

Evagrius on Avarice

Avarice=fixated on and gripped by thoughts of possessions (vs. freedom from possessions in *Vic.*, prologue)

- According to *Vic.* 3, it is linked with injustice—hoarding and stinginess (not sharing with others) plus envy (evil desire that what others have should be or become one's own)
- Evagrius describes the avaricious person as
 - worrying about things until they make themselves sick and
 - suffering from possessions instead of allowing the suffering of Jesus on the cross to set them free from the world
 - In *8Th.* 3.1 and *Th.* 1, Evagrius even goes so far as to describe avarice as the root of all evils (1 Tim. 6:10), even though strictly speaking this should be false self-love or pride in Evagrius' system.
 - The reason for this is that Evagrius describes avarice as unlimited wanting, so when one want is cut off, another sprouts up to take its place (*8Th.* 3.1-2),
 - Also until avarice is cut off, it is impossible to make any progress against pride (*Th.* 1)
 - “It appears to me that the demon of avarice is the most varied and ingenious in deceit” (*Th.* 21).
 - Evagrius also says in *Th.* App. 1 and App. 2 that the initial impure thoughts that arise in the monks mind have to do with avarice (securing possessions), gluttony (securing food) and vainglory (securing honor). These cause the mind to become thickened and unable to pray as it ought, since the thoughts prevent the mind from being moved in a rational manner and seek the Word of God (*Pr.* 50)
- Evagrius describes the avaricious person as weighed down by memories of possessions and bound to them by worry (*8Th.* 3.7), briefly rejoicing when he gains something, but mostly pained by thoughts and stung by sadness when he thinks he will not, enslaved by many masters (*8Th.* 3.9).
 - Avarice→sadness (*8Th.* 5.12,17)
 - Avarice →fear of the future (fear of what might be lacking in the future)→sadness (*Pr.* 9)
- Evagrius most interesting explanation of avarice is in *Th.* 19: “a pleasure hostile to humanity, born of free will, and compelling the mind to make improper use of the creatures of God.”
 - For Evagrius the solution is the knowledge that comes through the law of God, which shows that God is one's security and will supply what is needed, which takes away the fear of lack and the aggression toward the other, who is no longer seen as a competitor for limited resources.

- At a practical level, this may occur by substituting another thought or picture for the picture of possessions, since the mind can only hold one thing in its focus/attention at a time; see *Th.* 24.
- Almsgiving can also be used to refocus the mind (*Exh.* 1.2), since giving
 - is an act of trust and presupposes that God will supply one's own needs even if one gives some of what one has to the neighbor
 - stirs up love for the neighbor, which can replace the sick focus upon oneself (in competition with the neighbor, even at the expense of the neighbor) that characterizes avarice.