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# ‘Natural Contemplation’ in Evagrius Ponticus’ *Scholia on Proverbs*

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## ABSTRACT

Evagrius assigns to natural contemplation, *phusikē theōria*, a central place in his account of the monastic spiritual life. Despite this there is still a great deal lacking in our understanding of the theoretical framework and practice of this contemplation. Evagrius is still riddled with a one-sided reputation of being a ‘mental iconoclast’. In this article I claim that this approach needs to be replaced with a more careful attention to the styles of thought, the genres, literary habits and philosophical framework in which he frames *phusikē theōria*. Through an analysis of the first five scholia on *Proverbs* I suggest that the work of exegesis of scriptural language is a practice which contributes to contemplation of nature and that it should be understood against the philosophical background of the attainment of reliable ‘scientific’ knowledge, *epistēmē*, as mediated to Evagrius by Clement of Alexandria.

## 1. Natural contemplation as possibility and problem

‘Christianity is the doctrine of Christ the Saviour. It is comprised of the practical, the natural, and the theological. [Χριστιανισμός ἐστι δόγμα τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ ἐκ πρακτικῆς καὶ φυσικῆς καὶ θεολογικῆς συνεστός.]’<sup>1</sup> In this first chapter of Evagrius Ponticus’ work *Praktikos* he presents the tripartite structure which is a major feature and organising principle in his literary production. In what follows I will try to flesh out some aspects of what Evagrius might have meant with this compressed statement, specifically what he thought was involved in the second item of the definition of the *dogma* of Christ: *phusikē*. We will look at his exegetical scholia on *Proverbs* in order to try to further our understanding of the conceptual framework and practices Evagrius associated with *phusikē theōria*, natural contemplation.

In the writings of Evagrius the area of monastic praxis which he refers to as *phusikē theōria*, is divided in several different types of contemplations of the created order. These are often ordered in a spiritualising ascending order from

<sup>1</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos* 1, SC 171 (Paris, 1971). English translation from Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (Oxford, 2003), 97.

contemplation of bodies and worlds, on to contemplation of incorporeal beings, which in the end leads the mind to the wholly spiritual and ineffable knowledge of the Trinity. Contemplation of nature also includes the contemplation of providence and judgment, which deal with cosmic history and God's action to save his creation from sin and ignorance. The lower and more preliminary forms of *phusikē* are referred to as 'second' natural contemplation, and those that deal with the incorporeal world are 'first' natural contemplation.<sup>2</sup>

The problem with understanding the *mechanics* or method of practicing *phusikē theōria* and the role it played in Evagrius' monastic programme is that we often hear him speaking about when it should *not* be engaged in, about the potential dangers it entailed. Evagrius claims that *phusikē* is a central intellectual-spiritual practice which leads the mind to God, but it also seems to occupy a space which is fraught with potential dangers: in *Gnostikos*, we are told that beginners should not be allowed to discuss or even hear about some of the doctrines connected to contemplation of beings, lest they get confused, embrace false knowledge, or develop habits of excessive argumentation and questioning before making progress in virtue.<sup>3</sup> Similarly it is the cognitive habits of *phusikē theōria* which can become a distraction, and it seems, a source of demonic delusions, when the monk who seeks to engage in pure prayer imagines the shape and form of God instead of leaving all such creaturely categories behind.<sup>4</sup> It is precisely because of the precarious nature of knowledge mediated by nature that the *gnostikos*-teacher plays such a crucial role in the spiritual life of the monk as Evagrius imagines it. To prevent 'shipwreck' (a favourite metaphor with Evagrius<sup>5</sup>) the quest for reliable knowledge must be embedded in an educational relationship with a *gnostikos* through which intellectual and moral virtues can be formed. These virtues are thought to enable and support a style of thinking and reading wherein contemplations of various kinds and value can occur.

The fact that 'natural contemplation' as it was understood, taught and practiced by Evagrius is a somewhat elusive phenomenon to his modern day readers should not come as a surprise. In *Kephalaia Gnostica* Evagrius addresses the undefined nature of *phusikē theōria* and tells us that 'Divine Scripture has not made known what the contemplation of beings is, but it has taught quite openly *how* one should approach it by practising the commandments and by true teachings'.<sup>6</sup> This last expression 'commandments and true teaching' expresses the commonly stated goal of Evagrian monastic life, namely that of being transferred from 'evil and ignorance to virtue and knowledge' (ἀπὸ κακίας καὶ

<sup>2</sup> See Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.27; 1.74; *Sententiae ad monachos* 131-6.

<sup>3</sup> Evagrius, *Gnostikos* 25-6.

<sup>4</sup> Evagrius, *De oratione* 55-7, 66-7; *De malignis cogitationibus* 40.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 23; *Scholia in Proverbia* 266.

<sup>6</sup> Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.1; unpublished translation by Rowan Greer.

ἀγνοσίας ἐπ’ ἀρετὴν καὶ γνῶσιν).<sup>7</sup> *Praktikē* and knowledge together lead the soul to God. Evagrius repeatedly reminds his readers that the mind must be continually guarded from ‘false knowledge’ by a properly carried out *phusikē theōria* wedded to practice of the virtues.<sup>8</sup> The realm of *gnōsis* is not just concerned with speculation or a passive reception of elevated mysteries, there are intellectual virtues that need to be developed, and we should understand Evagrius’ teaching on *phusikē theōria* as concerned also with the means of securing this reliable and true knowledge.

## 2. Scholia on *Proverbs* 1-5

Let’s turn now to the scholia on *Proverbs* and look at a few examples where we can get an idea of how the process of *phusikē theōria* functioned, and the conceptual framework which Evagrius embeds it in. The collections of scholia on biblical books comprise a large part of Evagrius’ literary output and they are a body of evidence which must be integrated into our account of *phusikē theōria*, in order that this account be grounded in the types of texts Evagrius actually produced, and in the habits of mind which they presuppose or claim to lead the reader to. Evagrius consistently associates the act of reading with contemplation of nature, be this in a literal sense such as through psalmody<sup>9</sup> or listening to biblical texts during vigils,<sup>10</sup> or in other instances where reading is the controlling metaphor shedding light on his understanding of *phusikē*, such as when he compares it to teaching the letters of the alphabet to children,<sup>11</sup> or the act of reading a love letter from God inscribed in nature.<sup>12</sup> When trying to delineate the space occupied by *phusikē theōria* in Evagrius’ thought we should not just investigate the *subject matter* associated with cosmology and knowledge of created beings, but also take into account the style of his thinking when it comes to *carrying out phusikē*: and this he does through providing his readers with allusive gnomic sayings, through the genres of the exegetical scholia, syllogisms, definitions, and analysis of language and created being using concepts inspired by e.g. Aristotle’s *Categoriae*.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Evagrius, *Scholia in Proverbia* 12; *Gnostikos* 48; *Scholia in Psalmos* 76:11; 112:7.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. *Scholia in Proverbia* 44: γνῶσιν ψευδῆ; *Scholia in Proverbia* 46: ψευδώνυμος γνῶσις.

<sup>9</sup> Evagrius, *De oratione* 85.

<sup>10</sup> Evagrius, *De octo spiritibus malitiae* 4.21; *Tractatus ad Eulogium* 20.

<sup>11</sup> Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.57.

<sup>12</sup> Evagrius, *The Great Letter* 5-6.

<sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Lackner calls attention to the allusions to Aristotle’s *Categoriae* in the *Kephalaia Gnostica* in his article ‘Zur profanen Bildung des Evagrius Pontikos’, in *Hans Gerstinger: Festgabe zum 80. Geburtstag* (Graz, 1966), 17-29. See also examples of Evagrius’ use of Aristotle’s *Organon* in Paul Géhin, ‘La place de la *Lettre sur la foi* dans l’œuvre d’Evagre’, in Paolo Bettolo



The origins of Evagrius' scholia are obscure. Paul Géhin has suggested that perhaps they were culled from the margins of Evagrius' own copy of the Bible by his disciples after his death.<sup>14</sup> But as literary witnesses to Evagrius' life as an author and monastic teacher they fit very well with the theory he describes in works such as *Gnostikos*, where he says that the *gnostikos*, the experienced monk who has progressed in virtue and knowledge, must be able to give definitions of virtues and vices to those he is in charge of teaching,<sup>15</sup> he should provide them with proofs that define the customary terminology of the Bible,<sup>16</sup> and be able to interpret it spiritually to show how different passages can be understood as revealing truths regarding *praktikē*, *phusikē* and *theologikē*.<sup>17</sup> The scholia also give witness to the type of literary re-use of the Bible Evagrius engaged in, they give us access to his way of reading, which he later put to creative use through unexplained allusions and quotations in composing his own gnomic sayings and proverbs.<sup>18</sup> The scholia thus give us a glimpse of the intellectual activity of Evagrius, as a teacher and thinker, in the business of gaining and transmitting access to reliable knowledge.

As for the scholia on *Proverbs* in particular, scholion 247 gives us one crucial hint about the general scope of the book of *Proverbs* as Evagrius understood it. Evagrius says that the inner principles or reasons, the *logoi*, of *praktikē*, *phusikē* and theology will be understood by 'the one who widens his heart through purity'.<sup>19</sup> He then adapts the theory found in Origen's *Commentary on Song of Songs* (and in many later authors) where the books of Solomon should be understood as a progressive 'curriculum' of true philosophy: *Proverbs* is about ethics, *Ecclesiastes* about physics, and finally the *Song of Songs* deals with theology proper.<sup>20</sup> Knowing this we might suspect that Evagrius' scholia on *Proverbs* should focus primarily on matters of ethics. But, as we will see,

(ed.), *L'epistula fidei di Evagrio Pontico: Temi, contesti, sviluppi*, Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 72 (Rome, 2000), 30-6.

<sup>14</sup> P. Géhin, 'La place de la Lettre sur la foi' (2000), 53.

<sup>15</sup> Evagrius, *Gnostikos* 17.

<sup>16</sup> Evagrius, *Gnostikos* 19.

<sup>17</sup> Evagrius, *Gnostikos* 18; 20. For an introduction to Evagrius' exegetical pedagogy, and a brief analysis of the relationship between *Gnostikos* and the scholia see Columba Stewart, 'Evagrius Ponticus on Monastic Pedagogy', in John Behr, Andrew Louth and Dimitri Conomos (eds), *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood, 2003), 241-71.

<sup>18</sup> On the usefulness of consulting the biblical scholia for interpreting Evagrius' gnomic sayings see Augustine Casiday, 'Gabriel Bunge and the Study of Evagrius Ponticus: A Review Article', *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 48 (2004), 249-97, 263.

<sup>19</sup> Evagrius, *Scholia in Proverbia* 247, SC 340 (Paris, 1987): 'Ὁ πλατύνων διὰ τῆς καθαρότητος τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ νοήσκει τοὺς τοῦ θεοῦ λόγους τοὺς τε πρακτικούς καὶ τοὺς φυσικούς καὶ τοὺς θεολογικούς. Πᾶσα γὰρ ἡ κατὰ τὴν γραφὴν πραγματεία τέμνεται τριχῶς εἰς ἠθικὴν καὶ φυσικὴν καὶ θεολογικὴν. Καὶ ἀκολουθεῖ τῇ μὲν πρώτῃ αἱ Παραοιμαίαι, τῇ δὲ δευτέρᾳ ὁ Ἐκκλησιαστής, τῇ δὲ τρίτῃ τὰ Ἀσμάτα τῶν Ἀσμάτων.'

<sup>20</sup> Origen, *Commentarius in Canticum* praef. 3; Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum canticorum* 1. On this tradition and its relation to ideas concerning the parts of philosophy see Pierre Hadot,

the ethical teachings of *Proverbs* are from the start oriented by Evagrius to questions of knowledge. Columba Stewart has pointed out that the first five scholia on *Proverbs* provide an ‘epistemological orienting of the work’.<sup>21</sup> These first chapters make clear that even though following Origen in seeing the main topic of *Proverbs* as associated with the practical life of virtue, the goal of *praktikē* is engaging in various forms of contemplation, of created beings and of God. We will now take a brief look at these initial ‘epistemological’ scholia to see in what way they give us an idea about the intellectual context of Evagrius’ natural contemplation, which might indicate the manner in which this *theoria* was practiced.

The first two scholia on *Proverbs* are written as glosses on the very first words of the book, namely, ‘proverbs of Salomon son of David, who was king in Israel’ (*Prov.* 1:1 NETS). The words that Evagrius focuses on and seeks to define are ‘proverb’ and ‘kingdom of Israel’. Regarding the first we are told that: ‘A “proverb” is a word [λόγος] which signifies intelligible objects through sensory objects’.<sup>22</sup> Here Evagrius establishes at the very beginning what we are dealing with in reading *Proverbs*: these literary constructions, these proverbs, are instances of a meaningful and a dynamic relationship of signification between the sensory and the intelligible *in language*. It is this process of gaining access to the intelligible through the sensory which makes reading a fitting metaphor and medium for that same movement when it is carried out through *phusikē theōria*. A proverb is essentially an expression of language which becomes an opportunity for the mind to engage in the contemplative activity of going below the surface of created things.<sup>23</sup>

In the two following scholia it becomes clear that for Evagrius the subject matter of many of these proverbs is knowledge regarding *phusikē*. In scholion 2 Evagrius comments on the description in the first verse of *Proverbs* of Solomon as ‘king of Israel’, explaining that: ‘The “kingdom of Israel” is spiritual knowledge of the *reasons* [λόγους] concerning God and the incorporeal and bodily beings and judgment and providence; or, which reveals the contemplation concerning *ethics* and *physics* and *theology*’.<sup>24</sup> That this knowledge of the *logoi* of nature, as found in bodies, incorporeals, providence and judgment is the proper topic also of the ‘ethical’ book of *Proverbs* become clear

‘Les divisions des parties de la philosophie dans l’antiquité’, *Museum helveticum* 36 (1979), 201-23.

<sup>21</sup> C. Stewart, ‘Evagrius Ponticus on Monastic Pedagogy’ (2003), 266.

<sup>22</sup> Evagrius, *Scholia in Proverbia* 1, SC 340 (Paris, 1987): Παροιμία ἐστὶν λόγος δι’ αἰσθητῶν πραγμάτων σημαίνων πράγματα νοητά. Compare the distinction between sensible and intelligible knowledge in *Gnostikos* 4 and *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.45.

<sup>23</sup> See also e.g. *Kephalaia Gnostica* 6.54.

<sup>24</sup> Evagrius, *Scholia in Proverbia* 2, SC 340 (Paris, 1987): Βασιλεία Ἰσραὴλ ἐστὶν γνώσις πνευματικὴ τοῦ περὶ θεοῦ καὶ ἁσωμάτων καὶ σωμάτων καὶ κρίσεως καὶ προνοίας περιέχουσα λόγους ἢ τὴν περὶ ἠθικῆς καὶ φυσικῆς καὶ θεολογικῆς ἀποκαλύπτουσα θεωρίαν.

in scholion 3 where Evagrius comments on the words ‘to learn wisdom and discipline [γνῶναι σοφίαν καὶ παιδείαν]’ (*Prov.* 1:1 NETS). Evagrius claims that the ‘wisdom’ learned by Solomon and transmitted through the proverbs is knowledge of bodily and incorporeal beings and of judgment and providence, two preliminary forms of *phusikē theōria*. But fittingly for the book’s ethical *skopos* this wisdom is coupled with *paideia* understood with its disciplinary connotations as involving ‘moderation [μετριοπάθεια]’ of the passions in the irrational part of the soul.<sup>25</sup> This same connection between *paideia* and *metriopatheia* of the passions is made by Clement of Alexandria in *Stromateis*.<sup>26</sup> It is likely that Evagrius’ comment is inspired by Clement because as we shall see in scholion 4 he quotes a passage from this same book of the *Stromateis* there.

The next verse of the book which Evagrius glosses says that these proverbs are meant to help the reader ‘to understand words of prudence and to grasp subtlety of words and to understand true righteousness and to direct judgment’ (*Prov.* 1:2 NETS). Evagrius’ comment seeks to clarify the meaning of the last two words of this sentence, namely ‘to direct judgment’. Clement of Alexandria had connected these words from *Proverbs* to the philosophical discussion concerning the criteria by which the faculty of judgment involved in human knowledge could be kept from error.<sup>27</sup> In scholion 4 Evagrius quotes these words from Clement’s discussion in the *Stromateis*: ‘There are three sources of judgment [κριτήρια] in us: perception, reason, and intellect [αἴσθησις, λόγος, νοῦς]: perception for sensible objects; reason, for nouns, verbs and sentences; and the intellect, for intelligible objects’.<sup>28</sup> We recognise the vocabulary of αἴσθησις-λόγος-νοῦς from Evagrius first scholion which gave a definition of a proverb. But here we can see that his understanding of these concepts is indebted to a well established philosophical investigation of preliminary logic and epistemology regarding the reliability and interrelation of these sources of judgment.<sup>29</sup> In the context from which the quotation is taken Clement is drawing on Aristotelian notions concerning the nature of scientific knowledge, *epistēmē*,

<sup>25</sup> Evagrius, *Scholia in Proverbia* 3, SC 340 (Paris, 1987): Τούτου χάριν, φησίν, ‘ἐβασίλευσεν ἐν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ γνῶναι παιδείαν καὶ σοφίαν’. Καὶ σοφία μὲν ἐστὶν γνῶσις σωμάτων καὶ ἀσωμάτων καὶ τῆς ἐν τούτοις θεωρουμένης κρίσεως καὶ προνοίας· παιδεία δὲ ἐστὶν μετριοπάθεια παθῶν περὶ τὸ παθητικὸν ἢ ἄλογον τῆς ψυχῆς μέρος θεωρουμένη. Another example of Evagrius use of the Aristotelian ideal of virtue as moderation, and a mean between two vices see *Scholia in Proverbia* 53.

<sup>26</sup> As noted by P. Géhin, ‘La place de la *Lettre sur la foi*’ (2000); See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 2.8.39

<sup>27</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 2.2.7

<sup>28</sup> Evagrius, *Scholia in Proverbia* 4, SC 340 (Paris, 1987): Τὸ κρίμα κατευθύνειν ὀρθὸν καὶ ἀδιάστροφον εἶναι τὸ κριτήριον δηλοῖ. Τρία δὲ κριτήρια ἐν ἡμῖν, αἴσθησις, λόγος, νοῦς· καὶ αἴσθησις μὲν τῶν αἰσθητῶν, λόγος δὲ ὀνομάτων καὶ ῥημάτων καὶ τῶν λεγομένων, νοῦς δὲ τῶν νοητῶν. See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 2.11.50

<sup>29</sup> See Alcinous, *Didaskalikos* 4.

which is a secure knowledge based on demonstrative proofs argued fundamentally from indemonstrable first principles accepted on faith. The starting point for this process of gaining secure knowledge is, according to Clement always sensory perception, which based on faith can gain the force of demonstrative proof.<sup>30</sup> As Matyáš Havrda has pointed out, when speaking of ‘sensory perception as the starting point of proof, Clement specifically means the experience of hearing or reading the Scriptures’.<sup>31</sup> This intersection between attention to scriptural language and philosophical epistemology is something which we also saw in Evagrius’ scholion 1 on *Proverbs*.

The status and nature of sensory perception is the focus also of the last of the five ‘epistemological’ scholia introducing the scholia on *Proverbs*. Here Evagrius comments on the words ‘piety unto God is the beginning of perception’ (*Prov.* 1:7 NETS), by writing: ‘Just as the mind attends to sensory things through the senses, so it contemplates the intelligible things through the virtues’.<sup>32</sup> In this scholion we see once again, as in scholion 3, how Evagrius interrelates questions of ethics with those of securing reliable knowledge. The analogy between sensory perception and knowledge shows us that to Evagrius’ mind there can be no talk of attaining a ‘level’ of monastic life where the practice of virtue is irrelevant to the life of *gnōsis*. Just as sensory things disappear from view when the senses stop functioning, so intelligible things cannot be perceived without the virtues. It is wrong to conceive of the struggle against the passions as merely an ‘active’ preamble to the ‘contemplative’ life: both of these aspects of monastic life share the common end of securing reliable knowledge. Kathleen Gibbons has argued that Evagrius is influenced by an Aristotelian-Platonic tradition according to which the passions are bound up with the false perception of objects as sources of fear or pleasure, and it is this false perception which the ascetic struggle is meant to correct in order to enable contemplation of created nature.<sup>33</sup> Through progress in virtue the monk gains the means by which *phusikē* can be practiced.

<sup>30</sup> Clement cites the Peripatetic Theophrastus on the question of the relationship between sensory experience, faith and demonstrative proof in *Strom.* 2.2.9. For Aristotle’s understanding of first principles, demonstrative proof, and *epistēmē* see e.g. *Analytica Posteriora* 100b.

<sup>31</sup> Matyáš Havrda, ‘Demonstrative Method in *Stromateis* VII: Context, Principles, and Purpose’, in M. Havrda, V. Hušek, J. Plátová (eds), *The Seventh Book of the Stromateis* (Leiden, 2012), 259-75, 272.

<sup>32</sup> Evagrius, *Scholia in Proverbia* 3, SC 340 (Paris, 1987): Ὡςπερ διὰ τῶν αἰσθήσεων ὁ νοῦς ἐπιβάλλει τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς, οὕτω καὶ διὰ τῶν ἀρετῶν ἐποπτεύει τὰ νοητά· διόπερ καὶ αἰσθήσεως αὐτὰς λόγον ἐπέχειν ὁ σοφὸς Σολομὼν ἡμᾶς διδάσκει.

<sup>33</sup> Kathleen Gibbons, ‘Passions, Pleasures, and Perceptions: Rethinking Evagrius Ponticus on Mental Representation’, *ZAC* 19 (2015), 297-330, 319. Important in this regard is also Evagrius’ reception of the ideas concerning spiritual senses, see e.g. *Kephalaia Gnostica*, 2.35.

### 3. Conclusion

In these brief observations on the initial scholia on *Proverbs* we have seen that Evagrius situates his ideas concerning *phusikē theōria* within the context of an account of the relationship between language, sensation and intellection, and the criteria by which scientific knowledge, *epistēmē*, can be attained. It is against this background that many elements of Evagrius' practise of *phusikē theōria* begin to make sense, such as his tendency to compose exegetical scholia in the form of definitions or syllogistic proofs.<sup>34</sup> The scholia in turn fits well with the pedagogical context described in *Gnostikos*, where Evagrius speaks about the upper realms of monastic education and exegesis as an 'investigation [ζήτησις]' which the immature should not engage in due to the risk that the dialogue devolve into contentious debate.<sup>35</sup> Evagrius' description of various kinds of contemplation of nature begins to take on a more definite form and inner coherence when we understand the preliminary contemplations of the material world as part of a process of gathering raw-material for a monastic contemplative 'science'. We have seen in the scholia on *Proverbs* that for Evagrius there is a close relationship between reading and the epistemological status of sensory perception. For him it is in the systematic construction of meaningful textual interpretations that the building-blocks for a deeper understanding of the world begins to be revealed.

Perhaps a way forward in understanding more clearly what intellectual practices were involved in carrying out secondary *phusikē theōria* we should place it more firmly within patristic receptions of philosophies of science, especially as it is encountered in the Aristotelian-Platonic commentary tradition. A lamentably understudied influence on Evagrius in this regard is Clement of Alexandria whose ideal portrait of the Christian gnostic as a reader of Scripture is integral to his account of true *epistēmē* and demonstrative proof.<sup>36</sup> In this short presentation we have seen some ways in which this Clementine influence can be seen in Evagrius' scholia. An analysis of Evagrius' theory and practice of *phusikē theōria* within this context could help us avoid seeing Evagrian 'spirituality' as

<sup>34</sup> Julia Konstantinovsky makes a brief reference to the Aristotelian background of certain terms involved in evagrian *phusikē theōria* but does not develop this line of thought in *Evagrius Ponticus: The Making of a Gnostic* (Farnham, 2009), 41-2. Kevin Corrigan has fruitfully explored some instances of Evagrius' use of the language of demonstrative proof in *Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul and Body in the 4th Century* (Farnham, 2009), 116ff.

<sup>35</sup> Evagrius, *Gnostikos* 34-5. See commentary in *Le Gnostique*, SC 356 (Paris, 2008), 39-40.

<sup>36</sup> For a brief reflection on this topic see Antoine Guillaumont, 'Le gnostique chez Clément d'Alexandrie et chez Évangile le Pontique', in J. Pouilloux (ed.), *Alexandrina: Hellenisme, judaïsme et christianisme à Alexandrie*, Spiritualité Orientale 66 (Paris, 1987), 151-60. For an analysis of Origen's exegetical and theological method with reference to Aristotelian philosophy of science see Brian Daley, 'Origen's *De Principiis* – A Guide to the Principles of Christian Scriptural Interpretation', in John Petruccione (ed.), *Nova et Vetera: Patristic Studies in Honor of Thomas Patrick Halton* (Washington, D.C., 1998), 3-21.

merely one of a relentless mental iconoclasm<sup>37</sup> and rather understand *phusikē theōria* as a complex intellectual process and investigative exercise engaged in by a mind trained in constant ascetic observation of thoughts and emotions, where evil thoughts are argued against, and analysed empirically.<sup>38</sup> The mind’s training in ascetic analysis makes it ready for a fruitful extended exposure to Scriptural language, which becomes the sensory means to gain access to intelligible truths. This ‘craft of thought’<sup>39</sup> or ‘lived physics’<sup>40</sup> is meant to preserve the mind – so easily swayed – from going astray, deluded by ‘false knowledge’, and gives it access to the ‘manifold wisdom of God’<sup>41</sup> found in nature.

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, 1992), 75.

<sup>38</sup> See e.g. Evagrius, *De malignis cogitationibus* 9; 25.

<sup>39</sup> See Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Harvard, 1998), 96.

<sup>41</sup> *Eph.* 3:10, see for instance Evagrius, *De oratione* 85.