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## **Separation, Loss, Confinement, and Change: How Evagrius Can Speak to the Experience of Lockdown**

### **1. Introduction**

Separation, loss, and confinement have been imposed upon whole populations during the Covid-19 pandemic through government-mandated lockdowns. People have been confined to their homes and separated from family and friends, suffered bereavements made all the more bitter by that separation, lost their way of life and livelihood, and had to navigate the resulting changes. The experience of separation, loss, confinement, and change is also integral to the monastic life. The monk is separated from their former life, endures the attendant losses, and remains confined to the monastery, the crucible for the change nurtured by monastic formation. This paper examines the role of separation, loss, and confinement, and the nature of the change they support, in one of monasticism's most demanding forms, that of the fourth century Egyptian desert as represented by Evagrius. The first part lays the paper's groundwork by introducing the anthropology presupposed by Evagrius' curriculum of the monastic life. Part Two focuses on the role of separation, loss, and confinement in Evagrian asceticism, and Part Three on the spiritual change to which they contribute. Finally, Part Four considers how Evagrius can speak to the experience of

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lockdown. We shall see that while he offers no easy consolations, he can show us how to find meaning and freedom in lockdown and can act as both our guide and our companion.

## 2. The human condition according to Evagrius

To appreciate the role of separation, loss, confinement, and change in Evagrius we must first acquaint ourselves with the main contours of his anthropology.

### 2.1. The primary nature

Evagrius' anthropology is rooted in an Origenian protology according to which humans, along with angels and demons, were originally created as rational beings comprising a nous with an immortal and immaterial body<sup>2</sup>. In the original state of creation, which Evagrius calls the primary nature, the rational beings were fully united to God in burning love, the image and reciprocation of his burning love for them<sup>3</sup>. Although the *Kephalaia Gnostika*, the third and most advanced volume of Evagrius' trilogy on the monastic life, begins by defining God as essential goodness<sup>4</sup>, Evagrius more usually describes God as essential gnosis to highlight the centrality of relationship to the divine nature, γνῶσις bearing its biblical sense of spiritual knowledge of God enjoyed through relationship with him and inseparable from love, and by extension spiritual knowledge of creation enjoyed through such knowledge of God<sup>5</sup>. The nous is a faculty of gnosis in this sense. It images God

<sup>2</sup> In Evagrius' technical usage this is strictly speaking not a body (σῶμα) but an instrument which becomes a body in the fall, but this detail need not concern us here. Cf. M. Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, London, forthcoming, 2, 3.1-2, 4.4; 5, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Like much of Evagrius' system this is not stated explicitly in his writings but can be inferred from them; cf. Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 2, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 1, 1. The first two volumes of the trilogy are the *Praktikos* and *Gnostikos*.

<sup>5</sup> More precisely, Evagrius distinguishes between spiritual and secular gnosis, the former received from God through grace by those who have attained apatheia, the latter acquired from human beings by those prepared to study regardless of the state of their soul. Cf. Evagrius, *Gnostikos* 4, 45; Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in*

by receiving him into itself, and in doing so it is received into him and participates in him. Since God is the source of all goods, the rational beings' enjoyment of any good, starting with their own existence, depends upon such participation. In the primary nature they were fully united to God and accordingly enjoyed all goods as fully as their creaturely nature permitted.

## 2.2. Pathos and the secondary nature

Being endowed with freedom and possessing the vulnerability intrinsic to creaturely nature, the nous has a tendency to wander, and in virtue of this tendency the rational beings weakened in their love for God and turned away from him in what Evagrius refers to as the movement, a reference to the fact that in exercising its power of choice the nous moves<sup>6</sup>. Deprived of the stability they enjoyed through union with God, they fell into privation. To break their fall God created a secondary nature in which the state of each rational being depends upon the extent of its deflection from him. Since the weakening of the creatures' love for God is a cooling, the nous in the secondary nature has cooled and thickened and, deprived of unity, fragmented into a tripartite soul comprising epithumetikon, thumos, and logistikon<sup>7</sup>, and its immortal and immaterial body has congealed into

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*Evagrius of Pontus*, 4, 2.1-2; J. Konstantinovsky, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic*, Farnham 2009, p. 42-44. On the biblical meaning of γνῶσις, cf. L. Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, History of Christian Spirituality 1, Paris 1963, p. 15-20.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Scholion* 10, Eccl. 2:11; *Scholion* 23, Prov. 2:17. Here and below, the numbering of Evagrius' scholia follows Géhin.

<sup>7</sup> The three parts of the soul according to Plato. The epithumetikon is the seat of the appetites or ἐπιθυμίαι and for both Plato and Evagrius the part of the soul closest to the body – according to Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 6, 84, it is “joined to the flesh and blood” – while the logistikon is the seat of reason or λόγος and thus the highest part of the soul. The thumos is the middle part of the soul, and according to Plato the seat of courage and of the sense of honour and shame. For Evagrius it is the seat of a wide range of virtues including courage, perseverance, humility, and love. The word θυμός is especially difficult to translate. According to M. Clarke, *Flesh and Spirit in the Songs of Homer: A Study of Words and Myths*, Oxford 1999, p. 79-80, etymology indicates its basic meaning to be ‘billowing, gaseous breath’, while the cognate verb θύ(ν)ω ‘denotes the violent surging of wind and water, air and fluid’. Latin writers translated it as *irascibilitas* and Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*, follows them in translating it as “irascibility”. Cf. Plato, *Respublica*

a mortal and material body<sup>8</sup>. For Evagrius all these changes are subsumed under the concept of pathos (pl. pathe) according to its meanings as defined in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* of an actualised change, a harmful change or movement, or an extreme of misfortune and distress<sup>9</sup>. The fall was from spiritual health to spiritual malaise, and pathos is the defining characteristic of the secondary nature, present in the nous as ignorance, thickness, and fragmentation; in the soul as the disposition to sin, and in the body as its mortality and other vulnerabilities<sup>10</sup>. Although Evagrius never explicitly makes the connection, we recall Plato's likening of the human soul to the sea God Glaucus whose true nature is hidden by the "rocks and barnacles", the "pathe and forms", that cling to him<sup>11</sup>. The fall, in sum, is from the heat of love into the chill of pathos, from unity into fragmentation, and from expansiveness and lightness into contraction and heaviness<sup>12</sup>.

### 2.3. The pathe and the logismoi

The pathe of the soul are the guise in which pathos intersects with the will<sup>13</sup>. While some coincide with states we would call emotions, a pathos is not strictly speaking an emotion but, echoing the Stoics, the affective aspect of a false value judgment; more precisely, of an evaluation which, implicitly if not explicitly, values something more highly than God. In other words, the pathe are the affective aspect of idolatry, and since to value something more highly than God is to value it excessively, excess is intrinsic to pathos and reflected in both its physiological and psychological manifestations. The false value judgments associated with the pathe take the form of lo-

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435b-441b; Evagrius, *Praktikos* 89; Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus* 5, 1.3.2; 5, 1.3.4.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus* 2, 3, 1. In the context of Evagrius "mind" and "intellect" as we ordinarily understand them equate with the logistikon rather than the nous.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysica* 1022b15-21.

<sup>10</sup> Evagrius' characterisation of the fall in terms of pathos is never made explicit but can be inferred and reflects both Paul's association of sin with death and Plato's association of death with composite natures; cf. Rom. 6:23; Plato, *Phaedo* 78bc; Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 2, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Plato, *Respublica* 611d-612a.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 2, 68; 3, 50; 6, 25; Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus* 2, 3, 2-4.

<sup>13</sup> More precisely, with the voluntative and desiderative aspects of the nous.

gismoι, conventionally rendered as “thoughts” or “evil thoughts” but in Evagrius having the more specific sense of defective reasoning reflecting the gnoseological privation resulting from the fall<sup>14</sup>. Evagrius divides the logismoι into eight generic categories: gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, distress, acedia, vainglory, and pride. Pathos is intrinsic to all of them<sup>15</sup> and together the pathe and logismoι are the malaise of the nous. While we cannot control whether or not logismoι arise within us, we can control how we respond to them: “Whether or not all these logismoι trouble the soul does not depend on us (τῶν οὐκ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐστὶ), but whether or not they linger and arouse pathe does depend on us (τῶν ἐφ’ ἡμῖν)”<sup>16</sup>.

The formula τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν / τὸ οὐκ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν is Stoic<sup>17</sup> but in Evagrius refers to the power of choice belonging to the nous. The fact that our response to the logismoι depends upon us enables us to choose the existential orientation of our lives: whether we direct ourselves towards or away from God, nourish the new self or the old self<sup>18</sup>. To choose the latter is to choose futility and enslavement. All logismoι centre on misdirected desire: in our fallen state our desire for God remains intact, but in our ignorance we no longer know that it is he whom we desire, nor how to recognise him. Instead, convinced by the intensity of bodily sensation that material reality is more real than anything else<sup>19</sup>, we seek to satisfy what is in reality our longing for God with material objects understood in the broad sense of any object of the logismoι (and so including, for example, human esteem, an object of vainglory). In the form of the pathe, our misdirected desire binds us to such objects<sup>20</sup>, but since they

<sup>14</sup> Only rarely does Evagrius use the word λογισμός in its neutral sense, an example being Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 8.

<sup>15</sup> Evagrius provides four definitions of λογισμός, three of which – *De malignis cogitationibus* 25, 52-6, *Skemmata* 13, and *Capita discipulorum Evagrii* 65, 2 – make direct reference to pathos while the fourth, *Skemmata* supplement 2 (the numbering is that of Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus*) alludes to it by stating that the logismoι move the thumos or epithumetikon contrary to nature. Cf. Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus* 5, 4, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos* 6 (tr. MT).

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed discussion, cf. S. Bobzien, *Determination and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*, Oxford 1998, especially p. 280-286, 330-338.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 39; Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 6, 39-40.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 83c. Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus* 2, 3, 1, argues that this is part of the meaning of Evagrius’ reference at Evagrius, *Ad Melaniam* 26 to the fallen nous being named a body.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Scholion* 2, Ps. 145:7; Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 40, 3-5; Evagrius, *Skemmata* 23; Evagrius, *Epistula* 4, 3; Evagrius, *Historia Lausiaca* 38, 3.

are not what we truly desire, they can never satisfy us, and precisely because they cannot, they hold us in thrall as we pursue them ever more desperately in the hope that if only we have enough of them, or the right ones, we shall find fulfilment. Assent to the logismoi thus enslaves us to the pursuit of false goods and thus futility. The plight of the old self resembles that of the watercarriers in Plato's *Gorgias* who try to collect water in leaky vessels<sup>21</sup>, or that of drug addicts whose lives revolve around their next fix. But unlike drug addicts, we are oblivious to our addiction because it operates below the threshold of consciousness, and the very fact that our attention is focussed on servicing it prevents us from seeing it; Evagrius notes that when we are engaged in the warfare of the pathe, we cannot see its logoi, its underlying dynamics, but are like those who fight in the dark<sup>22</sup>.

### 3. Healing pathos through the practical life

Pathos is remedied through cooperating with Christ, the physician of souls, and in the present life the monastic state provides the optimal arena for doing so. According to Evagrius the monastic life comprises two phases: the ascetic or practical life which forms its foundation and is patterned on Christ's sufferings and death, and the contemplative or gnostic life onto which the practical life opens and which is patterned on Christ's resurrection. The healing of the pathe belongs to the practical life. Conceived on the model of a medical regime, it comprises a number of disciplines including fasting, manual labour, keeping vigil, reading scripture, and prayer<sup>23</sup>. It is to the practical life that separation, loss, and confinement belong as the necessary conditions for the change at which it aims. To heal pathos means to cultivate virtue by redirecting our desire away from false or merely contingent goods to the true good; that is, to starve the old self in order to nourish the new self. The idea recalls Plato's observation that when our desires incline strongly in one direction they are weakened in another, as when a channel is diverted<sup>24</sup>, but for Evagrius it is Paul who gives it authoritative force. Explaining the symbolism of the monk's habit, Evagrius declares that the sheepskin (μηλωτή) means that its wearer "always [bears]

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 493ac.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 83.

<sup>23</sup> Cf., e.g., Evagrius, *Praktikos* 15, 49.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Plato, *Respublica* 485d.

in the body the dying of Jesus”<sup>25</sup>; he leaves his reader to supply the rest of 2 Cor. 4:10: “so that the life of Jesus may also be made manifest in our mortal flesh”<sup>26</sup>. Continuing our analogy of drug addiction, the monastic life is a programme of withdrawal and rehabilitation. First the addict who wishes to regain their health must separate themselves from their supply of drugs, then they must accept and assimilate their loss, and until this has been securely achieved, they must confine themselves to a place of safety.

### 3.1. Separation

The monastic life begins with renunciation of the secular world, embodied in the first instance in physical withdrawal from secular society and symbolised by clothing in the monastic habit, both of which separate the monk from his former life and identity.

#### 3.1.1. Evagrius’ embrace of the monastic life

Although we noted in the Introduction that the monastic life is undertaken voluntarily, this must now be qualified by the fact that a vocation to the monastic life is not necessarily welcomed by the person who receives it. Such was the case with Evagrius. Of the three “Cappadocian Fathers” with whom he received his pre-monastic formation – Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus, and, we can assume from the many affinities in their thought, Gregory of Nyssa<sup>27</sup> – only Basil was a monk, and both he and the two Gregories pursued the life of Christian asceticism and contemplation in their homeland. We can assume that the young Evagrius did likewise. But that phase of his life came to an end when, in his mid-thirties, he joined Gregory Nazianzus in Constantinople to serve him as a deacon<sup>28</sup>. He soon gained a reputation for his zeal and eloquence in defending Nicene ortho-

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* Prologue 6.

<sup>26</sup> Tr. Bentley Hart.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 2, 4.6; 10, 1.3; 10.2; K. Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory. Mind, Soul, and Body in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century*, Farnham 2009; I.L.E. Ramelli, *Evagrius and Gregory. Nazianzen or Nyssen? Cappadocian (and Origenian) Influence on Evagrius*, “Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies” 53 (2013) p. 117-137.

<sup>28</sup> The remainder of this paragraph is based on Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 38, 1-7.

doxy, and following Gregory's departure remained to serve his successor as Bishop, Nectarius. But then catastrophe struck: Evagrius fell in love with the wife of a high-ranking imperial official and she with him. Years later he described to his disciple Palladius how he found himself "held fast in bonds of servitude (δεσμοῖς τῆς θεραπείας ταύτης κατεχόμενος)" to his desire<sup>29</sup>. Feeling powerless to extricate himself, yet desperate to avoid a scandal, he prayed for deliverance and received a dream in which an angel instructed him to leave without delay. He obeyed and left for Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem he was received by Melania and Rufinus at their monastery on the Mount of Olives. He would have been an emotional wreck when he arrived: broken-hearted, ashamed, and with his sense of his own integrity shattered. But before long he relapsed into his worldly ways, dressing in fine clothes and enjoying city life. Then Providence intervened a second time, striking him down with a wasting sickness which no doctor was able to diagnose. When it had continued for six months with no sign of improvement, it occurred to Melania that it might have a spiritual cause and so she invited Evagrius to make a full confession to her. Only now did he reveal to her the true reason for his departure from Constantinople. In response she urged him to embrace the monastic life, assuring him that if he did so, she would pray for his recovery. He agreed, and proceeded to make a swift recovery. Having received the habit he departed for Egypt and spent two years living in community at Nitria before retiring to the interior desert to pursue a semi-anchorite life<sup>30</sup>.

The monastic life as Evagrius lived it was unrelentingly harsh, his admonitions to moderation notwithstanding<sup>31</sup>. He describes the monk's exile from the world as an "illustrious contest" in which he goes abroad "like an athlete stripped of homeland, family, and possessions" to stand alone in the "wrestling school of the desert"<sup>32</sup>. As an athlete leaves home to compete in foreign lands<sup>33</sup>, so the monk must "take flight from his familiar haunts"<sup>34</sup>, and as the athlete strips off his clothes before a contest lest they be hindered

<sup>29</sup> Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 38, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 38, 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 35.

<sup>32</sup> Evagrius, *Tractatus ad Eulogium* 1, 1-17 (tr. Sinkewicz). The *Tractatus ad Eulogium* is cited according to Fogielman. For the role of exile in Evagrian asceticism, cf. Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 8, 2.1.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. R.L. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Oxford 2003, p. 236, n. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Evagrius, *Tractatus ad Eulogium* 1, 7 (tr. Sinkewicz).



by their tunic and readily dragged about<sup>35</sup>, so the monk must strip off all worldly ties. Especially when his body is weakened by illness, the devil enjoins upon him the hardship of such a life and tries to persuade him that virtue can just as well be cultivated at home:

“Go away” [says the devil], “Carry yourself off you who are the joy and glory of your family! – to these you have without compassion left behind an unbearable sorrow, for most people have lighted upon the virtues in the midst of their family, without having fled their homeland”<sup>36</sup>.

At home, with the consolation of family, continues the devil, he could pursue virtue with less weariness and without the “misery and painful dependency” he now endures<sup>37</sup>. But for Evagrius the reality was that, for him at least, that way was not a possibility; to attempt to cultivate virtue at home with his family would be but “a pleasant service for his weakness”<sup>38</sup>. Yet at the same time as blaming himself for what happened in Constantinople, he was tormented by guilt and anguish for abandoning his family. His exile was motivated not by zeal but by trauma.

### 3.2.2. Apharesis in the practical life

Evagrius’ renunciation of secular life and embrace of exile are but the initial manifestations of an aphairetic structure that characterises the monastic life throughout, expressed in different ways in different contexts. Evagrius summarises that structure in terms of three renunciations necessary for the acquisition of gnosis: first, of the things of this world, meaning material objects in the broad sense noted above<sup>39</sup> viewed through the lens of the *pathe*; second, of evil, meaning the *pathe* themselves and by extension the sins to which they dispose us, and third, of “ignorance of the things that are naturally manifest to human beings in proportion to their state”, meaning ignorance of God and of reality, “the nature of beings”<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 6, 21-9.

<sup>36</sup> Evagrius, *Tractatus ad Eulogium* 1, 25-28 (tr. Sinkewicz).

<sup>37</sup> Evagrius, *Tractatus ad Eulogium* 1, 23-24 (tr. Sinkewicz).

<sup>38</sup> Evagrius, *Tractatus ad Eulogium* 1, 23 (tr. Sinkewicz).

<sup>39</sup> See above, 1, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 26, 17-25; Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 178-180; Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 8, 2.5.

However, for reasons which will emerge in the course of our discussion of change, only the first two renunciations are experienced as separations in a privative sense and both are associated with the practical life. The *praktikos*, the monk engaged in the practical life of asceticism, is the “servant of separation”<sup>41</sup> and the alpha-privative of *apatheia*, the goal of the practical life, reflects both the aphairetic nature of *apatheia* itself and the aphairetic emphasis of the practical life. Further examples of that emphasis include Evagrius’ reference in the *Praktikos* to separating soul from body, his exhortation to Eulogius to “strip off (ἐπαποδύω) the weight of his flesh”, and his concept of “noetic circumcision”<sup>42</sup>. The separation of soul from body is a Platonic motif for cultivating distance from bodily pleasures, pains, and desires, and according to Evagrius should be practised by those who long for virtue<sup>43</sup>. The image of stripping off the weight of the flesh recalls the athlete stripping for a contest and can be read on two levels, both relating to the fact that, as Evagrius tells Eulogius, “the matter of the flesh constitutes the nourishment of logismoi”<sup>44</sup>. The “matter of the flesh” understood literally is the physical flesh: pathos is associated with the flesh such that to weaken the flesh is to weaken pathos and to strengthen the flesh is to nourish pathos. Understood metaphorically, it is all that pertains to the old self, so likewise, to weaken the old self is to weaken pathos while to strengthen it is to nourish pathos. The motif of noetic circumcision recalls the biblical metaphor of circumcising the heart<sup>45</sup> and for Evagrius refers to “a voluntary distancing from the pathe which (takes place) thanks to the gnosis of God”<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 5, 65.

<sup>42</sup> Evagrius, *Tractatus ad Eulogium* 1, 9; Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 4, 12; cf. Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 8, 2.1, 3, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 52; Plato *Phaedo* 81a-84b.

<sup>44</sup> Evagrius, *Tractatus ad Eulogium* Prologue 1-10 (tr. Sinkewicz).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Deut. 30:6; Rom. 2:29.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 4, 12. Evagrius continues the symbolic association of circumcision with *apatheia* at Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 6, 6 and 6, 66. I.L.E. Ramelli, *Evagrius’ Kephalaia Gnostika. A New Translation of the Unreformed Text from the Syriac*, Atlanta 2015, p. 412, notes that the allegorising of circumcision in terms of rejecting pathos goes back to Philo of Alexandria. Cf. also Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 5, 83; Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 18, 19-20; 35, 18-21.

## 3.2. Loss and confinement

Both loss and confinement follow upon the separation that characterises the practical life: loss as its direct consequence and confinement as the condition under which separation and loss are endured as the basis for change.

### 3.1.1. Loss

All the separations of the practical life entail loss. In Evagrius' case the loss of his career, reputation, psychological equilibrium, and sense of his own integrity was followed by the loss of family, homeland, and every physical comfort. His *Antirrhētikos* lists almost five hundred individual logismoi classified according to his eightfold scheme and, I believe, affords us glimpses of the thoughts that assailed him<sup>47</sup>, and while only a few relate directly to personal losses, they are poignant. Palladius' description of him as having enjoyed a luxurious and refined life prior to entering the desert allows us to impute to him the logismos of gluttony that recalls the delicate foods and pleasant wines he used to enjoy and the cups he held as he reclined at table<sup>48</sup>. Certain logismoi of fornication suggest memories of the affair that prompted his departure from Constantinople, one evoking the image of a married woman, another featuring a married woman with whom he wishes to linger in conversation, and a third reminding him of the house in which he "gave many fruits to Satan"<sup>49</sup>. But it is above his generic description of the logismos of distress that lays bare the emotional toll of his losses:

When certain logismoi gain the advantage, they bring the soul to remember home and parents and one's former life. And when they observe that the soul does not resist but rather follows right along and disperses itself among thoughts of pleasures, then with a hold on it they plunge it into distress with the realisation that former things are no more and cannot be again because of the present way of life<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> Since we have no way of ascertaining which, if any, of the logismoi described in the *Antirrhētikos* were Evagrius' own, any attribution of particular logismoi to him must remain conjectural.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Antirrhētikos* 1, 30; Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 38, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Antirrhētikos* 2, 1; 2, 35; 2, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos* 10 (tr. Sinkewicz).

*Praktikos* 95 recounts how, when a certain monk was informed of the death of his father, he replied, “Stop blaspheming, my Father is immortal”, and Palladius indicates that the monk in question was Evagrius himself<sup>51</sup>. But that Evagrius’ attachment to his family remained undiminished throughout his life in Egypt is apparent from an episode recounted by John Cassian, who spent time in Egypt as his disciple. Cassian tells how, one day, Evagrius received fifteen years’ worth of letters from his parents and many friends in Pontus. Holding the bundle of correspondence, he reflected at length:

How many thoughts, which will drive me either to empty joy or to fruitless sadness, will come to me as a result of reading these? For how many days will the recollection of those who wrote them turn the concentration of my heart away from the contemplation that I have set myself? How long will it take for the mental confusion that has been generated by this to be calmed and with what effort will a tranquil condition be regained once my spirit has been shaken by the feelings occasioned by this correspondence and, by recalling the words and faces of those whom it left so long ago, has begun to see them again, to live with them, and to be involved with them in mind and thought? It would be of no use whatsoever to have left them in body if in heart I begin to gaze upon them and to revive and readmit into myself the memory that everyone who renounces the world has rejected as though he were dead<sup>52</sup>.

Having deliberated thus, says Cassian, he decided that not only would he not open a single letter but he would not even untie them, lest “seeing the names of those who had written and recalling their faces”, his resolve fail. Instead he took the bundle and threw it into the fire. Harsh though this seems to us, for Evagrius his attachment to his family belonged to his old self and included pathos, meaning that his abandonment of them was part of the “renunciation of material things” required for the acquisition of gnosis. The problem was not the family ties but his own pathos; the *Chapters of the Disciples of Evagrius* record him as teaching that the biblical patriarchs suffered no harm from loving their wives (or possessing wealth) because they did so without pathos<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 38, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Ioannes Cassianus, *De coenobiorum institutis* 5, 32 (tr. Ramsey).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Capita discipulorum Evagrii* 112.

### 3.2.2. Confinement

At the most basic level, confinement remedies the tendency of the nous to wander by training it in a habit of stability and perseverance, but it also ensures perseverance in the monastic life. Far from diminishing the monk's attachments to secular life, separation from the world throws them into sharp relief so that he is tormented by longing for the things he left behind. Other thoughts conspire with this longing to weaken his resolve to remain in the desert. Evagrius' generic description of gluttony concerns worries about the effects of monastic asceticism upon his health<sup>54</sup>, the demon of fornication tries to convince the monk that his efforts to be chaste are futile<sup>55</sup>, logismoi of avarice include fear of poverty and un-met needs<sup>56</sup>, while as we have seen, distress evokes nostalgia for the monk's former life. But it is above all the demon of acedia who specialises in trying to persuade him to abandon the monastic life:

The demon of acedia [...] is the most oppressive of all the demons. [...] [He instils in the monk] a dislike for the place [where he lives] and for his state of life itself, for manual labour, and also the idea that love has disappeared from among the brothers and there is no one to console him. And should there be someone during those days who has offended him, this too the demon uses to add further to his dislike. He leads him on to a desire for other places where he can easily find the wherewithal to meet his needs and pursue a trade that is easier and more productive; he adds that pleasing the Lord is not a question of being in a particular place: for scripture says that the divinity can be worshipped everywhere<sup>57</sup>. He joins to these suggestions the memory of his close relations and of his former life; he depicts for him the long course of his lifetime, while bringing the burdens of asceticism before his eyes; and, as the saying has it, deploys every device in order to have the monk leave his cell and flee the stadium<sup>58</sup>.

Evagrius stresses the importance of standing one's ground against the demons:

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 7.

<sup>55</sup> Cf., e.g., Evagrius, *Antirrhētikos* 2, 2; 2, 4; 2, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Antirrhētikos* 3, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. John 4:21-24.

<sup>58</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos* 12 (tr. Sinkewicz).

You must not abandon the cell in the time of temptations, fashioning excuses seemingly reasonable. Rather, you must remain seated inside, exercise perseverance, and valiantly welcome all attackers, especially the demon of acedia, who is the most oppressive of all but leaves the soul proven to the highest degree. Fleeing and circumventing such contests teaches the nous to be unskilled (ἄτεχνον), cowardly, and evasive<sup>59</sup>.

For the monk to leave his cell while under attack would not only be to capitulate to the demons but would reinforce both the particular pathos itself and the weakness of the nous; it would not only nourish our fallen nature but recapitulate the primal deflection and fall of the nous. Nor was it only the demons who sought to weaken Evagrius' resolve. Friends likewise tried to entice him out of the desert, among them John of Jerusalem, in a letter to whom Evagrius explains, "Because of the great number of my sins I have been thrown into the desert [...] and since I am full of numerous ulcers, it behoves me remain here"<sup>60</sup>. He tells another correspondent that it is dangerous for a monk who is not yet perfect to leave his cell. "You know what miserable conduct was mine", he says, "but the Lord sent me an angel and delivered me from the hands of King Herod [...] Now therefore I have resolved not to quite my cell"<sup>61</sup>.

#### 4. Summary: separation, loss, and confinement in Evagrius

For Evagrius, separation, loss, and confinement weaken the old self and nourish the new self. In secular life the nous is bound to material objects in the broad sense of that term noted above, a state of affairs that nourishes the old self and starves the new self. Weighed down by its flesh in both the literal sense of its body and the metaphorical sense of its attachment to material objects, the nous resembles a drug addict, material objects its drugs, and the pathos its cravings for them. This is not to say that all regard for the body and materiality is problematic; the problem lies not with material ob-

<sup>59</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos* 28 (tr. Sinkewicz).

<sup>60</sup> Evagrius, *Epistula* 50, 1.

<sup>61</sup> Evagrius, *Epistula* 58, 2. A. Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert. Évagre le Pontique*, Paris 2004, p. 66, rightly notes that Evagrius' commitment to remaining in the desert was motivated not simply by the desire to expiate his sins but above all to purify his soul and attain to the gnostic life, since only then would he be able to contribute effectively to the salvation of others.

jects *per se* but with the *pathe*. Separation, loss, and confinement free the *nous* from the grip of material objects and afford it the space in which to overcome its *pathe* and redirect itself towards God.

## 5. Change

The change at which the practical life aims is to begin to reverse the effects of the fall and establish the foundation for further progress. Separation from secular life, from the objects of the *pathe*, and from the *pathe* themselves, and the losses attendant upon such separation, mirror our primal separation from God, while confinement to the desert, and especially to the cell, mirrors the confinement of the *nous* to a mortal body and the straitened perspective to which it disposes it. In our present state, thickened and fragmented by *pathos*, we experience reality itself as fragmented and ourselves as alienated from God, from each other, and from the rest of creation. We suppose knowledge to be distinct from love and experience our appetites as conflicting with reason. Because the *pathe* constrain us to see objects in terms of their potential to gratify our appetites, we do not see the objects themselves but rather the shadows of them formed by the *logismoi*<sup>62</sup>, thus our grasp of reality is itself shadowy. Our view resembles that of the prisoners in Plato's cave<sup>63</sup>, and because the shadows formed by the *logismoi* are idols<sup>64</sup>, to entertain the *logismoi* is to commit idolatry and thereby reinforce our alienation from reality and bondage to unreality. But Evagrius agrees with Antony that virtue is present within us, working to restore us to health, and only needs us to cooperate with it<sup>65</sup>, and separation, loss, and confinement play their part within his curriculum of the monastic life to help us do so. The health that, together with the other disciplines of the practical life they foster, is that of the soul, and Evagrius' technical term for it is *apatheia*, freedom from *pathe*<sup>66</sup>. In freeing the *nous* from thralldom

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 25, 52-6; Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 5, 4.2.1.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Plato, *Republica* 514a-517a. While Evagrius does not explicitly refer to the allegory of the Cave, it is implicit in his understanding of our thralldom to *pathos* and liberation from it through the practical life.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Skemmata* 13; Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 5, 4.2.2.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 20, 3-5.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 56.

to pathos apatheia frees it from attachment to false goods and enslavement to futility. While logismoi will still arise in the nous, their affective power has been defused, making them easier to resist (although Evagrius warns against complacency)<sup>67</sup>, thus apatheia is like a harbour or protective wall<sup>68</sup>.

It was noted above that, of the three renunciations required for the acquisition of gnosis, only the first two – renunciation of material objects *qua* objects of pathos and renunciation of the pathe themselves – are experienced as privative and both belong to the practical life. We are now ready to see why this is so. Complementing the aphairctic structure of the monastic life throughout is a structure of plerosis reflecting the fact that as pathos is diminished the nous regains its innate receptivity to grace, enabling it to be “filled by God” and divinised<sup>69</sup>. At least in formal terms (the reality is less clear cut)<sup>70</sup>, attainment of apatheia is the point at which the sense of privative renunciation and loss starts to give way to the sense of being filled; the emigration of the practical life to the homecoming of the gnostic life<sup>71</sup>. In other words, attainment of apatheia is the point at which the monk who has sown in tears begins to reap in joy<sup>72</sup>. Love becoming the soul’s stable disposition reflects this, as do its concomitants: the stabilising of virtue in the soul<sup>73</sup>, the harmonising of the soul’s three powers in orientation to the true good<sup>74</sup>, and the enabling of the capacity for contemplation<sup>75</sup>. The monk who attains apatheia no longer supposes love to be separate from

<sup>67</sup> Cf., e.g., Evagrius, *De octo spiritibus malitiae* 2, 18; Evagrius, *Tractatus ad Eulogium* 32, 25; Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 20, 1-5.

<sup>68</sup> Harbour, Evagrius, *Praktikos* 91, 4-6; Evagrius, *Scholion* 16, Ps.106:30; protective wall, Evagrius, *Scholion* 293, Prov. 24:31; Evagrius, *Scholion* 343, Prov. 28:4; cf. also Evagrius, *Scholion* 17, Prov. 1:9; Evagrius, *De octo spiritibus malitiae* 5, 12-14.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Scholion* Ps. 80:11; Evagrius, *Scholion* 12, 1-8, Prov. 1:20, cf. 2 Cor. 6:13; *Kephalaia Gnostika* 4, 51; Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 10, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Partly because plerosis will sometimes make its presence felt in the practical life and partly because aphairesis continues into the gnostic life, not only in the continued perseverance in the practical life that underwrites the gnostic life, but also in new forms, most obviously the phenomenological relinquishing of noetic content in preparation for imageless prayer; cf. Evagrius, *De oratione* 55-58, cited according to Géhin.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Tractatus ad Eulogium* 24, 15; 2 Cor. 5:8.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Scholion* 3, Ps.125:5.

<sup>73</sup> According to Evagrius, *Scholion* 290, Prov. 24:11, apatheia is “constituted by the practical virtues” (tr. MT).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 85; Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 4, 73; Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 5, 1.3.1.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* Prologue 8.



true gnosis but recognises it as integral to it, and his appetitive desire no longer conflicts with reason but conforms to it in desiring the true good. No longer experiencing himself as alienated from God, from other human beings, and from the rest of creation, he lives in God's presence, senses God's indwelling within him, and sees the whole of creation as theophany. It is this graced perspective in which all of reality is seen through the eyes of love that above all characterises apatheia. Evagrius explains that it is not when we no longer become angry or sad or vain in relation to some object that we have become free from anger or sadness or vainglory, nor is it when we no longer desire this object or that person that we have risen above all desire. Rather, it is when we see all people as messengers of God and love them as we love ourselves that we have truly acquired apatheia<sup>76</sup>. In sum, as the fall was from the heat of love into the chill of privation, from unity into fragmentation, and from expansiveness and lightness into contraction and heaviness, so all of these changes, these pathē, are reversed in the ascent.

The prologue to the *Praktikos* maps the practical life in terms which expand upon the virtues of faith, hope, and love<sup>77</sup>, and Evagrius has no doubt that, its rigours notwithstanding, each of us will sooner or later prevail such that faith will be rewarded and hope fulfilled for all: "I confess that I have not yet reached the perfection of this state, but I persevere boldly and have confidence that I shall attain to it because that is what he who called me from the shadows to the holy and blessed light has promised me"<sup>78</sup>. That all rational beings will attain to divinisation<sup>79</sup> follows from the facts that God implanted indestructible seeds of virtue in us at our creation<sup>80</sup> and the Good Shepherd will never cease searching for his lost sheep until all are rescued,<sup>81</sup> and this certainty finds reflection in Evagrius' exegesis of 1 Cor. 15:27: "Christ's feet are practical virtue and contemplation. Now if he 'puts all his enemies under his feet', all of them will know practical virtue and contemplation"<sup>82</sup>. Meanwhile success in the practical life transforms reality from a place of alienation and meaningless suffering to a place of belong-

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *Capita discipulorum Evagrii* 163; Gal. 4:14; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 19:19.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* Prologue 8, 1 Cor. 13:13; Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 8, 1.2.

<sup>78</sup> Evagrius, *Epistula* 58, 12-14 (tr. MT from Bunge's German).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 3; Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 4, 51; cf. Tobon, *Apatheia and Anthropology in Evagrius of Pontus*, 2, 4.6.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 1, 39-40.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Epistula fidei* 17; Luke 15:4.

<sup>82</sup> Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 6, 15 (tr. Ramelli).

ing where, although suffering still exists, it is imbued with meaning, sanctified by love, and points beyond itself to its final cessation.

## 6. How can Evagrius speak to the experience of lockdown?

The differences between the two contexts notwithstanding, Evagrius can speak to the experience of lockdown in several ways. In the first place, he endows separation, loss, and confinement with meaning and purpose by situating them on a roadmap of spiritual progress validated by Christian tradition<sup>83</sup>. For Evagrius our everyday consciousness arises from and presupposes a deeper level of subjectivity that we ordinarily have little or no awareness of. This deeper level of subjectivity, the *nous*, is our true self, the core of our being, and connects us to the ground of our being, since through it we participate in God. But it is only by disengaging from our everyday preoccupations and habitual ways of thinking that we start to awaken to it, and Evagrius shows us how separation, loss, and confinement can help us do so; how, that is, they can help us break loose from the constraints of our old self and discover and cultivate our new self. In turn, viewing them as meaningful and purposive is likely to make them easier to endure. Victor Frankl, drawing on his three-year experience of internment in Nazi concentration camps, affirms the importance to mental health of believing that our lives have meaning and purpose and notes in particular the vital role of such a belief in fostering resilience. Citing Nietzsche, “He who has a *why* to live can bear with almost any *how*”, he describes how any attempt to restore the inner strength of his fellow prisoners had to begin by presenting them with a future goal<sup>84</sup>.

The second way in which Evagrius can speak to the experience of lockdown is by highlighting our freedom to choose how we respond to it, and thus our freedom to view it as meaningful. A freedom equivalent in its attitude to things beyond our control and expressed in similar terms to the

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<sup>83</sup> For Evagrius’ influence on Christian tradition, cf., e.g., G. Collins, *The Evagrian Heritage in Late Byzantine Monasticism*, in: *Evagrius and His Legacy*, ed. J. Kalvesmaki – R. Darling Young, Notre Dame 2016, p. 317-331, 318-319.

<sup>84</sup> V.E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Ebury Digital 2013, p. 102. The original Nietzsche quote reads, “If we have our own why in life, we shall get along with almost any how”. F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, tr. W. Kaufman – R.J. Hollingdale, Scotts Valley, 2018, p. 6. I do not mean to suggest or imply any equivalence or commensurability between the Nazi concentration camps and other forms of adversity.

formula Evagrius uses in relation to the *logismoi* is given powerful voice by Epictetus:

What aid must we have ready to hand [...]? Why, what else than [knowledge of] what is mine and what is not mine and what is permitted me and what is not permitted me (τί ἐμὸν καὶ τί οὐκ ἐμὸν καὶ τί μοι ἔξεστιν καὶ τί μοι οὐκ ἔξεστιν)? I must die: must I then die groaning too? I must be fettered: and wailing too? I must go into exile: does anyone, then, keep my going with a smile and cheerful and serene? “Tell me your secrets”. I say not a word, for this is under my control. “But I will fetter you”. What is that you say, man? Fetter *me*? My leg you will fetter, but my will (προαίρεσις) not even Zeus himself can overcome<sup>85</sup>.

Frankl attests to the inviolability of our inner freedom, declaring: “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one’s attitude in any set of circumstances”<sup>86</sup>. He is cited and echoed by a survivor of the Siege of Leningrad who told Caroline Walton that the one thing that the *blokadniki*, the besieged, did not lose during their 872 day ordeal was their freedom<sup>87</sup>. For Evagrius, to allow our circumstances to dominate us is to locate our existential centre of gravity in our old self, whereas to recognise and accept that we can choose our attitude to them is to invest in our new self. Even when we feel most powerless we are free to pray for help, as he did in Constantinople<sup>88</sup>.

As both Evagrius and Frankl testify, however, to see suffering as meaningful and take responsibility for our attitude to it does not necessarily diminish it and can on the contrary intensify it. Frankl writes:

Once the meaning of suffering had been revealed to us, we refused to minimise or alleviate the camp’s tortures by ignoring them or harbouring false illusions and entertaining artificial optimism. Suffering had become a task on which we did not want to turn our backs [...] Therefore it was necessary to face up to the full amount of suffering<sup>89</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. Epictetus, *Dissertationes ab Arriano digestae* 1, 1, 21-25 (tr. Oldfather, with slight amendment).

<sup>86</sup> Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, p. 88.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. C. Walton, *Te, kto vyzhil 900 dnei blokady*, St Petersburg 2021, p. 46-47.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 38, 3; see above, 3.1.1.

<sup>89</sup> Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, p. 104-106.

For Evagrius, as we have seen, the ascetic dimension of the monastic life has its paradigm in the suffering and death of Christ, meaning that its rigours are not to be avoided or diminished but embraced as integral to the dynamic of transformation. In order to rise with Christ the monk must first die with him by mortifying their old self<sup>90</sup>, and Evagrius' suffering is the means by which he carries in his body the death of Jesus in order that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in that same body<sup>91</sup>. This brings us to the third way in which he can speak to the experience of lockdown, namely by accompanying us as compassionate fellow sufferer and guide. As our fellow sufferer he validates our pain by accepting his own pain. But there is a difference between accepting necessary pain and courting unnecessary pain, and as our guide Evagrius provides us with a range of resources to help us navigate our own journey. In his curriculum of the monastic life separation, loss, and confinement are supported by its other disciplines, above all prayer<sup>92</sup>, and he describes practices and offer maxims that as well as being what we would call "coping mechanisms" are aids to spiritual growth, reflecting the fact that for him the desert is not simply or even primarily a place of suffering but rather a place of blossoming: perhaps responding to Athanasius' statement that under the influence of Antony, "the desert was made a city by monks (ἡ ἔρημος ἐπολίσθη μοναχῶν)",<sup>93</sup> he describes apatheia as "the flower of the practical life (ἀπάθεια δέ ἐστὶν ἄνθος τῆς πρακτικῆς)", implying that monks make the desert a garden.

Finally, while there are many differences between lockdown and Evagrius' experience of separation, loss, and confinement, we have seen that the voluntary nature of the monastic life is not a straightforward instance of them. While Evagrius did indeed embrace his vocation freely, he did so only when he believed both his physical life and his spiritual health to be at stake. His story therefore erodes any clear-cut distinction between the monastic life as voluntary and lockdown as involuntary and in doing so highlights another way in which he can accompany us. It is one thing to philosophise about our freedom to choose our attitude to adversity but quite another to exercise it when the time comes. The historian Socrates Scholasticus states that it was only when Evagrius entered the desert that he became a philosopher of deeds rather than of words alone<sup>94</sup>, and certainly

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 6, 39-40.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 4:10; see above, 2.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 49.

<sup>93</sup> Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 14, 7 (tr. T. Vivian – A.N. Athanassakis).

<sup>94</sup> Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4, 23.

when he found himself in trouble in Constantinople he was not ready fully to exercise his freedom, in that while he was able to pray for deliverance and flee the city, he then faltered, and it was only the experience of serious illness combined with the counsel of Melania that finally elicited his assent to his monastic vocation<sup>95</sup>. He can, therefore, accompany us in our prevarication and backsliding as well as in our resolve.

## 7. Conclusion

Separation, loss, and confinement play a prominent role in Evagrius' asceticism by supporting the changes that begin to reverse the effects of the fall and restore the nous to health. Separation from the objects of the pathos, acceptance of the loss of those objects and of the pathos that bind us to them, and confinement to the cell and the desert, are all necessary to attain apatheia. Apatheia establishes love as the soul's stable disposition and opens the door to contemplation, enabling the monk to embark on the changes associated with the gnostic life, culminating in divinisation. Despite the differences between monastic asceticism and lockdown, Evagrius can speak to our experience of separation, loss, and confinement by endowing them with meaning and purpose as facilitators of spiritual awakening and growth, emphasising our freedom to choose our attitude to them, and, while he offers no easy consolations, showing us by his teachings and example how we can make our deserts into gardens.

### **Separation, Loss, Confinement, and Change: How Evagrius Can Speak to the Experience of Lockdown**

(summary)

Separation, loss, confinement, and change have been imposed on entire populations during the Covid-19 pandemic in the form of lockdowns aimed at limiting the spread of the virus. They are also central to Evagrius' asceticism, where they establish the conditions for the change at which the monastic life aims, namely to begin to reverse the effects of the fall by restoring the soul to health. This paper examines how they do so in order to gain an understanding of their ascetic function. Following the Introduction, it outlines Evagrius' anthropology in order to lay the groundwork for its main theme, the healing of pathos through the practical life. Separation, loss, and confinement are each considered in turn by referencing Evagrius' descriptions of their ascetic function and his own experience of

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 38, 3-9.

them. Next, the change at which they aim is described, again drawing upon a range of Evagrius material. The final section of the paper considers how Evagrius can speak to the experience of lockdown by endowing separation, loss, confinement with meaning and purpose in relation to spiritual awakening and growth, highlighting our freedom to choose our attitude to them, and acting as both our guide and our companion.

**Keywords:** Evagrius; separation; loss; confinement; change; lockdown; asceticism; apatheia; spiritual growth; freedom; transformation; nous; old self; new self; pathos; pathē; logismoi; Plato; Epictetus; Frankl

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