

## PART II



# Codification of the Virtues and Vices

If people like Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero as well as Isaiah, Matthew, Paul, and the author of Proverbs provided the raw materials, it was people like Prudentius, Evagrius, and Gregory the Great who developed those materials into the virtues and vices. The Classical and Judeo-Christian worlds provided the principles, while subsequent thinkers refined them into the “building codes,” the commonly agreed upon standards of upright moral goodness and downright badness. This process of assembling such codes into the list of virtues and vices did not happen all at once. The story of the codification of the virtues and vices has many interesting twists and turns.

The first important character in this story is Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, or simply Tertullian (160–225 CE). An excerpt from Tertullian’s *The Shows* is the first item in this section. Tertullian’s part in the story of the virtues and vices is that he continued and elaborated Paul’s idea of a moral battle between good and evil. While he did not set up a well-developed list of virtues and vices, Tertullian’s battle imagery found its way into Prudentius’s elaborate epic poem of the battle within the soul (or *psychomachy*). Prudentius (348–413 CE) did give a remarkable list of virtues and vices, and his dramatic personification of each offers a stirring and engaging discussion of their nature. The epic battle pits Faith against Idolatry, Chastity against Lust, Long-Suffering against Wrath, Lowliness and Hope opposite Pride, Sobriety confronting Indulgence, and Reason and Good Works defeating greed. The work has a final triumph of the Virtues overcoming Discord and building a temple to Wisdom. Though the *Psychomachia* was a tremendously popular text throughout the medieval period, Prudentius’s list did not become the standard code of virtues and vices.

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Prudentius seems to have developed virtues and vices that would suit his dramatic and moral purposes, and there does not seem to be one clear source for his selection.

The next principal character in the development of the virtues and vices is Evagrius of Pontus (345–399 CE). Evagrius is important because he developed a list of vices or evil spirits that must be overcome. This list was drawn up as part of the spiritual meditation for the Christians who had fled the world seeking moral purity in the harsh isolation of the Egyptian desert. This list formed the basis of the vices and seven deadly sins, and it includes gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, *acedia*, vainglory, and pride.

Perhaps the single most important person not included in this section is John Cassian (360–435 CE). Cassian was Evagrius's pupil, and he elaborated on his teacher's list of vices in his book *Institutes*. This book brought the vices from Egypt to France, and it became required reading for Benedictine monks. Cassian's list also became the basis for penitential manuals, which are handbooks that priests used to help identify and eliminate sins in the souls of those seeking absolution through confession. For Cassian and Evagrius, the vices were the evil spirits or thoughts to be overcome, and the virtues were those God-given powers that could overcome them.

While this list of vices developed in the Egyptian deserts, the virtues came together in a different location and context. Most Christians living in the Roman world were careful to distinguish themselves from pagans, yet they nevertheless recognized and incorporated the humanistic virtues they saw around them. People like Saint Augustine saw the Roman Empire as an important yet inherently limited precursor to the emerging "city of God," or Christian empire. Such Christians admired the humanistic Roman values. Perhaps the most important step toward transforming humanistic values into Christian virtues was made by the fourth-century bishop of Milan, Saint Ambrose (340–397 CE). In about 375 CE, Ambrose wrote *Paradise*, and in it he compared the cardinal or classical virtues to the four rivers of the Edenic paradise. This comparison allowed Ambrose to explain that these "rivers" flowed from one common source, Christ, thereby allowing their combination with the theological virtues.

## TERTULLIAN'S *THE SHOWS*

### Introduction

In the small North Carolina town where I live we have some batting cages. Batting cages, if you do not know, are places where machines pitch baseballs at people who want to practice their swing. I believe that the cages are owned locally, and they have a sign in front that can be changed to make announcements. In May of 2006 the sign admonished people to not see the movie *The Da Vinci Code*. Given the cultural environment, I believe that this plea was made on account of the movie's controversial depictions of religion, specifically Christianity and Catholicism. Tertullian would have

been happy with this sign, but possibly not happy enough. He probably would have discouraged people from seeing most any movie or from going to theater productions, watching television, or attending sporting events.

Tertullian lived in North Africa (modern-day Tunisia) from about 160 until 225 CE. And he would probably not like that I use the abbreviation *CE* (which stands for the Common Era) instead of *AD* (which stands for the Latin phrase *anno domine*—“year of our Lord”); he would likely see the use of *CE* as a further diminishment of Christian devotion. Tertullian was fiercely devoted to Christianity at a ferocious time. His hometown of Carthage did not have batting cages, so the Carthaginians would round up people and make them fight to the death in gladiatorial arenas. Tertullian was outraged with this on several levels. He himself may have seen Christians martyred in this way, and at least knew that Christians had indeed undergone martyrdom, so he was beside himself to see Christians attend such horrific, bloodlust spectacles. Not only did they encourage the worst instincts and feed the most base desires, but they had pagan roots and were patronized by so-called Christians. And so he wrote against this practice in his work *Of Shows* or *De Spectaculis*. In this work Tertullian uses his sharp rhetorical skills to persuade his audience that such shows as well as violent and vulgar theatrical performances seduce Christians away from God and only serve demonic purposes.

Though Tertullian himself rejected (pagan) Greek philosophy, going so far as to ask, “what has Athens to do with Jerusalem or the Academy with the Church?” (*De praescriptione*, vii.), he would agree with Plato on the power of art and the need to control that power. Part of Tertullian’s argument is that the very power of these shows would have a damaging impact upon Christians. What Tertullian also says is that Christians should look at the real battle, the real “fightings and wrestlings” between the virtues and the vices. Instead of being distracted by sinful and eternally meaningless temporal battles, the true Christian should be keenly aware of the battle between good and evil. In this respect Tertullian continues Paul’s martial imagery of the Christian soul in constant warfare. He also lays the groundwork for Prudentius’s extended treatment of the *psychomachia* or the battle in (and for) the soul.

## Chapter XXIX.<sup>1</sup>

But now, if you think we are to pass this interval of life here in delights, why are you so ungrateful as not to find enough in the great pleasures, the many pleasures, given you by God, and not to recognize them? What has more joy in it than reconciliation with God, the Father and Lord, than the revelation of truth, the recognition of error, and forgiveness for all the great sins of the past? What greater pleasure is there than disdain for pleasure, than contempt for the whole world, than true liberty, than a

1. From Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, trans. T. R. Glover (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 295–97.

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clean conscience, than life sufficient, than the absence of all fear of death? than to find yourself trampling underfoot the gods of the Gentiles, expelling demons, effecting cures, seeking revelations, living to God? These are the pleasures, the spectacles of Christians, holy, eternal, and free. Here find your games of the circus,—watch the race of time, the seasons slipping by, count the circuits, look for the goal of the great consummation, battle for the companies of the churches, rouse up at the signal of God, stand erect at the angel's trump, triumph in the palms of martyrdom. If the literature of the stage delight you, we have sufficiency of books, of poems, of aphorisms, sufficiency of songs and voices, not fable, those of ours, but truth; not artifice but simplicity. Would you have fightings and wrestlings? Here they are—things of no small account and plenty of them. See impurity overthrown by chastity, perfidy slain by faith, cruelty crushed by pity, impudence thrown into the shade by modesty; and such are the contests among us, and in them we are crowned. Have you a mind for blood? You have the blood of Christ.

### PRUDENTIUS'S *PSYCHOMACHIA*

#### Introduction

I still scratch my head at the concept of Christian rock. I know that on a certain level it makes sense. Music is sounds, rhythms, melodies, particular instruments, maybe lyrics, and in that respect music is amoral. And music, like any of the arts, can powerfully convey content, and for that reason Plato calls for its strict public control. So if music can have such a powerful impact, why could not Christians harness the same sounds, rhythms, melodies and particular instruments of other rock bands? Of course Christian rock bands do just that, but it has always seemed like an odd fit to me. Maybe I just have not heard enough successful Christian rock. Maybe it's because so much rock music seems so decidedly irreligious or even antireligion, or maybe it is because the original term, *rock and roll*, seems to evoke images of (illicit) sexual activity sufficient to shake the entire Chevy van. If he were alive today, I suspect that Prudentius would be in a Christian rock band, blending Tertullian and Paul with Pink Floyd and Pearl Jam. What Prudentius did was the fifth-century equivalent, incorporating elements of martial Roman culture in a Christian psychological and spiritual drama. In addition, Prudentius *Psychomachia* is a crucial text for the virtues and vices, establishing key conflicts and iconographies.

Aurelius Prudentius Clemens (348–413 CE) lived most of his life in Roman-controlled Spain. His most famous work, the *Psychomachia*, begins with a preface and frame narrative about Abraham and Lot. Abraham, the father of the faithful, is a model of one who fights with the armor of faith, and who shows his total devotion to God by being willing to sacrifice the thing he loved most—in this case, his son. In that same frame narrative, Lot, Abraham's nephew, is described as one who was taken

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captive by barbarian kings. In contrast with the ever-faithful Abraham, Lot becomes an embodiment of all souls who, since Adam’s fall, are overcome by the savage vices. And just as Lot is freed when Abraham overcomes his captors, so are our souls freed by Christ the Victor.

With this preface in place, Prudentius begins his epic with an evocation of his muse, Christ, asking “our King” to tell of the forces furnished to the soul to overcome the evil passions. The poem ends with the virtues building a temple to house Wisdom. The bulk of the *Psychomachia* is given over to a variety of lively battle scenes. The chart below shows how those scenes can be divided into episodes. In almost every episode, one or two virtues battle a vice that may or may not be accompanied by partnering vices. Often a biblical example is given for the virtue described.

<i>Episode</i>	<i>Virtue</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Vice</i>	<i>Mode of Defeat</i>
<b>One</b>	Faith		Worship-of-the-Old-Gods	Strikes her down
<b>Two</b>	Chastity	Judith	Lust	Stone and sword
<b>Three</b>	Long-Suffering	Job	Wrath	Virtue’s invincibility provokes Wrath’s suicide
<b>Four</b>	Lowliness and Hope	David	Pride	Vice falls in pit, Lowliness beheads her
<b>Five</b>	Sobriety	Moses	Indulgence and entourage	Strikes with the Cross
<b>Six A</b>	Reason and Good Works		Greed and entourage	(Protection of Reason’s shield)
<b>Six B</b>	Good Works		Thrift (Greed in disguise)	Strangles and stabs
<b>Seven</b>	Faith and others		Discord or Heresy	Strikes, tears to pieces

This chart reveals important clues about the context of the *Psychomachia*. Faith’s struggle against idolatry represents Christianity’s conflict with a paganism still very much alive in Prudentius’s time. By contrast, at a later time Giotto casts Christianity’s already-vanquished opponent symbolically as idol worship. Sexuality, faith, and paganism come together in Chastity’s fight with Lust: Prudentius seems to see the same connection between sexual purity and faith that Paul so often calls for in his letters. Prudentius extends Paul’s call for humility and sobriety in the next episode, even using an example that appears in the New Testament—of Moses as one who sacrificed for God worldly pleasure and comfort (Hebrews 11:24–27). In the conflict between Reason and Greed, Prudentius shows considerable insight, not only in how Reason can protect the faithful, but in how Greed disguised as Thrift is overcome by Good Works. Given the intense conflicts within the Christian world before, during, and

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after Prudentius's life, the final episode is perhaps understated, predictive, and overly optimistic, as Faith swiftly and decisively overcomes Discord and Heresy.

When the virtues and vices are placed on a chart like this, what also comes to the fore is what is not included. Charity, for example, never takes the field, except perhaps as Good Works, and the only place we find love (*Amor*) is in the guise of desire and as part of Indulgence's malicious entourage. Classical virtues like Justice and Fortitude never enter the fray by name, though Fortitude is implied in how the virtues struggle against the vices. Nor do we ever directly encounter Temperance, though here again it may be manifest as Sobriety and Reason over excesses like Indulgence and Greed. It is very telling that we never witness an attack of Envy. For as much as Prudentius gives us a battle inside the soul, the conflicts seem more external in light of Envy's absence. There is the battle with paganism, with sexual impurity, with excesses like pride, indulgence, and greed, but there is not a picture of an internal conflict (potentially between Christians) with envy. Nor does Prudentius seem attuned to the interior conflicts with sloth or sadness, or to *acedia*'s lack of concern about spiritual growth. These are internal battles that ascetics like Evagrius detect and describe. What strikes many people who read the *Psychomachia* for the first time is how graphically Prudentius describes these metaphorical battles within and for control of the soul or psyche. In the very first episode, Faith

smites her foe's head down, . . . lays in the dust that mouth that was sated with the blood of beasts, and tramples the eyes under foot, squeezing them out in death. The throat is choked and the scant breath confined by the stopping of its passage, and long gasps make a hard and agonizing death.<sup>2</sup>

Of course then the other virtues leap for joy! Clearly there is no "love your enemies" here. But the soul has no room for loving its enemies; it can give no quarter or take prisoners of an enemy that will never stand down. Prudentius's graphic battle provides a new version of Virgil's *Aeneid*, not set in the mythic past, but in the souls of those living in the Christian Roman present. Some portions of the battle seem like an awkward mixing of Virgil and Paul. Even on the most superficial level one finds that the Virtues are, in the Roman tradition, very virile and "manly" female embodiments of those abstract principles. The *Psychomachia* employs some of the imagery, language, and graphic martial descriptions that would have been popular with its original audience. Those Roman features combine with content inspired by Paul and Tertullian. It is up to the reader to determine how successful this version of fifth-century Christian rock is.

2. From Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, in *Prudentius*, trans. H. J. Thomson (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 281.

Episodes IV and V<sup>3</sup>

It chanced that Pride was galloping about, all puffed up, through the widespread squadrons, on mettled steed which she had covered with a lion's skin, laying the weight of shaggy hair over its strong shoulders, so that being seated on the wild beast's mane she might make a more imposing figure as she looked down on the columns with swelling disdain. High on her head she had piled a tower of braided hair, laying on a mass to heighten her locks and make a lofty peak over her haughty brows. A cambric mantle hanging from her shoulders was gathered high on her breast and made a rounded knot on her bosom, and from her neck there flowed a filmy streamer that billowed as it caught the opposing breeze. Her charger also, too spirited to stand still, carries itself proudly, ill brooking to have its mouth curbed with the bit it is champing. This way and that it backs in its rage, since it is denied freedom to run off and is angered at the pressure of the reins. In such style does this boastful she-warrior display herself, towering over both armies as she circles round on her bedecked steed and with menacing look and speech eyes the force that confronts her; a force but small in number and scantily armed, that Lowliness had gathered for the war—a princess she, indeed, but standing in need of others's help and wanting trust in her own provision. She had made Hope her fellow, whose rich estate is on high and lifted up from the earth in a wealthy realm. Therefore Pride in her madness, after looking on Lowliness and her poor equipment of paltry arms that made no display, broke forth in speech with bitter words: "Are ye not ashamed, ye poor creatures, to challenge famous captains with troops of low degree, to take the sword against a race of proud distinction, whose valor in war has long won wealth for it, and given it power to impose its rule on hills where rich grass grows? And now—can it be?—a newcomer with nothing is trying to drive out the ancient princes! Behold the warriors who will have our sceptres become the spoil of their right hands, who seek to drive the furrow over lands that we have broken up, to ravage with a strangers's plough the soil our hands have taken, and with war expel its hardy cultivators! Absurd mob! Why, in the hour of birth we embrace the whole man, his frame still warm from his mother, and extend the strength of our power through the body of the new-born child, we are lords and masters all within the tender bones. What place in our abode was granted to you when the growing strength of our realm was matched by that of the sovereignty that was born with it? For both the house and its masters were born on the same day and we grew side by side as the years passed, since the time when the first man, going forth from the hedged bounds of Eden, went over into the wide world, and the venerable Adam clothed himself with skins, whereas he had been naked still, had he not followed our instruction. What foe is this that from shores unknown arises now to trouble us, a spiritless, luckless, base, insensate foe, who claims his rights so late, after banishment till now? Doubtless there will be trust in the silly dreams of the vain talk which bids poor wretches choose the

3. *Ibid.*, 291–311.



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hope of a good that 'may some day come to pass, so that its feckless consolations flatter their unmanly sloth with idle expectation! Ay, a nerveless hope it must be that flatters these raw troops, for in the dust of battle here the bray of the War-Queen's trumpet does not rouse them, and their courage is not hot enough to brace their unwarlike spirit. Is Chastity's cold stomach of any use in war, or Brotherly Love's soft work done by stress of battle? What shame it is, O god of war, O valorous heart of mine, to face such an army as this, to take the sword against such trumpetry, and engage with troupes of girls, among them beggarly Righteousness and poverty-stricken Honesty, dried-up Soberness and white-faced Fasting, Purity with scarce a tinge of blood to color her cheeks, unarmed Simplicity exposed with no protection to every wound, and Lowliness humbling herself to the ground, with no freedom even in her own eyes, and whose agitation betrays her ignoble spirit! I shall have this feeble band trodden down like stubble; for we disdain to shatter them with our stark swords, to dip our blades in their frigid blood, and disgrace our warriors with a triumph that needs no manhood." Thus exclaiming she spurs on her swift charger and flies wildly along with loose rein, eager to upset her lowly enemy with the shock of her horse-hide shield and trample on her fallen body. But she falls headlong into a pit which as it chanced cunning Deceit had privily dug across the field—Deceit, one of those cursed plagues, the Vices, a crafty worker of trickery, who foreseeing the war had secretly broken the level earth with treacherous trenches on the enemy's side, that the ditch might catch their regiments in their onrush and the columns plunge into it and be swallowed up; and lest the army should be watchful and discover the pit that was set to deceive it, she had concealed the edges by covering them with branches and laying turf over them to simulate ground. But the lowly princess, though knowing nought of this, was still on the further side, and had not yet come up to Deceit's trap nor set foot on the craftily hidden pit that meant her ill. Into the snare has fallen that rider as she galloped in swift career, and suddenly revealed the secret gulf. Thrown forward, she clings around the horse's neck in its tumble; the weight of its breast comes down on her and she is tossed about among its broken legs. But the quiet, self-controlled Virtue, seeing the vain monster crushed and lying at the point of death, bends her steps calmly towards her, raising her face a little and tempering her joy with a look of kindness. As she hesitates, her faithful comrade Hope comes to her side, holds out to her the sword of vengeance, and breathes into her the love of glory. Grasping her blood-stained enemy by the hair, she drags her out and with her left hand turns her, face upwards; then, though she begs for mercy, bends the neck, severs the head, lifts it and holds it up by the dripping locks. Hope with her pure lips upbraids the dead Vice: "An end to thy big talk! God breaks down all arrogance. Greatness falls; the bubble bursts; swollen pride is flattened. Learn to put away disdain, learn to beware of the pit before your feet, all ye that are overweening. Well known and true is the saying of our Christ that the lowly ascend to high places and the proud are reduced to low degree. We have seen how Goliath, terrible as he was in body and in valor, fell by a weak hand; it was but a



boy's right hand that shot at him a little stone whizzing from his sling, and pierced a hole deep in his forehead. He, for all his stark menace, his boasting and his fierce and bitter speech, in the midst of his ungoverned pride and fearful raging, as he vaunted himself, affrighting the heavens with his shield, found what a little child's toy can do, and wild man of war as he was, fell to a lad of tender years. That day the lad, in the ripening of his valor, followed me; as his spirit came to its bloom he lifted it up towards my kingdom; because for me is kept a sure home at the feet of the all-powerful Lord, and when I call men on high the victors who have cut down the sins that stain them reach after me." With these words, striking the air with her gilded wings, the maid flies off to heaven. The Virtues marvel at her as she goes and lift up their hearts in longing, desiring to go with her, did not earthly warfare detain them in command. They join in conflict with the Vices and reserve themselves for their own due reward.

From the western bounds of the world had come their foe Indulgence, one that had long lost her repute and so cared not to save it; her locks perfumed, her eyes shifting, her voice listless, abandoned in voluptuousness she lived only for pleasure, to make her spirit soft and nerveless, in wantonness to drain alluring delights, to enfeeble and undo her understanding. Even then she was languidly belching after a night-long feast; for as it chanced dawn was coming in and she was still reclining by the table when she heard the hoarse trumpets, and she left the lukewarm cups, her foot slipping as she stepped through pools of wine and perfumes, and trampling on the flowers, and was making her drunken way to the war. Yet it was not on foot, but riding in a beauteous chariot that she struck and won the hearts of the admiring fighters. Strange warfare! No swift arrow is sped in flight from her bowstring, no lash-thrown lance shoots forth hissing, her hand wields no menacing sword; but as if in sport she throws violets and fights with rose-leaves, scattering baskets of flowers over her adversaries. So the Virtues are won over by her charms; the alluring breath blows a subtle poison on them that unmans their frames, the fatally sweet scent subduing their lips and hearts and weapons, softening their iron-clad muscles and crushing their strength. Their courage drops as in defeat; they lay down their javelins, their hands, alas! enfeebled, all to their shame struck dumb in their wonder at the chariot gleaming with flashing gems of varied hue, as with fixed gaze they look longingly at the reins with their tinkling gold-foil, the heavy axle of solid gold, so costly, the spokes, one after another, of white silver, the rim of the wheel holding them in place with a circle of pale electrum. And by this time the whole array, its standards turned about, was treacherously submitting of its own will to a desire to surrender, wishing to be the slaves of Indulgence, to bear the yoke of a debauched mistress, and be governed by the loose law of the pot-house. The stout-hearted Virtue Soberness mourned to see a crime so sore, her allies deserting the right wing, a band once invincible being lost without shedding of blood. Like the good leader she is, she had carried the standard of the cross at the head of her troops, and now she plants the spike in the ground and sets it up, and with biting words restores her unsteady regiment, mingling appeals with her reproaches to awake their courage: "What blinding madness is vexing your disordered

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minds? To what fate are you rushing? To whom are you bowing the neck? What bonds are these (for shame!) you long to bear on arms that were meant for weapons, these yellow garlands interspersed with bright lilies, these wreaths blooming with red-hued flowers? Is it to chains like these you will give up hands trained to war, with these bind your stout arms, to have your manly hair confined by a gilded turban with its yellow band to soak up the spikenard you pour on, and this after you have had inscribed with oil on your brows the signs whereby was given to you the king's anointing, his everlasting unction? To walk softly with a train sweeping the path you have trod? To wear flowing robes of silk on your enfeebled frames, after the immortal tunic that bountiful Faith wove with deft fingers, giving an impenetrable covering to cleansed hearts to which she had already given rebirth? And so to feasts that last into the night, where the great tankard spills out wasted floods of foaming wine, while the ladles drip on to the table, the couches are soaked with neat liquor, and their embossed ornaments still wet with the dew of yesterday? Have you forgotten, then, the thirst in the desert, the spring that was given to your fathers from the rock, when the mystic wand split the stone and brought water leaping from its top? Did not food that angels brought flow into your fathers' tents in early days, that food which now with better fortune, in the lateness of time, near the end of the world's day, the people eats from the body of Christ? And it is after tasting of this banquet that you let shameful debauchery carry you relentlessly to the drunken den of Indulgence, and soldiers whom no raging Wrath nor idols could force by war to yield have been prevailed on by a tipsy dancer! Stand, I pray you. Remember who ye are, remember Christ too. Ye should bethink yourselves of your nation and your fame, your God and King, your Lord. Ye are the high-born children of Judah and have come of a long line of noble ancestors that stretches down to the mother of God, by whom God himself was to become man. Let the renowned David, who never rested from the troubles of war, awake your noble spirits; and Samuel too, who forbids touching the spoil taken from a rich foe, nor suffers the uncircumcised king to live after his defeat, lest the captive, were he allowed to survive, summon the victor from his life of peace to a renewal of war. He counts it sin to spare the monarch even as a prisoner; but your desire, on the contrary, is to be conquered and submit. Repent, I beseech you by the fear of the high God, if at all it moves you, that you have desired to follow after this pleasant sin, committing a heinous betrayal. If ye repent, your sin is not deadly. Jonathan repented that he had broken the sober fast with the sweet honeycomb, tasting, alas! in an evil hour the savor of honey on his rod, when the tempting desire to be king charmed his young mind and broke the holy vow. Yet because he repented we do not have to lament the fate that was decreed, and the cruel sentence did not stain his father's axe. Lo, I, Soberness, if ye make ready to concert with me, open up a way for all the Virtues whereby the temptress Indulgence, for all her great train, shall pay the penalty, she and her regiment, under the judgment of Christ." So speaking, she holds up the cross of the Lord in face of the raging chariot-horses, thrusting the holy wood against their very bridles; and for all their boldness they have taken fright at its outspread arms and flashing top, and in the

roul of blind panic career down a steep place. Their driver, leaning far back and pulling on the reins, is carried helplessly along, her dripping locks befouled with dust; then she is thrown out and the whirling wheels entangle her who was their mistress, for she falls forward under the axle and her mangled body is the brake that slows the chariot down. Soberness gives her the death-blow as she lies, hurling at her a great stone from the rock. As chance has put this weapon in the standard-bearer's way (for she carries no javelins in her hand, but only the emblem of her warfare), chance drives the stone to smash the breath-passage in the midst of the face and beat the lips into the arched mouth. The teeth within are loosened, the gullet cut, and the mangled tongue fills it with bloody fragments. Her gorge rises at the strange meal; gulping down the pulped bones she spews up again the lumps she swallowed. "Drink up now thine own blood, after thy many cups," says the maiden, upbraiding her. "Be these thy grim dainties, in place of the too much sweetness thou hast enjoyed in time past. The taste of bitter death in thy mouth, the savoring of this final, ghastly draught, turns to gall the wanton delights that allured thee in thy life." At the slaughter of its leader her company of triflers scatters and runs in a flutter of fear. Jest and Sauciness first cast away their cymbals; for it was with such weapons that they played at war, thinking to wound with the noise of a rattle! Desire turns his back in flight. Pale himself with fear, he leaves behind his poisoned darts, abandoning his bow where it has slipped from his shoulder, his quiver where it falls. Ostentation, that parader of empty grandeur, is stripped bare of her vain flowing robe. Allurement's garlands are torn and trail behind her, the gold on her neck and head unfastened, and jarring Strife disorders her jewels. Pleasure is content to go with injured feet through thorny brakes, for superior force makes her endure the painful flight, and the dread of danger hardens her tender soles to bear the torture of the way. Wherever the column turns, as it rushes this way and that in its agitated flight, lie things lost, a hairpin, ribbands, fillets, a brooch, a veil, a breast-band, a coronet, a necklace. These spoils Soberness and all the soldiers of Soberness refrain from handling; they trample under their chaste feet the cursed causes of offence, nor let their austere gaze turn a blind eye towards the joys of plunder.

## EVAGRIUS OF PONTUS'S ON THE EIGHT THOUGHTS

### Introduction

Stillness. Unsullied quiet. A peace that passes all understanding. The soul caught up in its rightful home, absorbed back into its proper abode. For ascetics like Evagrius of Pontus (345–399 CE), stillness or *hesychia* was the soul's proper objective and the end to which every element of one's life should be aimed. The virtues, like thermal winds under eagles' wings, could lift that soul up, while the vices, like lead, were dark, powerful forces keeping the soul down. In Evagrius's many writings on the virtues and vices we have a pithy and potent exploration of their nature.

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Evagrius, it would seem, recognized the value of stillness because he experienced the soul's exile in chaos. He was born in northern Turkey, the son of a rural bishop, and evidently a bright young man who moved up the ranks, working with key people like Gregory of Nazianzus. He knew the spiritual chaos of his time, including the various doctrinal debates, but the real disorder of his soul may have come from his affair with a married aristocratic woman. What ended the affair was a terrifying dream he had in which he was only freed from prison by an angel with his promise to renounce the relationship. But even after ending his affair and fleeing to Jerusalem, he did not find peace. In Jerusalem he suffered a prolonged fever, leading his spiritual advisor to question the state of his soul. For Evagrius, his physical sickness was merely a manifestation of his real internal disease. In search of wholeness, Evagrius fled the world he was accustomed to and joined the ascetics in the deserts of Egypt.

In his writings, Evagrius dramatically describes the chaos as well as the stillness or the "impassability" that a soul can and should achieve. This achievement works in a logical progression. A monk—the audience Evagrius addresses—must learn the fundamental and practical spiritual skills. One must first recognize and overcome temptations of one's bodily passions, including gluttony, lust, and greed. In addition, one must properly harness psychic or emotional states, overcoming sadness, anger, and *acedia* with patience and courage. The rational faculty must also be properly yoked, eliminating vainglory and pride with prudence and humility. Evagrius thus lists eight temptations to be overcome. He does not call them sins or vices. Instead, he calls them "thoughts," or sometimes "demons," and the general picture that we get is that they are nefarious evil forces, each of which is a specialist in some area, but, in working together, they often lay the groundwork for each other. The evil thoughts assail one from outside, and do not rise from oneself. One is responsible, not for being tempted or attacked, but for one's response to that attack. The practical spiritual skills used to fend off these demons are the necessary groundwork for the sort of stillness one would need for proper prayer, meditation, and wholeness with God. This next spiritual level is reserved for the knowers, the gnostics, those ready for the higher mysteries of the knowledge of God.

Evagrius's writings were, for a long time, forgotten, neglected, or misassigned because he ended up on the wrong side of a key theological debate, leaving him essentially blacklisted. Evagrius's pupil, John Cassian, incorporated, with slight alteration, his teacher's list of eight temptations into his *Institutes*, which he brought from Egypt to France. This book became required reading for Benedictine monks and set the foundation for penitential manuals, thus setting the stage for an adapted version of Evagrius's eight evil thoughts to eventually become the seven deadly sins.

Evagrius's writings are not meant to be read quickly. If a monk has anything, he has time. These descriptions of evil temptations and their remedies will only give up their secrets when the reader gives them proper time and energy, in the form of deep meditation and contemplation. Read. Stop. Meditate. Be still.

ON THE EIGHT THOUGHTS<sup>4</sup>

1. *Gluttony*

1. Abstinence is the origin of fruitfulness, the blossom and beginning of the practical life.
2. He who controls the stomach diminishes the passions; he who is overcome by food gives increase to pleasures.
3. 'Amalek was the first of the nations' (Num. 24:20); and gluttony is the first of the passions.<sup>5</sup>
4. Wood is the matter used by fire, and food is the matter used by gluttony.<sup>6</sup>
5. A lot of wood raises a large flame; an abundance of food nourishes desire.
6. A flame grows dim when matter is wanting; a lack of food extinguishes desire.
7. He who seized the jawbone destroyed the foreign nations and easily tore asunder the bonds of his hands (Judg. 15:9–20).<sup>7</sup>
8. The (place called) Destruction of the Jawbone begat a spring of water;<sup>8</sup> and when gluttony was wiped out, it gave birth to practical contemplation.
9. A tent peg, passing unnoticed destroyed an enemy's jawbone (Judg. 4:21); and the principle of abstinence has put passion to death.<sup>9</sup>
10. Desire for food gave birth to disobedience and a sweet taste expelled from paradise (Gen. 3:6, 23).

4. From Evagrius of Pontus, "On the Eight Thoughts," in *Evagrius of Pontus*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz (Oxford Early Christian Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 73–75, 80–81, 87–90. Used by permission. Notes selected from the original.

5. *Amalek*. After the exodus from Egypt Amalek was the first of the nations to attack Israel. According to Origen's allegorical reading, Amalek was called 'first of the nations' because he was a hostile power, the first to turn people to paganism.

6. *The matter used by gluttony*. The passions use sensible objects or the memories of such as the 'matter' or material to tempt human beings. The different passions have a greater or lesser range of material to draw upon for this purpose.

7. *he who seized the jawbone*. When Samson took revenge on the Philistines, they in turn attacked Judah. The men of Judah then captured Samson, bound his hands with ropes and handed him over to the Philistines. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson and the bonds caught fire and dropped from his hands. Samson then took the jawbone of an ass and slew a thousand Philistines. Throwing the jawbone away, he called the place 'Destruction of the Jawbone.' Since Samson was thirsty, God opened the wound of the jawbone (according to the LXX text) and water came forth from it.

8. *A spring of water*. Evagrius usually understand springs of water as the virtues from which flows gnosis (knowledge of God). Cf. S51-Prov. 4:21, 'So that your springs may not abandon you, guard them in your heart.' He calls the virtues 'springs,' from which is begotten the 'living water' (John 4:11). Which is the knowledge of Christ'; cf. also S9-Ps 17:16 'He calls springs the virtues from which there issues knowledge.'

9. *A tent peg*. Jael killed Sisera by approaching quietly while he slept and driving a tent peg into his head.

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11. Extravagance in foods pleases the throat, but it nourishes the unsleeping worm of licentiousness.
12. A stomach in want is prepared to spend vigils in prayers, but a full stomach induces a lengthy sleep.
13. Vigilant thinking is found in the driest regimen; a life of moist diet plunges the mind into the deep.
14. The prayer of one who fasts is like a young eagle soaring upwards, whereas that of a drunkard is born downwards under the weight of satiety.
15. The mind of one who fasts is like a radiant star in the clear night air; that of a drunkard is concealed in a moonless night.
16. Fog conceals the sun's rays; and heavy consumption of food darkens the mind.
17. A soiled mirror does not produce a clear image of the form that falls upon it; when the intellect is blunted by satiety, it does not receive the knowledge of God.
18. Land that has become barren produces thorns; and the mind of a glutton grows shameful thoughts.
19. It is not possible to find spices in the mud, nor the fragrance of contemplation in a glutton.
20. A glutton's eye is busy looking for dinner parties; the eye of the abstinent person is busy looking for meetings of the wise.
21. A glutton's soul rejoices at the commemorations of the martyrs;<sup>10</sup> that of the abstinent person imitates their lives.
22. A cowardly soldier shudders at the trumpet that announces the battle; the glutton shudders at the proclamation of abstinence.
23. The gluttonous monk, under the burden and scourge of his belly, demands a daily share of the spoils.
24. The speedy traveller will quickly gain the city, and the abstinent monk a state of peace.<sup>11</sup>
25. The slow traveller will have to make camp in the desert<sup>12</sup> under the sky, and the gluttonous monk will not attain the abode of impassibility.
26. The smoke of incense sweetens the air, and the prayer of the abstinent person presents a sweet odour to God (cf. Rev. 8:4).

10. *The commemorations of the martyrs.* Funeral banquets were held to commemorate the death of the martyrs. Such celebrations were often occasions for excesses in eating and drinking.

11. *A state of peace.* This is a synonym for *apatheia*, 'impassibility.'

12. *Make camp in the desert.* Evagrius interprets the desert as a symbol for 'the rational soul deprived of God.' *Egypt* signifies evil; the *desert*, the practical life; the land of *Judah*, the contemplations of the bodies; *Jerusalem*, that of the incorporeals; and *Zion* is the symbol of the Trinity.



27. If you give yourself over to the desire for food, nothing will suffice to fulfil your pleasure, for the desire for food is a fire that ever takes in and is ever in flames.
28. A sufficient measure fills a vessel; a full stomach does not say, 'Enough!'
29. An extension of hands put Amalek to flight (Exod. 17:11), and the raising of practical works subdues the passions of the flesh.
30. Exterminate from yourself every breath of wickedness and forcefully mortify the members of your flesh (cf. Col. 3:5). In the same way that an enemy destroyed can cause you no fear, so the mortified body will not trouble the soul.
31. A dead body does not experience the pain caused by fire, nor does the abstinent person experience the pleasure of desire that is dead.
32. If you strike an Egyptian, hide him in the sand (Exod. 2:11–12); and do not fatten the body with a vanquished passion, for as the hidden plant grows on fertile land, so does passion sprout afresh in a fat body.<sup>13</sup>
33. An extinguished flame lights again if it is given firewood; and a pleasure that has been extinguished is rekindled in a satiety of food.
34. Do not pity a body that is debilitated and in mourning, nor fatten it up with rich foods, for if it gains strength it will rebel against you and wage unrelenting war upon you, until it takes your soul captive and delivers you as a slave to the passion of fornication.
35. A docile horse, lean in body, never throws its rider, for the horse that is restrained yields to the bit and is compelled by the hand of the one holding the reins; the body is subdued with hunger and vigil and does not jump when a thought mounts upon it, nor does it snort when it is moved by an impassioned impulse.

#### 4. Anger

1. Anger is a passion that leads to madness and easily drives those who possess it out of their senses; it makes the soul wild and moves it to shun all (human) encounter.
2. A fierce wind will not move a tower; irascibility cannot carry off a soul free from anger.
3. Water is driven by the force of the winds; the irascible person is troubled by senseless thoughts.
4. The angry monk, like a solitary wild boar, saw some people and gnashed his teeth.

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13. *If you strike an Egyptian, hide him in the sand.* For Evagrius Egypt is the symbol of evil and the Egyptians a symbol for the disposition of evil. So the Egyptian buried in the sand is the evil passion buried in the sterile soil where it will wither and die.



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5. The forming of a mist thickens the air; the movement of irascibility thickens the intellect of the angry person.
6. A passing cloud darkens the sun; a thought of resentment darkens the mind.
7. A lion in a cage continuously rattles the hinges; the irascible monk in his cell rattles thoughts of anger.
8. A calm sea is a delight to contemplate, but there is nothing more delightful than a state of peace. For dolphins go diving in a sea that is calm; thoughts worthy of God swim in a state of peace.
9. A patient monk is like a still spring offering a gentle drink to all, but the intellect of an angry person is always disturbed and provides no water to the thirsty, and if it does offer water it is muddy and useless.
10. The eyes of an angry person are irritated and bloodshot and are indicative of a troubled heart; the face of a patient person is composed, with gentle eyes looking downwards.
11. The gentleness of a man is remembered by God (cf. Ps. 131:1), and a soul without anger becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit.
12. Christ reclines his head on a patient spirit (cf. Matt. 8:20), and an intellect at peace becomes a shelter for the Holy Trinity.
13. Foxes find shelter in the resentful soul, and beasts make their lairs in a troubled heart.
14. A distinguished person avoids a shameful inn, and God avoids a resentful heart.
15. When a stone falls into water it troubles it; an evil word troubles a man's heart.
16. Remove thoughts of anger from your soul, and let not irascibility lodge in your heart, and you will not be troubled at the time of prayer. In the same way as the smoke from chaff irritates the eyes, so does resentment irritate the mind in the time of prayer.
17. The thoughts of the irascible person are a viper's offspring (cf. Matt. 3:7); they consume the heart that gave them birth.
18. The prayer of the irascible person is an abominable incense offering (cf. Isa. 1:13); the psalmody of an angry person is an irritating noise.
19. The gift of a resentful person is a blemished sacrifice (cf. Lev. 22:22) and does not approach the consecrated altar.
20. The irascible person sees disturbing nightmares, and an angry person imagines attacks of wild beasts.
21. A patient person has visions of encounters with holy angels, and one free from resentment discourses on spiritual matters and receives in the night the answers to mysteries.

8. *Pride*

1. Pride is a tumor of the soul filled with pus; when it has ripened, it will rupture and create a great disgusting mess.
2. A flash of lightning foretells the sound of thunder; vainglory announces the presence of pride.
3. The soul of a proud person mounts a great height, and casts him down from there into an abyss.
4. A rock broken off from a mountain descends in a quick rush; the person who has withdrawn from God quickly falls.
5. The one who has distanced himself from God suffers the disease of pride in ascribing his accomplishments to his own strength.
6. As he who mounts a spider web falls through and is born downwards, so he falls who is confident of his own strength.
7. A lot of fruit bends a tree's new branches; an abundance of virtue humbles a person's thinking.
8. Rotten fruit is useless to the farmer; the virtue of the proud person will be of no use to God.
9. The vine-prop supports the young branch weighed down with fruit; the fear of God the virtuous soul. As the weight of fruit knocks down the young branch, so does pride cast down the virtuous soul.
10. Do not give your soul to pride, and you will not see terrifying fantasies, for the soul of the proud person is abandoned by God and becomes a plaything of the demons: at night he imagines a multitude of wild beasts approaching and by day he is troubled by thoughts of cowardice; when he falls asleep he is continually jumping up and when he is awake he cowers at a bird's shadow; the sound of a leaf frightens the proud man and the noise of water breaks down his soul. He who a little while before set himself against God and rejected his help is later frightened by paltry fantasies.
11. Pride cast the archangel from heaven and made him fall to earth like lightning (cf. Isa. 14:12; Luke 10:18). Humility leads a person up to heaven and prepares him to dance with the angels.
12. Why do you put on airs, fellow, if you are mud and rot (cf. Job 4:19; 25:6)? Why do you puff yourself up and exalt yourself above the clouds? Consider your nature, that you are earth and ashes (cf. Gen. 18:27), and in a little while will dissolve into dust—a swaggerer now, but in a while a worm (cf. Ps. 21:7). Why do you raise your neck which in a while will turn to rot? A great thing is the human being who is helped by God; he is abandoned and then he realizes the weakness

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of his nature. You have nothing good which you have not received from God (cf. 1 Cor. 4:7). Why then do you glory in another's (good) as if it were your own? Why do you pride yourself in the grace of God as if it were your own possession? Acknowledge the one who gave it and do not exalt yourself so much. You are a creature of God; do not reject the Creator. You receive help from God; do not deny your benefactor. You have mounted to the height of this way of life, but he has guided you. You have attained the accomplishments of virtue, but he has wrought this together with you. Confess the one who exalted you that you may remain secure on the heights. You are a human being; remain within the bounds of your nature. Acknowledge one of your own kind because he is of the same substance as you; do not deny the relationship because of vain boasting. Though he is humble and you are haughty, still the same Creator formed you both. Do not despise the humble person, for he stands more secure than you. He walks on the earth and does not quickly fall, but the haughty person will get bruised if he falls.

13. Pride is an unsound vehicle, and he who gets into it is quickly thrown. The humble person always stands firm and the foot of pride (Ps. 35:12) will never trip him.
14. The proud monk is a tree without roots; he will not bear the rush of the wind.
15. An attitude that is not puffed up is a walled city; he who lives in it will be unharmed.
16. A breath of wind sends straw into the air; an attack of presumption exalts the proud man.
17. When a bubble bursts it will disappear; the memory of the proud person perishes after his death.
18. The word of a humble person is a soothing ointment for the soul, but that of a proud person is filled with boasting.
19. The prayer of a humble person gets God's attention, but the supplication of the proud vexes God.
20. A precious stone is striking in a gold setting; a person's humility is resplendent among many virtues.
21. One celebrating Passover eats unleavened bread often (cf. Exod. 12:18–20); a virtuous soul is nourished on freedom from arrogance. For as leavened bread rises from the moment it is first near a fire, but unleavened bread remains in a lowly form, so virtue exalts the proud person but it does not puff up the humble person with presumption.
22. If you are fleeing Laban the Syrian, flee in secret and do not trust his promise to escort you, for through those means whereby he said he would escort you, he shall restrain you. For in escorting you with musicians, flutes, and drums,

- he contrives to pull back the fleeing mind by beguiling it with the sound of music and by dissipating its moral resolve with the harmony of the melody (Gen. 31:20–7).
23. A staff is a symbol of instruction; he who holds it crosses the Jordan of life (cf. Gen. 32:10).
  24. A staff in the hand of a traveller is useful for every purpose; instruction in the practical life directs a person's life.
  25. A staff cast away becomes a serpent (Exod. 4:3); instruction that departs from the practical life becomes pleasure.
  26. Do not let the serpent that crawls on the ground frighten you; nor the passion of pleasure that creeps among earthly material concerns. For if you grab it by the tail, it will again be a staff in your hand (Exod. 4:4); if you gain control of a passion it will again become instruction.
  27. In the desert a serpent bites and kills the soul (cf. Num. 21:6); pleasure wounds and destroys the mind with ease.
  28. He who looks at the bronze serpent escapes death (Num. 21:9); he who gazes upon the rewards of chastity shall live forever.
  29. A serpent bites a horse's hoof (Gen. 49:17–18); the reason of chastity touches passion.<sup>14</sup>
  30. A long-standing infection is cured with a cautery; a habit of vainglory by dishonor and sadness.
  31. The scalpel and cautery cause a great deal of pain, but they restrict the spreading of the wound; on the one hand, dishonor pains the one being treated, but on the other, it puts a stop to the grievous passions, namely vainglory and pride.
  32. Humility is the parapet of a housetop, and it keeps safe the one who gets up upon it (Deut. 22:8).<sup>15</sup> When you ascend to the height of the virtues, then you will have much need of security. He who falls at ground level gets up quickly, but he who falls from a high place is in danger of death.

14. *The reason of chastity.* The *logos* of chastity may refer either to the 'word' of counsel about chastity or the 'reason,' the ultimate principle, of chastity that dissolves passion. One manuscript extends the scriptural allusion: 'when the horse was bitten by a serpent, the horseman fell backwards (Gen. 49:17); the mind of one who loves pleasure inclined to evil when passion caught hold. The rider who fell backwards when the horse broke off waits for salvation from the Lord (Gen. 49:18); when the mind has fallen away it calls upon the help of God. An extension of hands put Amalek in flight (Exod. 17:11); actions directed upwards in truth mortify the passions.'

15. *The parapet of a housetop.* Deut. 22:8, "If you build a new house, you shall make a parapet on the housetop, and you will not be responsible for a death in your house if someone falls from it."