



The Late Antique History of Psychology: The Test Case of Introspection

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This article argues for the need to broaden the scholarly focus on the history of the modern *discipline* of psychology to include the history of psychological *knowledge*. It seeks to demonstrate the benefits to be derived from this endeavor by focusing on late antique psychology and presenting the novel methods of psychological investigation that emerged within the Christian monastic movement, especially introspection. Far from being a historically recent invention, I argue that introspection was systematically and self-consciously employed by late antique monks as a method for producing knowledge about the human mind. Yet rather than arguing for a simple continuity between late antique and modern introspective procedures, a comparison between early monastic introspective accounts and those of the founders of the modern psychology reveals profound differences in the interpretation and evaluation of introspective data; thereby, it allows one to address fundamental questions related to the nature of psychological knowledge and its relationship with culturally constructed categories.

Keywords: introspection, history of psychology, late antiquity, Christian monasticism

The period of transition from classical antiquity to the Middle Ages, known as late antiquity, gave rise to a novel and highly influential concept of the self, some elements of which have since constituted the identity of the Western self. In particular, a greater emphasis on interiority is an important aspect of the cultural and religious transformations that took place during this period. Especially in Christianity, new theological concerns resulted in a growing interest in the inner life of the individual and in the idea that individual human consciousness constitutes a special object of investigation. This development constituted the beginning of the conceptual changes necessary for the emergence of new lines of psychological investigation.

Psychology, however, did not exist in the late antique world as an independent field of study, nor was a distinction drawn between scientific and moral or religious elements of psychological knowledge.¹ Accordingly, this important source for studying the history of psychology has been neglected by scholars investigating the history of Western psychology, who have tended to focus on the 19th-century roots of modern,

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¹ “Psychology,” in the sense that I use the term, refers to what Richards (1989) described as “small-p psychology,” to be distinguished from *Psychology* with a capital *P*, which refers to the modern discipline of psychology.

scientific psychology.² Although this is indeed the only part of the history of psychology that has a relatively unproblematic subject matter,³ to restrict ourselves to this fragment of psychology's past is to neglect important sources of evidence for addressing fundamental questions related to the nature of psychological knowledge and the extent to which it is culturally constructed. This article seeks to demonstrate the benefits to be derived from broadening the scope of the historical examination by presenting the new lines of psychological investigation that emerged within the Christian monastic movement in late antiquity, especially the monastic use of introspection as a method for gaining evidence about the human mind and its operations.

Introspection is a generic term that covers a large group of procedures designed to obtain knowledge on one's own mental states or processes, such as sensations, impressions, perceptions, or passing thoughts, as well as bodily sensations and states. In all of these cases, introspection consists of directing the focus of attention inward in a deliberate attempt to observe and/or to record one's own mental operations (see [Schwitzgebel, 2016](#); [Titchener, 1912](#)). Although monastic introspection assumes a different relationship between the mind and the world, or external and internal causation, than do modern notions of introspection,⁴ this definition applies to both. Moreover, the introduction of introspective methods of data production was no less important in the emergence of the theistic psychology of the early monastic movement than it was in the emergence of modern scientific psychology. The concept of introspection thus provides a useful bridge between the radically different theories of mind presumed by modern and late antique notions of introspection.

Introspection was of central importance in the emergence of modern psychology, which first took shape as an empirical, progressive, and laboratory-based science with the appearance of quantitative methods of introspection in the second half of the 19th century. This development is usually linked to the work of Wilhelm Wundt at the University of Leipzig.⁵ Building upon the preexisting uses of introspection, in 1879 Wundt was the first to use introspective procedures under laboratory control, making it possible for other scientists to replicate his experiments elsewhere.⁶ At this stage, the application of specific methods of data production became the special characteristic of the field and distinguished it from its intellectual predecessors. Nevertheless, modern psychology did not invent its concepts and methods out of the blue.

² The view that modern psychology is a product of the second half of the 19th century was promoted by [E. G. Boring \(1929\)](#) in his influential book, *A History of Experimental Psychology*. This view was retained, though for different reasons, in more recent scholarship (see [A. C. Brock, 2014](#)). Other scholars have traced the roots of the modern discipline of psychology to the 18th century (see [Hatfield, 1994](#); [Vidal, 2006](#)), whereas others have traced the beginning of that discipline to the end of the 16th century (see [Mengal, 2005](#)). For an important corrective to this approach, see [Robinson \(1995\)](#). Robinson dates the origins of psychological research to the 4th century B.C.

³ On the problematic subject matter of the history of psychology, see [R. Smith \(1988\)](#). See also [Danziger \(1997\)](#).

⁴ On the fuzzy boundary between the self and the world in monastic theology and demonology, see [G. A. Smith \(2008\)](#). More generally, the permeability of the boundary between the self and the world has often been cited as the main characteristic of premodern modes of self-constitution. [Taylor \(2007, p. 27\)](#) introduced the idea of "porous subjectivity" to elucidate this mode of being in the world, which he distinguished from the "buffered self" of atomistic individualism that is typical of the modern world.

⁵ Whereas earlier philosophers, such as Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, confined their use of the introspective method to an examination of their own ideas and experiences, Wundt employed in his experiments "externalized" methods of introspection (see [Robinson, 1995, p. 306](#)).

⁶ The decade from 1903 to 1913 is the period during which "systematic introspection," as it was known, flourished and proliferated. Soon, however, bitter disputes arose between practitioners of different variants of introspection, in which both sides based themselves on introspective reports of conscious experience. On this debate and on the introspective procedures employed by the founders of modern psychology, see [Boring \(1953\)](#), [Danziger \(1980\)](#), [A. C. Brock \(2013\)](#), and [Lyons \(1986\)](#).

The question of continuity versus discontinuity in the history of science in general was brought to the fore by Thomas Kuhn's (1962/2012) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. The radical implication of this question for psychology was conveyed in 1988 by Roger Smith's (1988) query, "Does the history of psychology have a subject?" Smith concluded that the history of psychology should be abandoned, because it is impossible to conceptualize a continuous and unitary subject for such a history. Kurt Danziger (1997, p. 21), although arriving at a different conclusion, also stressed the discontinuity in the history of psychology and the absence of a disciplinary tradition in psychology prior to the 19th century.⁷

The tendency among authoritative writers on the subject to stress discontinuity over continuity in the history of psychology—a welcome corrective to earlier approaches that treated psychology's conceptual and investigative practices as applications of timeless logical principles—is reflected in the understanding of introspection as a historically recent invention. According to Danziger (1990, p. 19), "far from being the time-hallowed method of prescientific psychology . . . introspection is actually a historically recent invention," whose roots ultimately go back to "certain tendencies in Protestant theology" that advocated a methodical self-examination of one's conscience. Although philosophers before the 19th century appealed to the subjective self-awareness of their readers, these appeals, according to Danziger, cannot be regarded as constituting a methodology. The historical record, however, suggests that introspection is not a historically recent invention. As will be shown, the literature of the early monastic movement provides evidence that introspective procedures were self-consciously and systematically employed by late antique monks, especially within the Eastern monastic tradition, as a method for producing knowledge on mental and emotional processes. The acquisition of such knowledge was seen as an essential step in the search for contemplative union with God.

Despite its novelty, the theistic psychology of the early monastic movement did not invent its concepts and investigative practices out of the blue. The first part of this article thus provides an overview of the traditions of investigative practice that emerged in the philosophical schools of the Roman Empire. Far from being exhaustive, the goal of this brief overview is merely to clarify the points of continuity between monastic introspective procedures and earlier developments that took place in the philosophical traditions of the Roman empire. The introspective methods developed within the early monastic movement, however, also constituted a significant departure from earlier traditions. The monastic innovation is at the center of the second part of this article, which presents evidence suggesting that the use of introspection as a method for producing psychological knowledge goes back to the Eastern monastic tradition of late antiquity.

The main goal of this article, however, is to argue for the need to broaden the current scholarly focus on the history of the modern *discipline* of psychology. To the extent that introspection was employed by both the founders of modern psychology and those of monastic psychology, it serves as a perfect test case. To demonstrate some of the benefits to be derived from studying the late antique history of psychology, therefore, the third part of this article goes on to juxtapose monastic introspective accounts with those of modern introspectionists, revealing both striking continuities and profound differences in the interpretation and evaluation of introspective data. The juxtaposition reveals the tacit anthropological assumptions on which different types of psychological theories rest and the extent to which these assumptions shape psychological knowledge. Thereby, I argue, it enables us to address key questions concerning the nature of psychological knowledge and its relationship with culturally constructed categories, as well as to explore the complex relationship between continuity and discontinuity in psychology's past.

⁷ For the influence of this view on recent scholarship, see Teo (2005, p. 19). For a criticism of this view, see Robinson (2013).

Intellectual Background: “What Is Finer Than to Examine One’s Conduct?”

A growing body of scholarship suggests that in classical antiquity there was no clear-cut discussion of the peculiarity of the individual person. In this view, although ancient Greek philosophers developed elaborate theories of the soul, their works evince “very little if any interest” in the private and subjective aspects of human experience (see [Remes & Sihvola, 2008](#), p. 1).⁸ To account for this lack of interest, Myles Burnyeat argued in an influential article that ancient philosophers did not accept the idea that truth could be obtained within the subjective experience (see [Burnyeat, 1982](#)).⁹ Consequently, the teachings of various philosophical schools of classical antiquity show a basic lack of interest in individual identity.¹⁰

Whatever the reasons for this shift may have been, what is important for the present discussion is that indications of a growing interest in the individual and the particular begin to accumulate in the first centuries of the common era.¹¹ One indication is the great increase in the portraiture of the individual in writing and art during this period. It has been suggested that this shift represents the start of a more developed idea of individuality that will be fully realized in the Christian world of late antiquity (see [Swain, 1997](#), pp. 2–4). More important for the present discussion is the new insistence in philosophical texts of this period on the need to pay attention to oneself—or what Michel Foucault (1986) described as “an intensification of the relation to oneself” (p. 41).¹² For the elites of the Roman empire, the idea that one ought to attend to oneself—to take oneself as an object of knowledge so as to transform, correct, and purify oneself—which already existed in classical Greek culture, became a central concern and acquired new dimensions. It gave rise, especially within Stoic thought, to a growing interest in the interior disposition of the individual ([Edwards, 1997](#); [Long, 2002](#), p. 260).

This shift in emphases evolved into practical procedures. Most relevant for the present discussion are techniques of self-examination—the practice of regularly examining one’s conscience—across the different philosophical schools of the imperial period. The fundamental structure of the practice is found in the Neopythagorean sayings collection known as the *Golden Verses*. Stoic philosophers of the imperial period, such as Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, drew upon this tradition in order to explain how one should examine oneself. According to [Seneca \(2007\)](#); the quote is from: *De Ira* 3.36.1-3), the soul should

daily be called up to render an account. This is what Sextius [a Neopythagorean] would do: the day being over, when he retired for his nightly rest, he questioned his soul: “What evil have you cured yourself of

⁸ Elsewhere, [Remes \(2007a\)](#) argues that ancient philosophers emphasized the objective character of the contents of perceptions and thoughts. For ancient Greek theories of the soul, see [Snell \(1953\)](#) and [Griswold \(1981\)](#).

⁹ According to [Burnyeat \(1982\)](#), St. Augustine was the first philosopher to discuss subjective states and pick them out as giving certain knowledge *because* they are subjective states. See also [Everson \(1991\)](#).

¹⁰ In a study of ancient ethics, [Rist \(1982, pp. 145–163\)](#) convincingly argues that Plato generally ignored or dismissed the problem of individuality, and in Aristotle, too, there was almost no discussion of individuality (because Aristotle thought that philosophy could deal with individuals only insofar as they were members of classes). For a similar opinion, see [Stroumsa \(1990\)](#). Similarly, [Robinson \(1995, pp. vii, 77\)](#), although dating the beginning of psychological inquiry to ancient Greece, nevertheless noted that ancient Greek psychology was not concerned with subjective inner experiences. For a discussion of this subject in ancient medical discourse, see [Thumiger \(2017\)](#). This lack of interest in the mental and psychological experience is also evident in the literature, in which the self often appears pale and artificial (see [Veyne, 1987](#)). Nevertheless, there is a lively scholarly discussion about whether we can find a notion of subjectivity in ancient philosophy. For the different approaches see [Gill \(2008\)](#), [Sorabji \(2000\)](#), and [Remes \(2007b\)](#).

¹¹ Historians have linked this shift in emphases to social and political changes that took place in the Roman Empire during this period. See, for example, [Veyne \(1987, p. 229\)](#).

¹² For the introspective nature of Stoic philosophical teaching, see [Nussbaum \(2013, p. 341\)](#).

today? What vice have you struggled against? In what area are you better?" . . . What therefore is finer than to examine (*excutiendi*) one's conduct during the whole day? When the light is taken from sight and my wife has fallen silent, aware of my practice, I scrutinize my whole day and reflect upon what I have done and said. (p. 321)¹³

Stoic philosophers of the imperial period employed elaborate techniques for self-examination. As the above quote implies, however, the primary object of attention for Stoic self-scrutiny was not one's subjective experiences or thought processes but one's actions and behavior, as well as the philosophical doctrines according to which these are to be evaluated. As Foucault observed in his study of self-technologies, Stoic techniques of self-examination "stress what you did, not what you thought" (Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988, p. 33). It has been suggested that this lack of interest in the individual's *unique* inner world and its complex inner dynamics derives from the Stoic belief that the ruling part of the soul is (in its purified form) a segment of the divine Reason (and hence qualitatively equal to and identical with other segments; Rist, 1982, p. 148; see also Danziger, 1997, p. 24).¹⁴ Whatever the case may be, of importance for the present discussion is that despite the Stoic interest in the inner disposition of the individual, Stoic self-examination is different from introspection.

The inward turn in the philosophical schools of the Roman empire culminated in the 3rd century in the teaching of Plotinus. In his *Enneads*, Plotinus repeatedly stresses the need to turn one's attention inward:

We must turn our power of apprehension inward (εἰς τὸ εἶσω ἐπιστρέφειν), and make it attend to what is there. It is as if someone was expecting to hear a voice which he wanted to hear and withdrew from other sounds and roused his power of hearing to catch the best of all sounds which can be heard; so here also we must let perceptible sounds go . . . and keep the soul's power of apprehension pure and ready to hear the voices from on high. (Plotinus, 1966, p. 53, *Enneads* 5.1.12.12-20)

Withdraw into yourself and look (ἀναγες ἐπὶ σαυτὸν καὶ ἴδε). And if you do not yet see yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a statue which has to be beautiful cuts away here and polishes there and makes one part smooth and clears another till he has given his statue a beautiful face, so you too must cut away excess and straighten the crooked . . . and never stop "working on your statue" till the divine glory of virtue shines out on you. (Plotinus, 1966, p. 259, *Enneads* 1.6.9)¹⁵

For Plotinus, the data of consciousness, though they are necessarily within us, are not the object of attention when we are looking inside. His belief that we should move closer to our true self by distancing ourselves from the soul-body compound (which is the seat of consciousness) suggests that, for him, knowledge on one's subjective experiences or first-person viewpoint is not the path to true knowledge about the self (see Stern-Gillet, 2006; see also Charles-Saget, 1999; Remes, 2007b). Rather, it is by attending to those "voices from on high" that the soul realizes its *higher* nature. The emphasis on the need to cultivate spiritual perfection thus came at the expense of interest in the actual dynamics

¹³ Similarly, Marcus Aurelius (1987) recommended, in his *Meditations*,

There is nowhere that a person can find a more peaceful . . . retreat (ἀναχωρεῖ) than in his own soul (εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν), especially if he has within himself the kind of thoughts that let him dip into them and so gain ease of mind; and by ease of mind, I mean nothing but having one's own mind in good order. So constantly give yourself this retreat and renew yourself. (4.3.2-3)

See also Galen (1884): "On rising in the morning one should consider (ἐπισκοπεῖσθαι), before all the tasks of the day, whether it is better to live a constant slave to the affections, or to employ reason on every occasion."

¹⁴ Seneca referred to the reflecting subjectivity by using the concept of the soul (*anima*). He employed this term in its specific sense as *hegemonikon*, referring to the soul's activities as mind (perceiving, judging, desiring, etc.). For a discussion, see Graver (2007, pp. 18-19) and Long (1982).

¹⁵ English translation slightly modified.

of individual human consciousness.¹⁶ The inward turn (ἐπιστροφή) advocated by Plotinus is thus different from introspection.¹⁷

It was in the Christian world of later antiquity that new theological ideas permitted the emergence of what has been described as “a newly reflexive self, that is, a subject turned back upon itself in ways unknown before” (see [Stroumsa, 1990](#), p. 26; see also [Taylor, 1989](#), Chapter 7; [Zachhuber & Torrance, 2014](#)). In particular, this shift in sensitivities was dependent upon a theological conception unknown to the classical world: the biblical idea that man was created in God’s image (*imago dei*), which implied, for Christian believers, that to turn upon oneself is an essential step in the search for God.¹⁸ This inward turn was also related to the idea of a spiritually unique and self-aware individual in Christianity as well as to the doctrine of resurrection of the body, both of which required a more sustained reflection on the uniqueness of the self’s individual identity than has been done before (see [Swain, 1997](#), p. 2; [Torrance, 2014](#)). The awareness of Christian believers to the final judgment, and of the kind of response required of them, also helped to focus attention on the inner disposition of the individual.¹⁹

The new anthropology that crystallized between the 2nd and 4th centuries culminated within the early monastic movement with the notion that the individual consciousness—one’s ongoing stream of thoughts, perceptions, mental images, inner dialogue and so forth—constitutes a special object of investigation. This notion, in turn, evolved into new introspective procedures. In the following, I reconstruct from early monastic writings of spiritual guidance (e.g., collections of sayings, collections of questions and answers, ascetical treatises)²⁰ the introspective methods that were employed by the Egyptian Desert Fathers and their disciples in the monastic colonies of Lower Egypt, which were the most important centers of the early monastic movement. The introspective tools that they fashioned were enormously influential and widely employed in monastic centers throughout the Mediterranean basin and beyond. Whereas Augustine of Hippo has often been hailed by modern scholars as the initiator of introspective consciousness in Christianity,²¹ we shall see that no less important developments took place within the Eastern monastic tradition beginning from the 4th century.

Monastic Introspection: “Observe Your Thoughts and Beware of What You Have in Your Heart”

In his work on ancient spiritual exercises, Pierre Hadot identified the components of the spiritual exercises employed by the Egyptian desert monks as those prevailing in the Greco-

¹⁶ John [Rist \(1982, p. 152\)](#) attributes Plotinus’s lack of interest in subjective experience to the influence of Platonic ideals of perfection on his ethics.

¹⁷ For Plotinus, ἐπιστροφή signified a reversion of the soul to its true origin, the One. In this respect, his notion of “inward turn” was similar to the Christian use of this term. Unlike Plotinian ἐπιστροφή, however, in Christian monasticism, the acquisition of knowledge on one’s own mental and emotional processes was a necessary condition for the process of reversion to the soul’s true origin in God. On the unique features of early Christian ἐπιστροφή, see [Rotman \(2016\)](#). The Greek term ἐπιστροφή (in Latin, *conversio*) has a rich philosophical background, and its meaning has a broad psychological and theological spectrum. On ἐπιστροφή as repentance in early Christianity and Judaism, see [Stroumsa \(1999\)](#). On ἐπιστροφή as conversion in the philosophical schools of the Roman empire, see [Nock \(1961\)](#).

¹⁸ As [Antony the Great, Ep. 2 \(1995\)](#) explained in the 4th century, “Every rational being, for whom the Savior came, ought to examine his way of life and know himself” (p. 204, *Ep. 2*). On the theological ideas underlying this view, see [Decock \(2013\)](#).

¹⁹ See, for example, Ephrem’s *Letter to Publius*, which urged Publius to look at himself as if in a mirror and to picture the day of judgement (in [P. Brock, 1976](#)).

²⁰ These texts are the fruit of practical experience rather than of theological or philosophical speculation; they were written especially for monks and offer practical advice on how to advance in the spiritual life. On the practical nature of early monastic literature, see [Leclercq \(1996, p. 153; de Vogüé, 1961\)](#).

²¹ The tendency to focus on Augustine’s psychology at the expense of developments within the Eastern monastic tradition is reflected, for example, in [Robinson \(1995\)](#). On Augustine’s use of introspection, see [Stock \(2001\)](#) and [Brittain \(2012\)](#).

Roman world (Hadot, 1995, Chapter 4). Although the roots of monastic self-examination lie in the common heritage of the Hellenistic world, this practice was significantly modified under the influence of the principle of contemplation (θεωρία, *contemplatio*), resulting in the idea that the acquisition of self-knowledge is an essential step in the search for contemplative knowledge (γνώσις) of God. Hence, Christian monks were instructed, “You want to know God? First know yourself” (Evagrius, *Maxims*).²² Although the imperative to know oneself goes back to ancient Greece,²³ the monastic emphasis on contemplation gave rise to a new definition of what constitutes self-knowledge.

Following the premonastic theology of Origen of Alexandria, in early Egyptian monasticism contemplation was thought to constitute the mind’s prelapsarian state, as it was originally created.²⁴ Yet the mind’s capacity for contemplation has become impaired and all but lost in the Fall, and this damage is expressed in the mind’s lack of stability and tendency to wander. Through regular practice of various spiritual and ascetic exercises, late antique monks sought to stabilize their mind and refocus its attention on the thought of God alone, in order to reconstitute the mind in its prelapsarian, contemplative state. In their search for contemplation, however, they first had to recognize their current attentional habits and thinking patterns and trace the mechanisms underlying them.²⁵ Close observation of one’s occurrent mental states and processes was considered as an essential first step in this demanding process. It was thus the mind in its earthly, fallen condition, rather than the soul’s *higher* nature, that constituted the primary object in the early stages of the monastic search for self-knowledge.²⁶ It was thus in the context of the monastic search for contemplation that earlier notions of self-examination were extended to include the examination of consciousness.

Several conditions may have come together to allow this development. The increased emphasis on interiority in Christian theology, alongside the monastic emphasis on contemplation, which created a need for a new type of self-knowledge, may have combined to produce the notion that individual human consciousness can be a special object of investigation. This notion evolved into practical procedures for investigating human consciousness, which are at the focus of this section. Admittedly, the focus on the practical facets of the monastic search for self-knowledge cannot do full justice to its theological and psychological complexity; the aim of the following discussion is merely to present

²² Evagrius, *Maxims* 2.2 (PG 79:1252). Antony the Great (1995) explained in one of his letters, “Every rational being, for whom the Savior came, ought to examine his way of life and know himself” (p. 204, *Ep.* 2). Elsewhere, Antony instructed, “Let us examine ourselves [to see] if we have become worthy of God” (*Apophth. patr.* systematic collection 3.1). On the relationship between self-knowledge and divine knowledge, see Burton-Christie (1993, p. 108), Bitton-Ashkelony (2011, p. 292), and McGinn (1999, p. 148).

²³ On the ancient history of the notion of self-knowledge, see Courcelle (1975) and Renz (2017).

²⁴ Origen posited a two-stage creation, the first of which involved the creation of rational beings, pure intellects (*logikoi*) who were originally immersed in contemplation. Eventually, however, they experienced satiety (*κόρος*, *satiety*) in the vision of God. Because they had free will, they wandered away from God, and this negligence resulted in the Fall. See Origen, *Princ.* 1.4.1 (SC 252: 166) and 2.9.2 (SC 252: 355–356). Origen’s cosmology was further developed by Evagrius in his *Kephalaia gnostica* and *Epistle to Melania*. This view was not limited to the spirituality of the Egyptian desert. According to the Syrian author of the *Spiritual Homilies*,

Adam at the beginning lived in purity. He reigned over his thoughts (ἐβασίλευε τῶν λογισμῶν αὐτοῦ). But from the time that he transgressed the command of God, heavy mountains weighed upon his mind, and evil thoughts mingled with it and became completely a part of the mind, and yet this was not really man’s mind by nature since such thoughts are tainted by evil. (Pseudo-Macarius, 1921, *Homilies* 15.25 [PG 34:592–593])

²⁵ On this demanding process, see Graiver (2016).

²⁶ As this implies, the monastic interest in the inner life of the individual should not be confused with an emphasis on individualism (in the sense of an independent, self-centered consciousness). Rather, the same logic that promoted interest in interiority also promoted suspicions about that interiority. On the ambiguous status of interiority in Christianity, see Martin et al. (1988, p. 42), Stroumsa (2009), Zachhuber and Torrance (2014, Introduction, p. 4).

evidence suggesting that the use of introspection as a method for producing knowledge about the human mind began much earlier than is usually assumed.

The collections of sayings of the Egyptian Desert Fathers, known as the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (hereafter, *Apophth. patr.*), which describe the life in the monastic centers of Lower Egypt during the 4th century (but were probably edited in the second half of the 5th century in Palestine; see [Guy, 1962](#); [Regnault, 1981](#), pp. 320–330)²⁷ preserve evidence suggesting that ongoing observation of one's own mental states and processes became a daily practice for Egyptian monks. Instructions such as “observe (βλέπε) yourself” (*Apophth. patr.* alphabetical collection, Macarius the Great 21, PG 65:272) or “observe your thoughts (τηρεῖτε τοὺς διαλογισμοὺς), and beware of what you have in your heart” (*Apophth. patr.* alphabetical collection, Elias 4, PG 65:184)²⁸ abound in the *Apophthegmata*. The communities described here were clearly ones in which a regular practice of rigorous self-observation of one's thought processes was expected and emphasized.

Unfortunately, in the *Apophthegmata*, we have relatively little in the way of direct description of what exactly this exercise was supposed to look like. The first to offer an explicit and technical description of the procedures designed to produce self-knowledge was Evagrius Ponticus (345–399 CE), one of the most influential monastic authors in the 4th century. Relying on the introspective tradition that he inherited from the Desert Fathers and on his personal experience, Evagrius fashioned introspective tools that were of lasting value for later Christian spirituality (see [Bitton-Ashkelony, 2011](#), p. 292; [McGinn, 1999](#), pp. 148–149).

Evagrius interpreted the Delphic maxim “know thyself” as referring to the need to observe one's ongoing thought processes, instructing, “Learn to know yourself (ἐπίγνωθι σαυθόν) by perceiving the secret dispersing of your thoughts (λογισμῶν)” (*Evagrius, Eulogios*, PG 79:1132).²⁹ In his widely read treatise *Praktikos*, he provided specific instructions on how this should be done:

Let him [the monk] observe his thoughts (τηρεῖτω τοὺς λογισμοὺς) and note their intensity and their relaxation, their interrelationships, their occasions, which . . . follows upon another and which does not follow another; and let him seek from Christ the reasons for these things. (*Evagrius, Praktikos* 50, SC 171:614)³⁰

The essence of the methodology that Evagrius proposed is introspective—based on rigorous and systematic observation of one's own mental and emotional processes. Yet

²⁷ Currently, most scholars treat the *Apophthegmata Patrum* as a reliable source for the study of early monasticism.

²⁸ This view was not limited to early Egyptian monasticism. The Syrian author of the *Spiritual Homilies*, for example, recommended, “Be attentive to yourself, observing your thoughts and your activities (πρόσεχε σεαυτῷ, ἐπέχων τοῖς λογισμοῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐνεργείαις)” (*Pseudo-Macarius, Spiritual Homilies* 31.6 [PG 34:732C]; cf. alphabetical collection, Poemen 32 and Zeno 6; systematic collection 3.1; 3.27; 11.58; 16.4; 21.22). See also Sean Garth Moberg, “The *Apophthegmata Patrum* and the Greek Philosophical Tradition,” PhD dissertation, submitted to The Catholic University of America, 2016.

²⁹ Already in the 3rd century, Origen of Alexandria interpreted the Biblical verse “unless you know thyself (*cognosce teipsum*), o fair one among women” (*Song of Songs* 1: 81, LXX) as follows: “The passage before us enjoins the soul, under the figure of a woman, that she should know herself (*ut agnoscat semetipsam*) . . . distinguishing in every case between what must be done and what must be avoided, between what you lack and what you have in full, what needs to be amended and what has to be preserved (*Commentary on the Song of Songs* 1.9 [PG 13:125]).

³⁰ See also *Eulogios* 16, PG 79: 1112–1113. Evagrius specified the benefits of this form of self-examination: “It is necessary to know these things, so that when thoughts begin to move their own particular matter (τὰς ἰδίας ὕλας), and before we are driven too far from our proper state, we may speak out to them and indicate which one is present” (*Praktikos* 43 [SC 171:600]). Cf. *Apophth. patr.* anonymous collection N 670: “We must arm ourselves prior to temptations . . . and in this way we will be clearly seen to be ready for them when they come upon us” ([Wortley, 2013](#), p. 536).

Evagrius, no less than introspective psychologists at the turn of the 20th century,³¹ was well aware that introspection could not always be done during the mental experience itself, because on these occasions “the mind is muddled and does not see accurately what is happening” (Evagrius, *On Thoughts* 9, SC 438:184). Because in the normal flow of experience a perception is often already over when we decide to observe it, Evagrius recommended a form of introspection that involved a retrospective analysis of one’s interior experience so as to understand the process better:

Sit down [after the experience has passed] and remind yourself [μνημόνευσον κατὰ σεαυτόν] where you started from, where you went, and the place in which you were caught . . . and how these things took place. Examine [κατάμαθε] these events carefully and commit them to memory. (Evagrius, *On Thoughts* 9, SC 438:182)

Evagrius recommended that the monk sit down and carefully review his interior experience in detail. Through rigorous observation and retrospective analysis of his mental processes, the monk could learn to recognize his habitual patterns of thinking, in order to reorient them so as to focus his attention on the thought of God alone.

Evagrius’s disciple, John Cassian, transferred his teaching from the Egyptian desert to the Latin West in the beginning of the 5th century. Following Evagrius, Cassian promoted a detached mode of observation of one’s own mental processes: “All the secret places of our heart, therefore, must be constantly scrutinized [*jugiter perscrutandi sunt*]” (Cassian, 1997; *Coll.* 1.22 [CSEL 13: 33–34]; cf. *Coll.* 15.10.4; 16.11.1; 24.9.1; 24.9.4). According to Cassian (1997),

We should . . . with a wise discernment, observe [*observare*] all the thoughts that emerge in our heart, first tracing their origins and causes and their author, so that, in accordance with the status of whoever is suggesting them, we may be able to consider how we should approach them. . . . We should carefully scrutinize [*omni scrupulo*] whatever enters our hearts. (*Coll.* 1.20.1–1.21.2 [CSEL 13:29])

Cassian clearly believed that we are able to introspect—to look in on and monitor our mental events. He compared this activity with that of a moneychanger who examines a coin, carefully considering the effigy the coin bears, the metal of which it is made and the workshop from which it comes. In the same way, Cassian explained, the monk must scrutinize his thoughts and verify their quality, their roots, and their origin. Although the metaphor of the money changer was already employed by Stoic philosophers of the imperial period, for the Stoics, it had a different meaning. For them, this metaphor meant that as soon as an idea came to mind, one had to think of the philosophical principles that must be applied to evaluate it. For Cassian, on the other hand, being a money changer meant examining one’s thought processes in order to decipher their mechanisms, their causes, and their consequences.³² Elsewhere, he referred to this activity using the Latin verb *introspicere*—the etymological root of the English word “introspection” (Cassian, 1997, *Coll.* 10.9 [CSEL 13:296]).

³¹ The Würzburg psychologists, and later Edward B. Titchener, developed a form of experimental introspection involving the retrospective analysis of remembered consciousness. As Titchener (1903) explained,

Many of our most interesting mental processes are very hard to catch . . . and will be gone before there is an opportunity to introspect them . . . To get over this difficulty, you must wait to introspect until the processes that you wish to examine have passed by . . . Then call them back by memory, and look at them. (pp. 28–29)

On retrospection, see also Leahey (1992).

³² On the difference between Stoic and Christian self-examination, see Martin et al. (1988, p. 38). On Origen’s adaptation of the Stoic theory of mental representations, see Gibbons (2011, p. 118).

Thanks to Cassian's introspective accounts, we have, for the first time in Western history, a description of the stream of thoughts. Grounding his arguments in self-observation, Cassian described the human propensity for mind wandering, observing that "the mind cannot possibly remain in one and the same state," and trying to stabilize it is like "trying to force a boat against the stream of a strong current [*flumen*]" (Cassian, 1997, Coll. 7.23 [CSEL 13: 202]). Cassian described the succession of thoughts as a stream. Although William James is credited by modern commentators with coining the phrase "stream of thoughts," a similar metaphor—*agmina cogitationum natantia*—was already employed by Cassian (Cassian, 1997, Coll. 24.3 [CSEL 13:677–8]).

Although Cassian's introspective accounts of the stream of thoughts are, in some respects, very similar to modern accounts, his evaluation of this pan-human cognitive phenomenon is radically different. Whereas today the ongoing stream of shifting thoughts and images represents the normal operation of ordinary human consciousness, for Cassian, it epitomized an unhealthy and unnatural condition, and hence his account bears a strongly negative tone. The mind, he laments, always wanders [*mens errabunda*], as if intoxicated [*ebria*], among various matters, and "cannot even retain firm hold for any length of time of anything spiritual" (Cassian, 1997, Coll. 10.8 [CSEL 13:296]). Although Cassian acknowledged that this mental activity was part of the normal functioning of the human mind in its present state ("The mind cannot be free from agitating thoughts during the trials of the present life"; Coll. 10.8 [CSEL 13:296]),³³ he insisted that it was not *natural*: "We should not attribute this wandering of our heart [*evagationem cordis*] either to human nature or to God who created it" (Cassian, 1997, Coll. 7.4.3 [CSEL 13:183]).

Cassian's negative evaluation of mind wandering rested on the assumption that inner unity and stability constituted the natural (prelapsarian) and healthy condition of the mind, whereas a lack of self-unity—epitomized in the ever-changing stream of thoughts—represented an unhealthy tendency toward inner multiplicity and fragmentation. The negative view of multiplicity and fragmentation in Christian theology is a major source of divergence between early monastic and modern introspective accounts of the stream of thoughts. For late antique monks, mind wandering was laden with moral and religious meaning.³⁴ Yet the mind's proclivity for wandering was not just a moral problem but also a practical one, because the ever-changing stream of earthly thoughts, perceptions, and emotions interfered with seeking detachment from the material world and engagement with the spiritual world (see Kroll & Bachrach, 2006, p. 47). Because the goal of the monk was to devote himself single mindedly to contemplation of God, the ever-changing stream of thoughts was the greatest enemy of contemplative monks. Their introspective accounts bear the marks of this negative evaluation.

This unwanted mental activity was understood within the explanatory framework of monastic demonology. Far from assuming that the mind wanders "simply because it can," as contemporary psychologists hold (see Mason et al., 2007), late antique monks ascribed the mind's tendency to wander to the sinister influence of demons: In their attempt to divert monks from their spiritual pursuit, demons spoke to them interiorly, through their thoughts, suggesting to them sinful or simply distracting thoughts (see Evagrius, *Eulogios* 33, PG 79: 1137). Furthermore, the demons did not attack randomly but adapted their strategies to the monk's internal disposition.³⁵ Knowledge on their activity, therefore, could be obtained through introspection. As one of the Desert Fathers instructed his

³³ See, however, Evagrius, *Praktikos* 68 and 87 (SC 171: 652 and 678).

³⁴ Distraction (*περισπασμός*) is defined as "the beginning of evil," in *Apophth. patr.* systematic collection 2.24 (SC 387: 138): ἀρχὴ κακῶν ἐστὶν ὁ περισπασμός. On the discrepancy between theological and contemporary scientific views of the multiplicity of self, see Turner (2011). For contemporary approaches to self-plurality as a potential means of maximizing one's possibility for actualization, see Cooper (1999).

³⁵ See Athanasius, VA 42.5 (SC 400: 250): "For when they [the demons] come, their actions correspond to the condition in which they find us; they pattern their phantasms after our thoughts."

disciple: “Observe your thoughts [τηρεῖτε τοὺς διαλογισμοὺς] . . . knowing that the demons put ideas into you so as to corrupt your soul” (*Apophth. patr.* alphabetical collection, Elias 4, PG 65: 184). Or in the words of Hesychius the Priest, “Someone who looks [βλέπει] into his own heart sees in it not only his own state, but also the black faces of the demons” (Hesychius the Priest, 1979, *On Watchfulness and Holiness* 23, PG 93: 1480D–1544).

The ease with which monastic authors moved between the personal realm of thoughts and the cosmic realm of external influences suggests that their self-understanding embraced both these realms. Rather than assuming a sharp distinction between the mind and everything outside it, monastic introspection assumed that the mind is an integral part of the cosmos and its processes are influenced by external powers, both good and evil.³⁶ As Palladius, bishop of Helenopolis, explained in the 5th century: “The mind is naturally exposed to waves of evil, both visible and invisible.”³⁷ This observation presents a pattern of relationship between the mind and the world in which external powers continually act upon the mind, imprinting it and affecting it. Through introspection, the monk could recognize and investigate these influences. The focus on exterior causality thus easily coexisted with an emphasis on interior disposition. In this way, demonology enabled monastic authors to trace external influences on the human mind while maintaining an internal responsibility for harboring them.³⁸

On the basis of theological and demonological premises as well as detailed observation of mental phenomena,³⁹ Evagrius was able to map complex cognitive-emotional processes and how they are shaped by external influences. For example, he distinguished between different types of thoughts according to their source—angelic, human, and demonic—and classified the latter type of thoughts according to their theme into eight general categories: “All the thoughts fall into eight general categories, in which every sort of thought is included” (Evagrius, *Praktikos* 6, SC 171:508). These thoughts, which were associated with demonic influence on different parts or faculties of the soul,⁴⁰ included gluttony, lust, greed, sadness, anger, sloth or laziness (*accidie*), vainglory, and pride. Though Evagrius’s schema of generic thoughts was informed by earlier traditions, the monastic context in which he lived clearly determined which issues merited inclusion in his schema.

Evagrius further taught that the eight generic thoughts are linked together in a chain, so that any excess of the one formed a starting point for the next. Sadness, for example, which is associated with the reactive faculty of the soul, is caused by frustration of

³⁶ Taylor (1989, p. 186) argues that the sharp partitioning of inside and outside is a result of the modern disengagement from the cosmic order. Seigel (2005) outlines the history of the idea of the private inner self.

³⁷ Palladius, *HL*, prologue, 7: γνώμη ἡ διαφόροις κακίαις ὁραταῖς τε καὶ ἀοράτοις κυμαίνεσθαι πέφυκε (Ed. Bartelink, 8). See also Maximus Confessor, *Capita de caritate* 3.92 (PG 90:1045; SC 9:149): “Our mind is in the middle of two things, each one active at its own work, the one at virtue, the other at vice, in other words between angel and devil.” On the nexus between demonology, cosmology and anthropology, see G. A. Smith (2008, pp. 481–482) and Pelikan (1993).

³⁸ On this aspect of monastic demonology, see Stewart (2011) as well as Stewart (2005).

³⁹ For example, *On Thoughts* 8 (SC 438: 176), 25 (SC 438: 240), and 34 (SC 438: 270); *Praktikos* 51 (SC 171: 616). On self-observation as a source of self-knowledge in Antony’s letters, see Rubenson (1995, pp. 59–64).

⁴⁰ Though Evagrius’s theology was marked by a strong tendency to stress the mind, he sometimes talked about “soul” (ψυχή) rather than “mind.” Following Plato and the later Aristotelian tradition, he considered the soul to be tripartite and ruled by the mind or reasoning faculty (νοῦς, λογιστικόν, or ἡγεμονικόν). In these contexts, νοῦς was seen as the ruling part of the soul (e.g., Evagrius, *On Thoughts* 17 [SC 438: 210]; Cassian, 1997; *Coll.* 24.15 [CSEL 13: 691]). In other cases, however, “soul” was given a wider significance than νοῦς: It involved one’s entire spiritual being in an abstract way, in contrast to one’s bodily aspect. On this subject, see Stock (2011). Stock traces two ways of looking at the self in antiquity and late antiquity—as closely related to the soul, or as independent of the soul—and argue that Christian writings on the subject adopt the latter view.

desire or following in the aftermath of anger.⁴¹ Following Evagrius, Cassian explained that the generic thoughts (to which he referred as vices [*vitia*]) “are connected among themselves by a certain affinity and, so to speak, interlinking (*inter se cognatione et . . . concatenatione conexa sunt*), such that the overflow of the previous one serves as the start of the next one” (*Coll.* 5.10.1 [CSEL 13:129]).⁴² Thoughts are thus not isolated mental events but rather represent human tendencies of thinking and imagination or cognitive-emotional trajectories in constant movement.⁴³ Furthermore, although the generic thoughts “disturb the whole human race,” nonetheless “they do not assail everyone in the same way”. Thus, there are those who are troubled primarily by fornication, while others are tormented mostly by anger, and so forth.⁴⁴ Each monk therefore ought to scrutinize his own thoughts and discover his own principal vice in order to uproot it.

By mapping cognitive-emotional processes and their interrelationship, Evagrius, followed by Cassian, was able to develop a simple yet flexible psychology of temptation, which was based on both theological principles and detailed observation of mental phenomena, as well as a practical, therapeutic psychology, which seeks to heal the mind through various methods of intervention and transformation. A thorough account of early monastic psychological theories and therapies, however, is outside the scope of this article. What it is important for the present discussion is to recognize that this psychology was based, to a large extent, on evidence derived from introspection,⁴⁵ which was understood within the explanatory model of monastic demonology and interpreted in the light of Scripture. In this process, theology, demonology, and evidence derived from introspection were systematically combined to produce psychological knowledge, and this knowledge, in turn, served diagnostic purposes and was applied in psychological praxis.

⁴¹ Evagrius, *Praktikos* 10 (SC 171:514):

When certain thoughts 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 sadness with the realization that former things are no more and cannot be again because of the present way of life. And the miserable soul, the more it allowed itself to be dispersed among the former thoughts, the more it has now become hemmed in and humiliated by these latter ones. (cf. *Praktikos* 12, and Cassian, *Coll.* 5.11.7)

Although the generic thoughts are mentioned frequently in all of Evagrius’s writings, the schema of eight thoughts as such appears in only a few works. For a full account of his scheme of the eight generic thoughts and their succession, see Corrigan (2009, pp. 83–88).

⁴² Cassian relied on Evagrius’s scheme, yet whereas the latter considered the generic thoughts as negative thought trajectories, which may lead to sin, Cassian treated them as sins or vices (*vitia*) produced by these negative tendencies. On Cassian’s adaptation of Evagrius’s theory, see Chadwick (1950, pp. 84–88).

⁴³ It would be interesting to compare this notion of the succession of thoughts with the modern theory of the association of ideas in the mind. The concept of an “association of ideas,” which was first used by John Locke and further developed by David Hume, holds that different thoughts and ideas are always connected to each other in their appearance in memory or imagination. William James, who further developed this idea, maintained that these connections are determined by habit, recency in experience, vividness in an original experience, and emotional congruity between the reproduced idea and our mood. Although modern and monastic authors share the idea that thoughts are not isolated mental events but always connected to each other, the monastic notion of succession of thoughts seeks to trace the deeper dispositional roots of these connections. Monastic authors would have disagreed with Hume’s argument (in his *Treatise of Human Nature*) that we are nothing but a collection of our successive thoughts and impressions.

⁴⁴ Cassian (*Coll.* 5.13 [CSEL 13:136]): “In one person the spirit of fornication is dominant, in another wrath rides roughshod, in a third vainglory tyrannizes, and in still another pride holds sway. And although it is evident that we are all attacked by all of these, yet we each suffer in different ways and manners.”

⁴⁵ For example, when Evagrius introduces his theory concerning the succession of thoughts, he explain, “We have observed (*παρτηρήσαντες*) these successions, and this is what we have discovered (*εὐρίσκομεν*)” (*Thoughts* 34 [SC 438: 270]). Elsewhere in his treatises, Evagrius makes it abundantly clear that his psychological observations rely mainly on his own experience and observation, as well as those of his teachers, the Desert Fathers: “After lengthy observation we have learned” (*Thoughts* 8 [SC 438: 176]); “Watch carefully and you will discover” (*Praktikos* 51 [SC 171: 616]); “My own proof in most cases is the heart of my reader” (*Thoughts* 25 [SC 438: 240]).

Introspective methods of data production thus enabled Evagrius and his followers to carve up a field of psychological phenomena in a very different way from modern psychology. The recurrence of certain questions and investigative procedures in late antique and modern psychologies, therefore, should not be understood as implying that these methods arose from similar aims and perspectives. Rather, it is exactly the profound differences between modern and late antique perspectives that are most instructive, inasmuch as they enable addressing key questions concerning the relationship between psychological knowledge and culturally constructed categories.

Between Description and Explanation in Introspection

The move from premodern to modern psychology involved profound changes in the conceptual frameworks for interpreting introspective data and in the practical rules for its production.⁴⁶ An important aspect of these changes is epitomized in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*'s definition of introspection as a process that generates "knowledge about mental events, states, or processes, and not about affairs outside one's mind" (Schwitzgebel, 2016). This definition reflects our modern experience of the mind and its relationship with the surrounding world, which assumes a sharp distinction between an inner, subjective world and an external, objective realm. This sharp partitioning of internal and external causation was a necessary first step in the construction of a new field of study—the inner world of the *isolated* individual mind. This definition of the object of psychological investigation has shaped the introspective accounts of the founders of modern psychology.

William James's account of consciousness, which has been described as "the point of origin of all subsequent consideration of self by psychologists and sociologists" (B. M. Smith, 1993, p. 179), provides a clear example. James, who was among the foremost advocates of introspection as a source of psychological knowledge,⁴⁷ relied on data derived from introspection when he argued in Chapter 9 of his *Principles of Psychology*:

In this room—this lecture-room, say—there are a multitude of thoughts, yours and mine. . . . My thought belongs with my other thoughts, and your thought with your other thoughts . . . The only states of consciousness that we naturally deal with are found in personal consciousness, minds, selves, concrete particular I's and you's. Each of these minds keeps its own thoughts to itself . . . Absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism, is the law. It seems as if the elementary psychic fact were not thought or this thought or that thought, but my thought, every thought being owned . . . Everyone will recognize this to be true, so long as the existence of something corresponding to the term "personal mind" is all that is insisted on, without any particular view of its nature being implied. (James, 1890, pp. 228–229)

For James, thoughts are necessarily part of a personal mind, which is perceived as a private space, a secluded entity in "absolute insulation." Whereas monastic introspection assumed a correlation between the mind and the world, or internal and external causation, James's introspective accounts of consciousness assume that our thoughts and ideas are "within" us, whereas the objects in the world that these mental states bear on are "without" us.

Edward Titchener's discussion of self-consciousness in his classical textbook on psychology provides another illustration of the subtle ways in which tacit theoretical assumptions shape psychological categories. Drawing on evidence derived from experimental introspective procedures, Titchener (1903) concluded,

⁴⁶ For a discussion, see Bohme (1977) and Danziger (1990, pp. 3–4).

⁴⁷ As James (1890) explained, "Introspective observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always" (p. 190).

Your “self,” the self that you perceive at this moment, is probably composed of pressures, temperatures, strains, breaths, and so forth. . . . Now that your attention is called to yourself, the perceived self comes out plainly: . . . All this mass of felt sensations is yourself. (p. 25)

Whereas Titchener interprets data derived from introspection to suggest that the self is “plainly” the sum of its sensations, early monastic introspection was based on the assumption that the true self is *different* from its ever-changing stream of thoughts, emotions, and sensations. As we have seen, evidence derived from introspection was interpreted to suggest that these processes were not part of the *natural* constitution of human beings but rather had an external source, and hence they were not identical with the true (prelapsarian) self.⁴⁸

Although Titchener’s account of consciousness drew on different introspective methods than did James’s account,⁴⁹ their interpretations of data derived from introspection mirror a similar conceptual framework—one that is very different from the conceptual framework that shaped late antique introspective accounts. Not only did this framework determine the interpretation, evaluation, and organization of data derived from introspection—it was powerful enough to shape the very experience that was being introspected.

The juxtaposition of modern and late antique introspective accounts thus demonstrates the subtle ways in which the investigative method, namely, introspection, and the object of investigation—the isolated individual mind of modern psychology or the more penetrable and porous mind of late antiquity—mutually confirm each other. Whereas the advocates of introspection have argued that “all introspection presupposes the standpoint of descriptive psychology,” and hence the results to which introspection leads are “logically prior to any sort of systematization” (Titchener, 1912, p. 487),⁵⁰ the profound differences between modern and late antique interpretations of introspective data reveal the extent to which description and explanation are intermixed in human thought. Even an apparently private technique like introspection turns out to be, to a large extent, culturally constructed.

The fact that psychological knowledge bears the marks of the cultural context in which it is produced does not necessarily mean that it is nothing but a reflection of that context; in fact, the above discussion has uncovered not only radical differences but also basic similarities between late antique and modern introspective accounts of the stream of thoughts. Yet it is only by considering both the differences and the similarities between different *types* of psychologies that we can recognize what is perhaps cross-cultural in psychology and what is culturally constructed; it is only by comparing different *types* of psychologies with each other that we can recognize the tacit anthropological assumptions on which they rest and the extent to which these assumptions shape psychological knowledge.

William James’s discussion of selfhood in *The Principles of Psychology* provides, as always, a good illustration. His famous chapter on “The Stream of Thought” opens with an exemplary statement of his phenomenological methodology—the deliberate setting aside of presuppositions in order to attend as faithfully as possible to the presenting phenomena (James, 1890, p. 227).⁵¹ As we have seen, however, this is easier said than done; some of our presuppositions are so deeply embedded that they go unnoticed, and setting them aside is not

⁴⁸ According to Cassian, “We should not attribute the wandering of our heart (*evagationem cordis*) either to human nature or to God who created it” (*Coll.* 7.4.3 [CSEL 13:183]).

⁴⁹ James had little interest in the tightly controlled experimental introspection of Wundt and Titchener. See Leahey, 1992 (p. 311).

⁵⁰ Although Titchener insisted that the results to which introspection leads are “logically prior to any sort of systematisation,” he did acknowledge that in practice, description and explanation “are likely to be intermixed” (p. 499). For additional arguments for the reliability of introspection, see Bakan (1954) and Hurlburt and Heavey (2001). On the other hand, according to Dennett (1991), “We are fooling ourselves about the high reliability of introspection . . . about the idea that it is a matter of just ‘looking and seeing’” (p. 67).

⁵¹ The presuppositions James particularly wanted to avoid had to do with elementary sensations. For a discussion, see B. M. Smith (1993).

necessarily a matter of simple choice. Acquaintance with Cassian's accounts of the stream of thoughts might have helped James recognize at least some of his presuppositions concerning the phenomena of the human mind.

By offering alternative conceptualizations of psychological data and investigative procedures, therefore, the theistic psychology of the early monastic movement enables us to gain a reflective distance from the explanatory models of modern psychology, in order to address key questions concerning the nature of psychological knowledge and its limitations, in an attempt to overcome these limitations. The opportunity to use psychology's past in order to gain new insight into its present constitutes, I believe, an important benefit to be derived from broadening the scholarly focus on the history of the *discipline* of psychology to include the history of psychological knowledge.

To the extent that the modern interest in interiority and exploration of the inner world of the individual ultimately go back to the first centuries of monastic history, the monastic corpus offers a wealth of possibilities that still has hardly been broached. For historians of psychology who are willing to make this endeavor, it provides an opportunity to explore, among other things, the complex relationship between continuity and discontinuity in psychology's past. Far from being mutually exclusive, analyses provided in this study suggest that continuity and discontinuity are intertwined in subtle ways. In stressing the latter at the expense of the former, historians run the risk of arriving at mistaken or inaccurate conclusions, as the test case of introspection demonstrates. Whether my hypothesis concerning the late antique roots of introspection is accepted or not, evidence presented in this study suggests, at the very least, that the history of introspection needs to be reconsidered once again, this time from a broader perspective. Our understanding of various other psychological practices and ideas can also be improved by adopting a wider historical perspective and a broader definition of what constitutes psychological knowledge.⁵² The vast potential for constructive dialogue and theory refinement across the disciplines of history and psychology remains to be explored. Here lies, I believe, an important direction for the future of the history of psychology.

⁵² For a reassessment of the historical roots of the modern category of "obsession" from a broad historical perspective, see Graiver (2018, Chapter 4).

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