegner, "Stress and Mental Control," 686.

[74] Cassian *Coll*. 22.5.1 (CSEL 13:620); trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, 766).

[75] Early monastic literature provides ample evidence that exemption from responsibility for sins was a powerful therapeutic tool. Palladius, for example, reports that Moses the Ethiopian suffered miserably from sexual phantasies over a long period. Finally he disclosed his problem to one of the elders. The old man, who obviously lacked discretion, attributed the dreams to Moses's negligence. Terrified from the harsh judgment, for the next six or seven years Moses tormented himself with vigils and fasts, but the more he dried up his body, the more he was consumed by wet dreams. It was only Father Isidore's performative words, exempting Moses from

responsibility for his "illicit pleasures," that eventually cured him: "Stop contending with demons and do not bother them. . . . In the name of Jesus Christ, your dreams have vanished. Now receive Communion confidently. You were subjected to this for your own good." From then on, Moses "no longer suffered anything" (*h. Laus.* 19.7-10; trans. Robert T. Meyer, *Palladius: The Lausiac History* [New York: Newman Press, 1964], 67).

[76] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 61.

[77] See Charles Stewart, "Dreams and Desires in Ancient and Early Christian Thought," in *Dreams and History*, ed. Daniel Pick and Lyndal Roper (New York: Routledge, 2004), 37-56.

[78] Pierre Hadot does note in passing that concentration entails a complementary process of attending *away* from certain thoughts. In his discussion of the spiritual exercise of concentration on the present moment he notes that thoughts about the past and the future are to be avoided, insofar as they can cause distractions and turn attention away from the present. See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 232.

[79] Kallistos Ware, "The Way of the Ascetics: Negative or Affirmative?," in *Asceticism*, eds. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3-15, at 12. Indeed, Cassian explicitly warns that "if we go

off to the desert or to remote places with our vices not yet attended to, only their effects (*effectus*) will be repressed (*reprimatur*), but the dispositions to them will not be extinguished (*exstinguatur*)" (*Coll*. 19.12 [CSEL 13:545]; trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, 677; cf. *Coll*. 2.10 [CSEL 13:48]).

[80] Barsanuphius and John, *ep.* 565 (SC 451:724); trans. John Chryssavgis, *Barsanuphius and John: Letters*, vol. 2, FC 114 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic university Press, 2007), 143.

[81] On repression in antiquity, see Charles Stewart, "Repression in Antiquity?" *Psychoanalytische Perspektieven* 20, no. 2 (2002): 181-203.

[82] Barsanuphius and John, *ep.* 565 (SC 451:724). Evagrius, however, recommends this strategy (*Praktikos* 42 [SC 171:596]).

[83] Evagrius explains that "in the laziness of the soul the demons are able to get hold of our rational mind and in the thoughts they disgorge the pleasures of evil" (*Eulogios* 12 [PG 79:1109]; cf. *On Prayer* 81 [PG 79:1185]).

[84] Hesychius, *On Watchfulness and Holiness* 1 (PG 93:1479).

[85] Evagrius, *On Thoughts* 6 (SC 438:170; trans. Sinkewicz, *Ascetic Corpus*, 157); cf. Matt 13.22.

[86] Barsanuphius and John, *ep*. 448 (SC 451:526); trans. Chryssavgis, *Letters*, vol. 2, 64.

[87] Lorenzo Perrone, "'Trembling at the Thought of Shipwreck': The Anxious Self in the Letters of Barsanuphius and John of Gaza," in *Between Personal and Institutional Religion*, eds. Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony and Lorenzo Perrone (Belgium: Brepols, 2013), 9-36, at 13.

[88] Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 55. On the value of cell-sitting, see Evagrius, *Praktikos* 28 (SC 171:564); *Apophth. Patr*. sys. 2.1 (SC 387:124). Already Seneca wrote to Lucilius: "I do not like you to change your headquarters and scurry about from one place to another. . . . Such frequent flitting means an unsteady spirit. And the spirit cannot through retirement grow into unity unless it has ceased from its inquisitiveness and its wanderings" (*ep*. 69; trans. Richard M. Gummere, *Seneca: ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, vol. 2 [New York: Putnam's Sons, 1917], 53).

[89] One of the most vivid illustrations of the interconnectedness of the wandering of thoughts and the monastic cell is Evagrius's description of the "noonday demon" (ἀκηδία), who tries to make the monk abandon his cell by bombarding him with various thoughts (*Eight Thoughts* 7 [PG 40:1273]).

[90] Anna N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 216.

[91] Cassian *Coll*. 24.5 (CSEL 13:679). See also *Apophth. Patr*. Theodora 3 (PG 65:201).

[92] Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom, "Divine Architects: Designing the Monastic Dwelling Place," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700,* ed. Roger S. Bagnall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 369 n. 7.

[93] *Ipsam quoque cellulam meam quasi cogitationum conscium pertimescebam* (Jerome, *ep*. 22.7 [CSEL 54:153-54]); trans. NPNF 2.06:90).

[94] Evagrius, *Coptic Life* 14 (trans. Tim Vivian and Rowan A. Greer, *Four Desert Fathers: Pambo, Evagrius, Macarius of Egypt, and Macarius of Alexandria* [Kalamazoo: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004], 78).

[95] Cassian *Coll.* 12.15.2 and 13.6.2 (CSEL 13:358 and 13:367). On this subject see Chadwick, *Cassian*, 68.

[96] Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 78-82.

[97] Kroll and Bachrach, *Mystic Mind*, 82.

[98] Gustave Flaubert, *La Tentation de saint Antoine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 90.

[99] Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, 25.

[100] The catholic mystic Teresa of Avila, who modelled her life on early Christian texts, also refers to this phenomenon when she warns that "any painful effort does us more harm than good. By 'painful effort' I mean any forcible restraint we place on ourselves… The very effort to think of nothing excites our imagination the more" (*The Interior Castle* 4.3.7; trans., the Benedictines of Stanbrook, *The Interior Castle or The Mansions,* 3rd ed. [London: Thomas Baker, 1921], 50). Instead, she urges her

readers to maintain calmness in the face of evil thoughts and simply "ignore these distractions" (*ibid*). Her repeated admonitions to maintain calmness in face of evil imaginations throughout the fourth book of *The Interior Castle* suggest that in practice monks and nuns did try hard "not to think of anything," thereby "hopelessly stimulating the imagination." In the same century Lorenzo Scupoli offers a similar advice. In one of the great classics in ascetic theology, *The Spiritual Combat* (ch. 59), he observes that "vile thoughts which are involuntary. . . are put to flight much sooner by a patient resignation to the anxiety they occasion. . . than by a tumultuous and overanxious resistance" (*The Spiritual Combat* [Manchester: R.W. Dean, 1801], 144). Suppression may have been a common mental control strategy among Christian contemplatives throughout the ages.

[101] Barsanuphius and John, *ep.* 166 (SC 427:566).

[102] Cassian *Coll*. 4.2 (CSEL 13:98).

[103] Mark the Monk, *On Those who Think They Are Made Righteous by Works* 98 (SC 445:158; trans. Vivian and Casiday, 124).

[104] This paradoxical phenomenon has also attracted the attention of Augustine. In his discussion of sense perception in the eleventh book of *De Trinitate* he explains that attention (*intentio*) may be directed to a stimulus either because it is one we desire or because it is one we wish to avoid. Yet he warns that the latter incentive makes the avoided stimuli particularly impelling to the mind’s attention. Mental images of sensible things, he explains, "are produced not only when the will is directed towards

such things by desiring them, but also when the mind, in order to avoid them and to be on its guard against them, is impelled to look upon them so as to flee from them. Accordingly, not only desire but also fear causes the senses of the body to be informed by sensible things, and the eye of the mind by the images of sensible things. And, therefore, the more vehement the fear or the desire, the more clearly is the eye informed" (*Trin*. 11.7 [PL 42:990]; trans. Stephen Mckenna, *The Trinity* [Washington: Catholic University Press, 1963], 325). Augustine acknowledges that our attention is often drawn in a direction exactly opposite to our attempt to control it.

[105] E.g., Evagrius, *On Thoughts* 9 (SC 438:184).

[106] *Apophth. Patr*. N 714 (questions 4-7; trans. Wortley, *Anonymous Sayings,* 554). More broadly, the warnings against excessive struggle against evil thoughts can be seen as an illustration of a general suspicion of excessive asceticism. E.g., *Apophth. Patr*. Poemen 129 (PG 65:353); *Apophth. Patr*. sys. 10.105 (SC 474:84).

[107] Hesychius, *On Watchfulness and Holiness* 44 (PG 93:1496A-B; trans. Palmer, Sherrard, and Ware, *Philokalia*, 170).

[108] Barsanuphius and John, *ep*. 432 (SC 451:510; trans. Chryssavgis, *Letters*, vol. 2, 57); cf. *ep*. 138 (SC 427:510-15).

[109] Barsanuphius and John, *ep*. 448 (SC 451:528; trans. Chryssavgis, *Letters*, vol. 2, 64).

[110] *Apophth. Patr*. N 184 (trans. Wortley, *Anonymous Sayings,* 128).

[111] *Apophth. Patr*. Macarius the Great 3 (PG 65:261A-64A).

[112] Dorotheus, *ep.* 8.193 (SC 92:515).

[113] Martin Laird, "The 'Open Country Whose Name is Prayer': Apophasis, Deconstruction, and Contemplative Practice," *Modern Theology* 21, no. 1 (2005): 141-55, at 144.

[114] See Laird, "Open Country," 146.

[115] Evagrius, *On Prayer* 44 (PG 79:1176); cf. *Apophth. Patr*. sys. 12.2 (SC 474:208).

[116] Evagrius, *Causes for Monastic Observances* 11 (PG 40:1264; trans. Sinkewicz, *Ascetic Corpus*, 11).

[117] Cassian *Coll*. 22.3.6 (CSEL 13:618; trans. Ramsey, *Conferences*, 765).

[118] Climacus *scal*. 23 (PG 88:976C; trans. Luibheid and Russell, *Ladder*, 211).

[119] Climacus *scal*. 23 (PG 88:977B; trans. Luibheid and Russell, *Ladder*, 212).

[120] Climacus *scal*. 23 (PG 88:977D). On the originality of Climacus's treatment of blasphemy, see G. Couilleau, "Jean Climaque," *DSAM* 8, cols. 369-89.

[121] Climacus *scal*. 23 (PG 88:977A; trans. Luibheid and Russell, *Ladder*, 212).

[122] Climacus *scal*. 23 (PG 88:976D); cf. *Apophth. Patr*. N 730 (trans. Wortley, *Anonymous Sayings*, 584).

[123] Climacus *scal*. 23 (PG 88:980; trans. Luibheid and Russell, *Ladder*, 213).

[124] On this procedure, see Jean Gouillard, "Conférence de M. Jean Gouillard," *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses* 82, no. 3 (1973): 213-19.

[125] Climacus *scal.* 23 (PG 88:976C; trans. Luibheid and Russell, *Ladder*, 211).

[126] Evagrius, *Praktikos* 46 (SC 171:604); cf. Acts 1.24. On Evagrius's influence on Climacus, see Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Giullaumont (ed. and trans.), *Évagre le Pontique: Traité pratique ou Le moine*, SC 171 (Paris: Cerf, 1971), 60.

[127] In the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas explicitly acknowledges that "blasphemy sometimes occurs without deliberation of the reason… This is a venial sin" (*Summa Theologica* 2, Q. 13, art. 2). According to Maureen Flynn, until the late middle ages blasphemy had been regarded by church authorities as immoral and condemned as a grave sin, and it is only in this period that theologians "began to recognize a variety of unintentional impulses motivating human behavior." See Maureen Flynn, "Taming Anger's Daughters: New Treatment for Emotional Problems in Renaissance Spain," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51 (1998): 864-86, at 877. However, the discussion above suggests that early monastic theologians already recognized that blasphemous thoughts can appear unintentionally.