Analogia

St Maximus
THE
CONFESSOR

We are not to fight against creation, which has been created by God, but to the contrary we must fight against the disordered and unnatural movements and activities of the powers within us.

(Responses to Thalassios 51)

EDITORIAL

It is best, perhaps, to introduce St Maximus the Confessor with an excerpt that I wrote some years ago:

> The most important thing to emphasize insofar as St Maximus the Confessor's contribution is concerned, is that he does not merely represent a personal theological view among those of other Greek patristic theologians (although he has a strong personal style), but is also an excellent key to the understanding of a considerable portion of the theology of other Fathers. Having assimilated almost every kind of theology before him, he also opened the ways of its future: there is not one important theological figure after him who does not bear his influence in same way or other. Thus when we speak of Maximus, we do not speak of another patristic figure, not even an eminently important one, but rather one of the centers around which the Greek patristic tradition constantly gravitates…I believe his theological achievement provides an impetus to discover again the core of the author's inspiration in the light of our own need to be inspired again today. In this way we are also capable of reworking some of the most delicate actual theological-philosophical issues: tradition means always reinterpretation, a new perception and evolution, without losing its center. As such, the most ground-breaking spiritual 'discoveries' are, in this sense, nothing different than a reworking of some of the 'cores of tradition'.

In recent years we have witnessed an explosion of dissertations, conferences, workshops, books, collections of essays, and papers—most of which are of high academic quality—dedicated to various aspects of the Confessor's theology. Following this rich harvest, there is no doubt that Maximus represents one of the spiritual peaks of Christian theology. No future expressions of Christian theology, worthy of its name, can afford to ignore his thought. Indeed, perhaps no Christian intellectual engagement with modern ideas and difficulties will be convincing unless it also takes into account his extremely creative and challenging theological suggestions. However, no one can really and ultimately follow Maximus' example unless he is himself creative and ground-breaking, in both an academic and existential sense. The Maximian fountain is inexhaustible precisely because his work is not merely the achievement of a good academic, but the immense feat of a Christian martyr.

Analogia owes the inspiration and the cause of this issue to one of the members of the Editorial Board, namely Dr Sotiris Mitralexis, who organized the workshop on St Maximus at the twenty-third International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Belgrade, August 2016, and invited many of the contributors of the present volume.

Though not all of the workshop participants offered their papers for publication in *Analogia*, most of the articles in this volume were presented as drafts at the Belgrade workshop. The articles by two of the contributors, Bishop Atanasije Jevtić and Fr Maximos Constas, were added later. I wish to thank, first, Dr Mitralexis for his willingness to contribute the papers from the Belgrade workshop to this issue of *Analogia,* which has greatly assisted the journal's editorial purposes. Second, I would like to thank the authors for their efforts towards the production of papers of high academic quality.

Regarding the articles themselves, Fr Maximos Constas offers an excellent account of the ways in which Dionysius and Maximus transformed Neoplatonism, by making markedly different use of its philosophical concepts. He focuses in particular upon the retooling of the paradigms, *remaining, procession*, and *return*. Vladimir Cvetković convincingly describes the four different modes/stages of union between God and his creatures. This union depends on the manifestations of the divine presence in creation as creator, provider, and objective, the latter of which defines, gives meaning to, and fulfils all the others. Emma Brown Dewhurst provides a fruitful comparison between Athanasius and Maximus the Confessor regarding the concepts of being and non-being. She suggests an existential Maximian reading of the Athanasius' understanding of sin as the rejection of being. Nevena Dimitrova explores the extremely important meaning of desire in Maximus, and she successfully clarifies the process of the dynamic completion of human nature through Maximus' modification of the philosophical concept of will. Fr Demetrios Harper skilfully elaborates upon a new description of the Maximian understanding of moral judgment in the context of what he calls an *analogical ethic.* Bishop Atanasije Jevtić offers a profound description of the way in which the incarnational mystery of Christ is realized in every man, through life as a participatory and existential experience of the *Gospel*, through and in the Church. Jevtić also makes special reference to the Maximian character of the Sixth Ecumenical Council. Smilen Markov explores the concept of wisdom in Origen, Dionysius, Maximus, and Photius, eloquently articulating the participatory and epistemological dimensions thereof. Sebastian Mateiescu provides a pertinent analysis of Maximus' use of Nemesius of Emesa concerning the relationship between soul and body. Mateiescu discusses the limits of this relationship insofar as it is applied to the description of the Christological mystery. Sotiris Mitralexis proposes a reading of the Maximian theology of sexes that radically departs from both the Old (Genesis) and New Testament (*e.g.* Gal 3:28). He states that Maximus 'not only asserts that sexual difference itself (and not only sexual division or reproduction) will not endure the eschata', but also that 'the differentiation between male and female is not even part of humanity's logos of nature'. Dionysios Skliris studies the shifting roles, according to Maximus, between dominated and dominator through the influence of the former upon the latter. He discusses Maximus' understanding of eschatological liberation from this dialectic

of domination, with which pleasure and pain are closely connected. Skliris argues that Maximus' refutation of Monoenergism enables him to conceptualize this escape from the dialectic. Finally, in my article, I strive to conclude a long theological debate with modern Orthodox Personalism and show that, in Maximus, nature is essentially *dialogical*. That is, I argue against the imposition upon Maximus of any abstract separation of nature from person. In the Confessor's view, person is *enousion*, not an abstract ecstatic detachment from nature. Will, for Maximus, is an expression of the inner life of nature, both in anthropology and Christology, and stands in opposition to any transcendental conception thereof. I also strive to show that neither Trinitarian life nor human fulfilment can be theologically articulated without the concept of *homoousion*. Finally, I seek to inaugurate a systematic discussion of these notions within the context of modern Philosophy and Psychology.

– Nikolaos Loudovikos
Senior Editor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Maximus the Confessor, Dionysius the Areopagite, and the Transformation of Christian Neoplatonism

MAXIMOS CONSTAS

Senior Research Scholar,
Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, Mass.

Maximus the Confessor and Dionysius the Areopagite are two of the most important representatives of what is often called Christian Neoplatonism, yet each made markedly different use of Neoplatonic categories and concepts. To date, there are no major studies comparing their respective responses to later Greek philosophy, which, this paper argues, are aligned with their respective responses to Origenism. To examine this phenomenon, this paper studies the Confessor's systematic restructuring of the Neoplatonic cycle of 'remaining, procession, and return', which departs significantly from the forms this cycle takes in the *corpus Dionysiacum*. Maximus' doctrine of the *logoi*, including the centrality of the incarnate Logos to his metaphysics, is at once a radical critique of Origenism, a tacit dismissal of Dionysian hierarchies, and a comprehensive rethinking of Christian Neoplatonism.

Introduction

Maximus the Confessor (580–662) was active at a time when Greek patristic theology and Platonic philosophy had reached their greatest maturity, evident from the Confessor's own writings, in which theology and philosophy are intricately intertwined in a complex and far-reaching Christian metaphysics. A highly synthetic thinker, Maximus drew freely on a diverse body of philosophical and theological sources. His anthropology, for example, was largely inspired by the writings of Gregory of Nyssa (whom he invokes as an authority).[1] For his ascetic theology, he owed a tremendous debt to the work of Evagrius of Pontus (whom he never mentions by name).[2] His interpretation of Scripture closely followed the hermeneutics of Philo

---

[1] *Cf. Ad Thalassium* 1.1 (CCSG 7:47); *Quaestiones et dubia* 19 (CCSG 10:17–18); and I.P. Sheldon-Williams, 'Maximus', in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy,* ed., A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 492: 'The universe of Maximus is that of Dionysius with a place found in it for the anthropology of Gregory of Nyssa.' Maximus' esteem for Nyssa did not prevent him from modifying some of the latter's signature doctrines, on which see: Paul Blowers, 'Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa and the concept of "Perpetual Progress"', *Vigiliae Christianae* 46 (1992): 151–71; and Maximos Constas, 'A Greater and More Hidden Word: Maximos the Confessor and the Nature of Language', in *Maximos the Confessor: A European Philosopher,* ed. Sotiris Mitralexis (forthcoming).

[2] Maximus systematically modified Evagrius' theology, redefining, for example, the *logoi* of 'judgment and providence' (*cf. Ambiguum* 10.37 [DOML 1:207]), and introducing the Dionysian notion of 'ecstasy'

and Origen (as modified by the Cappadocians and Dionysius the Areopagite).[3] One could point to other theological influences as well, including Gregory Nazianzus, Nemesios of Emesa, Cyril of Alexandria, John of Skythopolis, Leontios of Byzantium, and, not least, the Definitions of the first five Ecumenical Councils, especially the Councils of Chalcedon (451) and Constantinople (553).[4]

Maximus' philosophical sources, on the other hand, have proven difficult to identify with any certainty, although many of his theoretical categories and concerns are consistent with the Platonizing Aristotelianism characteristic of contemporary schools and writers.[5] It seems clear, however, that Maximus derived his fundamental philosophical framework from the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite, and that it was within this framework that the various influences mentioned above interacted in a dynamic and in many ways unprecedented synthesis.[6] While several scholars have compared and contrasted various Dionysian themes with the thought of the Confessor, a full-length monograph on this subject remains a critical desideratum.[7] It is to be similarly regretted that, whereas the modern explosion of interest

into the highest stage of Evagrian spiritual ascent (*cf.* Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism* [Rome: Herder, 1955], 124–54). On Maximus' revision of the *Chapters of the Disciples of Evagrios,* see: Maximos Constas, '"Nothing is Greater than Divine Love": Evagrios of Pontos, St Maximos the Confessor, and the *Philokalia*', in *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: Studies in Honour of Metropolitan Kallistos Ware* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), 57–74.

[3] See Paul Blowers, 'Exegesis of Scripture', in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor,* ed. Pauline Allen and Bronwen Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 253: 'Two [hermeneutical and exegetical] traditions were decisive to Maximus' formation as a biblical interpreter: first, the Alexandrian tradition of Philo and Origen, especially as appropriated and adjusted by the Cappadocian Fathers and by Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite; second, and closely related, the eastern monastic tradition.'

[4] Other influences include Mark the Monk, the Makarian writings, Diadochos of Photike, and Clement of Alexandria; *cf.* Andrew Louth, 'The Sources of Maximus' Theology', in id., *Maximus the Confessor* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 19–32; and Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 14–15.

[5] Wolfgang Lackner, 'Studien zur philosophischen Schultradition und zu den Nemesioszitaten bei Maximos dem Bekenner' (PhD diss., Karl-Franzens-Universitüt Graz, 1962), was one of the first to identify and catalog these connections systematically; see now the thorough investigation by Pascal Mueller-Jourdan, *Typologie spatio-temporelle de l'Ecclesia byzantine: La Mystagogie de Maxime le Confesseur dans la culture philosophique de l'Antiquité tardive* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

[6] *Cf.* Enzo Bellini, 'Maxime interprète de Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite. Analyse de l'*Ambiguum ad Thomam* 5', in *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur, Fribourg, 2–5 septembre 1980,* ed. Felix Heinzer and Christoph Schönborn (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg, 1982), 37: 'Dionysios is an essential component of Maximus' theological synthesis, together with Evagrius, Origen, the Cappadocians, and Leontius of Byzantium'; and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe according to Maximus the Confessor,* trans. Brian Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 58: 'It would be a mistake to choose one of [Maximus'] intellectual worlds as the *real* one and to judge the rest by its standard. At best one can say this: inasmuch as Dionysius was historically the last and most comprehensive theological and spiritual phenomenon before Maximus, and insofar as he includes essential elements of his predecessors (Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Evagrius) in his own thought, in a way that both corrects and surpasses them, his [*i.e.,* Dionysos'] insight can be accorded a certain preeminence in Maximus' intellectual ancestry.'

[7] Among the more important studies are: Polycarp Sherwood, 'Denys l'Aréopagite, IV: Influence du Pseudo-Denys en Orient. 4. Saint Maxime le Confesseur', *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité,* vol. 3 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1947), 295–300; Walther Völker, 'Der Einfluss des Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita auf Maximus Confessor', in *Universitas - Dienst an Wahrheit und Leben: Festschrift für Bischof Dr Albert,* ed. Ludwig Lenhart,

in Maximus the Confessor has largely coincided with the modern revival of interest in Neoplatonism—currently the 'fastest growing area of research in ancient philosophy'—the two have yet to enter into systematic dialogue.[8]

To be sure, comparing Dionysius and Maximus is a complicated venture. As arguably the most allusive and complex thinker (and writer) in the entire canon of Greek patristic literature, Maximus' use of the *corpus Dionysiacum* was equally allusive and complex. He held Dionysius in extremely high regard, considering him a leading and indeed inspired patristic authority.[9] Deeply sympathetic to the Christian Neoplatonism of Dionysius, Maximus likewise saw the world as a theophany of the divine, a manifestation of intelligible reality in sensible form. Yet he absorbed Dionysian vocabulary and conceptual structures not in reverential isolation, but in an animated and at times contentious conversation with his other sources and in conjunction with his own theological project. Possessed of a powerfully independent mind, Maximus drew slavishly on none of his philosophical or theological predecessors. To this rule Dionysius was no exception, and Maximus did not hesitate to modify, correct, and even suppress some of the signature features of the Areopagite's theology.[10]

vol. 1 (Mainz: Matthias-Gruenwald-Verlag, 1960), 243–54; id., 'Der Einfluss des Pseudo-Dionysius auf Maximus Confessor', in *Studien zum Neuen Testament und zur Patristik. Festschrift für Ernst Klostermann zum 90. Geburtstag dargebracht* (Berlin, 1961), 331–50 (though oddly bearing the same title as the 1960 study, this study expands the comparative analysis into new areas); id., 'Zur Ontologie des Maximus Confessor', *Beiträge aus Theologie, Kirche und Geschichte. Festschrift Ernst Barnikol* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1964), 57–79; id., *Maximus Confessor als Meister des geistlichen Lebens* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1965), 14–19; 351–70; Ysabel de Andia, 'Transfiguration et théologie négative chez Maxime le Confesseur et Denys l'Aréopagite', in ead., *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident. Actes du Colloque International, Paris 21–24 septembre 1994* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1997), 291–326 (many of whose conclusions I do not accept); Agnieszka Switkiewicz-Blandzi, 'Notes About Denys Areopagite's *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and its Influence on Maximus the Confessor's *Mystagogy*', *Studia Mediewistyczne* 34–35 (1999–2000): 56–70; and Vladimir Cvetković, 'Predeterminations and Providence in Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor', in *Dionysius the Areopagite between Orthodoxy and Heresy*, ed. Filip Ivanović (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 135–56. My contribution to the *Oxford Handbook of Dionysios the Areopagite* (forthcoming) will focus largely on Maximus' reception and transformation of Dionysian theology.

[8] The quotation is from Pauliina Remes and Svetla Slaveva-Griffin, 'Neoplatonism Today', in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism* (London and New York: 2014), 1. Two scholars, Christophe Erismann and Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, have done much to bridge this disciplinary divide.

[9] Reflected in the rich and varied epithets Maximus bestows on him: ὁ πολύς (PG 91:1048A, 1052C); σοφός (1056C); θεῖος (1188A); θεοείκελος (1289A); θεόφρων (1213C; 1413D); θεηγόρος (1312D; 1313A; 1413A); θεοφάντωρ (1080B; 1260B; 1417B; *cf. Opusculum* 7 [84D]); *Opusculum* 8 [96C]); ibid.; 100b); ἅγιος (1056C; 1085A; 1213C; 1260B; 1285A; 1289A; 1312D; 1313A); μέγας (1048A; 1188A; 1368C; 1260B; 1285A; 1289A; 1312D; 1313A; 1413A; 1417B). Most of these adjectives qualify the title διδάσκαλος (*e.g.*, 1048A; 1049A; 1052A; 1054C; 1056B) (which Maximus also uses heavily for Gregory Nazianzus), usually in combination with either 'Dionysius' or 'the Areopagite' (*cf.* 1032B; 1080B; 1085A; 1188A; 1188C; 1213C; 1241A; 1260B; 1285A; 1289A; 1312D; 1313A; 1413D).

[10] Völker, 'Einfluss' (1960)*,* 244; id., 'Einfluss' (1961), 333; and id., 'Christi Verklärung auf dem Tabor in der Deutung des Maximus Confessor und des Gregorius Palamas', in id., *Scala Paradisi. Eine Studie zu Johannes Climacus und zugleich eine Vorstudie zu Symeon dem Neun Theologen* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1968), 316–27, at 317–19, rightly stressed the diversity of influences on Maximus, and the extent to which these were combined with Dionysian language and concepts, but he nonetheless argued (misleadingly, as

These modifications include extensive changes to the doctrine of procession and return; a reordering of the structure and divisions of being; a tacit rejection of 'hierarchy' (a key Dionysian term that Maximus never uses); and a new emphasis on the philosophical category of motion. These developments were motivated in part by Maximus' response to Origenism, but they were also a response to larger problems within Christian Neoplatonism. Central to this larger project was Maximus' signature doctrine of the *logoi*, which enabled him to place greater importance than Dionysius had on the role of the divine will in creation, and to establish the Incarnation as the central act of divine self-manifestation. In a critical move, explored in detail below, Maximus regrounded the cycle of procession and return directly in the person of the incarnate Logos.[11]

While there can be little question that Maximus' departures from Dionysius were prompted by his response to Origenism, this does not rule out the possibility that the *corpus Dionysiacum* was itself a self-conscious response to Origenism. In a forthcoming book, Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi argues persuasively that the writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite were produced by theologians working in the circle of the emperor Justinian, and were intended as a direct reply to questions concerning the hierarchical structure of the Church, the nature and person of Christ, and the problem of sixth-century Origenism (and Evagrianism), which included overcoming the philosophical legacy of pagan Neoplatonism. Mainoldi argues that the Dionysian writings aim to correct Origenist cosmology and eschatology, and in particular to replace a fluid angelology and anthropology with fixed hierarchies, disallowing any ontological confusion of natures, which was central to the Justinianic theological project.[12]

---

it seems to me) for the ultimately heterogeneous nature of Maximus' work, in which one finds 'Dionysian islands' stylistically and intellectually adrift in a *mare Maximianum*.

[11] That these developments were motivated by Maximus' alleged 'Aristotelianism' has been disputed and remains under discussion. Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 60–61, asserted that Maximus used Aristotle to correct and clarify Dionysius, and thus was a predecessor of Aquinas. Balthasar's views—which were subsequently promoted by a group of French Dominicans associated with the journal *Istina* (*i.e.*, Alain Riou, Jean-Miguel Garrigues, Marie-Joseph Le Guillou, Pierre Piret, and François-Marie Léthel [a Carmelite])—were criticized by Walther Völker, 'Zur Ontologie des Maximus Confessor', 57–79; followed by Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 16–17; id., *Man and Cosmos*, 52–55; Larchet, *Divinisation*, 74–77, 267–69; id., *La théologie des énergies divines. Des origines à saint Jean Damascène* (Paris: Cerf, 2010), 331–42; and Marius Portaru, 'Classical Philosophical Influences: Aristotle and Platonism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, 130–33.

[12] *Cf*. Ernesto Sergio Mainoldi, 'Why Dionysios the Areopagite? The Invention of the First Father', *Studia Patristica* (forthcoming). I am thankful to the author for providing me with a copy of his work prior to publication. John Gavin, *'They Are Like Angels': Angelology and Anthopology in the Thought of Maximus the Confessor* (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2009), also argues that the Dionysian worldview was a direct response to Origenism; *cf*. below, n. 52.

Maximus, Dionysius, and the Transformation of Christian Neoplatonism

As mentioned above, Maximus adopted the Christian Neoplatonic framework of Dionysius,[13] the central principles of which included the radical transcendence and immanence of God; the notion of being as a theophany; the cycle of remaining, procession, and return; along with a cognate theory of mind and language marked by strong aesthetic, affective, and erotic/ecstatic elements. Maximus' development of a number of trajectories from within this complex system set him apart, not simply from Dionysius, but from Neoplatonic metaphysics more generally.[14] To illustrate Maximus' modification of the Dionysian tradition, the remainder of this paper will focus on the changes he introduced into the foundational metaphysical process of remaining, procession, and return.

As is well known, late Neoplatonists described this process as a cycle comprising three distinct but inter-related moments: (1) the moment of 'remaining' (μονή) of the transcendent source or cause within itself; (2) the moment of the source's 'procession' (πρόοδος) in an outward stream of energy; and (3) the final moment of 'reversion' or 'return' (ἐπιστροφή) of the stream to its source. The Neoplatonists themselves were aware of various philosophical problems within this cycle. Christian thinkers in particular were concerned about its ontological monism and the reduction of God's generative and creative activity to automatism and necessity.[15] Maximus was perhaps the first to address these problems directly, and he did so by reorganizing and redefining each moment within the process.

Remaining (μονή)

Confronted with the statement that creatures had 'flowed down from above',[16] Maximus rejected the basic principle that incorporeal beings pre-existed in a state of primal unity with God, from which they descended and entered the sensible world.

---

[13] And not the philosophy of Aristotle, as many scholars have claimed; for discussion, see: Portaru, 'Classical Philosophical Influences', 133–36, who suggests that all talk of 'being' (or 'substance') in Maximus is subsumed in his doctrine of participation.

[14] Gersh, *Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 6, sees Maximus as the pivotal writer in the trajectory from 'Iamblichus to Eriugena', and argues that Christian writers modified this structure in such a way that Neoplatonic tropes are not useful as a framework for analyzing the Christian sources. This is debatable, but what is correct is the emphasis on the pivotal role played by Maximus in these developments.

[15] See for example, the remark of Gregory Nazianzus, *Orationes* 29.2: 'We shall not venture to speak of an "overflow of goodness" (ὑπέρχυσιν ἀγαθότητος), as one of the Greek philosophers dared to say, as if it were a bowl overflowing (κρατήρ τις ὑπερρύη), and this in plain words in his discourse on the First and Second Causes. We ought never to introduce the notion of involuntary generation (ἀκούσιον γέννησιν), as some sort of unrestrained natural secretion (περίττωμά τι φυσικὸν καὶ δυσκάθεκτον)' (SC 250:180, lines 18–22), the cited material possibly referring to Plato, *Timaeus* 41d; Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.6, or 5.2; and (for the 'bowl') an unknown Neoplatonic source. Maximus comments on passages from *Orationes* 29.2 in *Quaestiones et dubia* 105 (CCSG 10:79); *Ambiguum* 1.1 (DOML 1:7); and *Ambiguum* 23.1 (DOML 2:3).

[16] 'Flowing' or 'streaming' (ῥεῖν, ἀπορρεῖν) is the central metaphor for Neoplatonic emanation. In *Ambiguum* 7, Maximus was called on to explain Gregory Nazianzus' claim (in *Orationes* 14.7) that human beings are a 'portion of God that has flowed down from above (ἄνωθεν ῥεύσαντας)' (DOML 1:74–75).

Instead, Maximus argued that the state of 'remaining' was to be found, not at the beginning of the process, but at its end.[17] While Neoplatonic forms of remaining are found throughout the *corpus Dionysiacum*,[18] Dionysius' position on this question was ambiguous. His citation of John 14:23 (μονὴν παρ᾿ αὐτῷ ποιήσομεν),[19] for example, seems to posit remaining as a future condition, which would (if this was his intention) signal a fundamental restatement of the traditional Neoplatonic view.[20] The definitive change, however, was achieved by Maximus, who revolutionized the traditional notion, which he dismissed as a 'doctrine of the Greeks' (ἐκ τῶν ἑλληνικῶν δογμάτων).[21] In so doing, Maximus had, in the words of Stephen Gersh, 'undermined the most cherished principle of pagan and earlier Christian Platonism', namely, the 'placing of remaining before procession.'[22] This move, though often noted, had far-reaching implications for Maximus' eschatology and teleology, as well as for his understanding of protology, which have yet to be fully explored.[23]

Proceeding (πρόοδος)

Maximus also modified the second moment in the cycle, 'procession.' For Dionysius, the divine 'processions'—which he calls 'powers', 'participations', 'providences', 'manifestations', 'activities', and 'distributions' of God—signify the presence of God 'outside' his essence, which refers to God's causal presence in beings as their intelligible determinations.[24] Dionysius does not hesitate to speak of the divine processions as an 'overflowing outpouring of light' (ὑπερβλύζουσα φωτοχυσία),[25]

---

[17] This is the great argument of *Ambiguum* 7 (DOML 1:75–141); *cf. Ambiguum* 20.3 (DOML 1:412, line 3), where μονή and ἵδρυσις likewise refer to a state obtained in the eschaton; *cf.* Gersh, *Iamblichus,* 221, who connects this new sense of 'remaining' with Maximus' anti-Origenist argument.

[18] *E.g., Divinis nominibus* 2.8 (132, lines 10–16; 645C). Citations from Dionysius are from Beate Regina Suchla, Günter Heil, and Adolf Martin Ritter, eds., *Corpus Dionysiacum,* 2 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990–1991), citing page and line number(s), followed by the column number in PG.

[19] *Ecclesiastica hierarchia* 2.1 (68, line 21; 392A).

[20] See the discussion in Gersh, *Iamblichus,* 218–21.

[21] *Ambiguum* 7.2 (DOML 1:76). Note that the phrase ἐκ τῶν ἑλληνικῶν δογμάτων is also found in Justinian, *Edict against Origen*: 'He (*i.e.*, Origen) teaches that, in the resurrection, bodies shall rise having a spherical form; such is the foolishness and ignorance of this exegete of the doctrines of the Greeks' (*ACO* 3:204, line 12); *cf.* Gersh, *Iamblichus,* 219, n. 65: 'It is now generally accepted that Maximus is attacking the Origenistic doctrine of the primal henad. However, the implications of this critique go even wider than this, for the elements in the Origenistic cosmology which Maximus is keen to refute are precisely those which also characterize traditional pagan Neoplatonism.'

[22] Gersh, *Iamblichus,* 219–20.

[23] But *cf.* Nikolaos Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity,* trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010); and Paul Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 221–24.

[24] Powers = *Divinis nominibus* 2.7, 11.6; participations = *Divinis nominibus* 2.5, 2.7, 5.5; processions = *Divinis nominibus* 1.4, 2.4, 2.11, 5.1, 5.2; providences = *Divinis nominibus* 1.8, 5.2; manifestations = *Divinis nominibus* 2.4; activities = *Caelesti hierarchia* 13.3–4, 15.6, *Divinis nominibus* 9.9; distributions = *Divinis nominibus* 2.5, 2.11.

[25] *Divinis nominibus* 4.6 (150, line 2; 701A); *cf.* id., Ep. 5.1 (162, line 5).

along with other metaphors of diffusion and radiation, which could imply that creation came about by necessity. However, Dionysius' emphasis here is more likely on the non-substantial character of these processions as a deliberate rejection of Neoplatonic self-subsisting 'henads' (intermediary entities).[26] Maximus adopts some of the same language and imagery, but for him the 'processions' are no longer the self-diffusing activities of a generic First Principle, but rather the multiplication of the One Logos into a plurality of *logoi*.[27] In this way, Dionysius' attempt to eliminate intermediaries by locating the source of multiplicity within the First Principle was transformed by Maximus, who identified the source of procession with the person of the Logos. While this is not exactly the sort of 'Christological corrective' that some scholars have posited,[28] it nonetheless marks a significant Christological reframing of both Dionysian thought and the Neoplatonic tradition more generally, for it was a massive reinscription of the Dionysian worldview within the framework of the Confessor's Christocentric cosmology.[29]

Hierarchy

Before turning to the final moment in the process, it will be helpful to consider a particular feature (or product) of procession, namely, hierarchy, which brings to light a pivotal difference between Dionysius and Maximus. In Neoplatonism, the outward procession of the First Principle generated a hierarchical structure of being composed of distinct levels of super- and subordination, the existence and activity of whose lower, inferior levels were contingent on the contemplation and imitation of their superiors. For Dionysius, who coined the word 'hierarchy', procession is

---

[26] *Cf. Divinis nominibus* 5.2 (181; 816C); *Divinis nominibus* 11.6 (221–23; 953B–956B); and the discussions in Gersh, *Iamblichus,* 48–55, 223–25; and Golitzin, *Mystagogy,* 73–79. According to Gersh, ibid., 21, there is 'no evidence that pagan thinkers understood emanation as anything other than an automatic and unwilled process. Yet Dionysius retains most of the language and metaphors but without implying actual ontological emanation, or the idea of the divine being diffused out into gradations.'

[27] *Ambiguum* 7.15 (DOML 1:95); *cf.* de Andia, 'Transfiguration et théologie négative', 293–328, who posits a distinction between Maximus' essence/activities ontology, and Dionysius' ontology of hyperousios/ousia. Though not without minor parallels in the *corpus Dionysiacum* (*e.g.*, *Divinis nominibus* 5.8), Maximus' doctrine of the *logoi* finds greater parallels in Origen, Evagrius, and Plotinus, 'On Providence', *Enneads* 3.2–3, where the *logoi* are parts of one cosmic Logos; *cf.* Radek Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13; and Lloyd P. Gerson, 'Plotinus on logos', in *Neoplatonism and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. James Wilberding and Christoph Horn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17–29.

[28] Here I am thinking in particular of the supposedly 'Palamite Christological corrective'; on which, see: Alexander Golitzin, 'Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas: On the Question of a "Christological Corrective" and Related Matters', *SVTQ* 46 (2002): 163–90, who considers the idea 'an illusion, a scholarly invention', and a 'scholarly phantom', for which he faults the academic reduction of Dionysius to Neoplatonism (p. 86).

[29] This process can already be seen in Maximus, *Quaestiones et dubia* 173 (CCSG 10:12), which demonstrates strong dependence on Dionysius, looks forward to the doctrine of the *logoi* developed in the *Ambigua to John*, and shows that already at this early stage Maximus was fusing Dionysian metaphysics with Christology.

likewise inseparable from the production of a hierarchical order of intermediary beings,[30] so that even the activity of the angelic orders is frequently expressed in terms of providence and procession.[31] Each particular order and level of the hierarchy is thus a force that reveals, turns, and leads the lower levels back to their source in God.[32] At the same time, these ordered rankings constitute impenetrable boundaries between levels of reality that were firmly set and could not be transgressed.[33]

Maximus, on the other hand, never uses the word hierarchy.[34] In place of vertiginous Dionysian verticality, Maximus' doctrine of the divine *logoi* generates something akin to a non-spatial model, in which presence and dependence are collapsed—like 'stars vanishing at the appearance of the sun'[35]—into the immediate and dynamic continuum of Logos, *logoi*, and beings.[36] This new model also found expression in a novel ordering of reality, not into Dionysian hierarchies, but into the five divisions of being described in *Ambiguum* 41. Here the primary division is into uncreated and created natures, which are transcended and unified in the person of the incarnate Logos.[37] Consistent with this reconceptualization of the Dionysian universe, movement across these new ontological boundaries was surprisingly simple and depended on the freely determined capacities of each participant. The most striking example of this is Maximus' account, in *Ambiguum* 20, of Saint Paul's upward passage (*cf.* 2 Cor 12:2–4) through all the angelic orders, terminating in a condition of absolute immediacy with God, beyond all negation, boundary, and

---

[30] *Cf. Divinis nominibus* 4.15 (161; 713AB); *Caelesti hierarchia* 9.2 (36–37; 257C–260B); and Chlup, *Proclus,* 65.

[31] *Cf. Caelesti hierarchia* 8.2 (34–35; 240C—241C); *Caelesti hierarchia* 15.1 (50–51; 328A–328C); and *Caelesti hierarchia* 15.6 (55–56; 333D–33DB).

[32] And is thus an ἀνάγωγος καὶ ἐπιστρεπτικὴ δύναμις (*Caelesti hierarchia* 15.5; 55, line 11; 333B); *cf.* Golitzin, *Mystagogy,* 140–43.

[33] Chlup, *Proclus*, 21–24; *cf.* the difficulties Dionysius had in explaining the prophet Isaiah's description of a seraph engaging in activities on a level not properly its own, *Caelesti hierarchia* 13.1–4 (46–49; 300B–308B).

[34] The words 'hierarchy' and 'hierarch' are attested in the prologue and chap. 9 of the *Mystagogy* (CCSG 69:6, line 55; 38, line 620): the latter is a simple reference to a bishop, and the former occurs when Maximus cites the title of Dionysius' *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. For Maximus, the more flexible category of θέσις effectively displaces the function of hierarchy; *cf.* Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 63; and Constas, DOML 1:486n31. Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor,* 111, is generally correct but understates the matter, noting that: 'Maximus interprets the Dionysian "hierarchies" with an emphasis less on their scaled ontological structure per se than on their instrumentality for conveying the intimate presence of the Logos even to the least of created beings.'

[35] *Ambiguum* 7.12 (DOML 1:93).

[36] Note that Dionysius at times appears to approach such a view: 'Jesus (*i.e.*, the *incarnate* Word) is the source and perfection of all hierarchies' (*Ecclesiastica hierarchia* 1.2; 65, lines 20–21; 373B).

[37] *Ambiguum* 41.2 (DOML 2:103–105). Here Maximus is indebted not to Dionysius but to Gregory of Nyssa, and, in a sense, is rejecting the hierarchies of Proclus for the immediacy of Plotinus; *cf.* Chlup, *Proclus,* 16–29; Frederic M. Schroeder, *Form and Transformation: A Study in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 45–56. Gavin, *Angelology and Anthropology,* 102–103, states that, for Maximus the 'ontological order of creation depends less on a [Dionysian] hierarchical structure, and more upon the ordering of the *logoi* of divine providence and judgment united in the *Logos.* The structure of the cosmos emerges from the divine desire to become "immanent" in the Incarnation, eliminating the need for the strict scalar chain of being.'

limit.[38] Dionysius, on the other hand, avoids the Pauline verse in question, as well as any suggestion of upward movement through the hierarchy, which would problematically transgress, and allow a more perfect union with, the very divine activity that established creatures in their fixed locations within the hierarchy.[39]

Returning (ἐπιστροφή)

With respect to the final moment of 'reversion' or 'return', the Confessor once again departed from the traditional view. Maximus' decision, noted above, to place 'remaining' at the *end* of the process was a radical shift that required a corresponding redefinition of the final moment of return. Rational creatures, and through them the entire created order, were now seen in terms of their final goal, which was no longer understood as a mere return to the beginning, but rather as an ontologically unprecedented union with God in a final, eschatological, and divinizing consummation. As a result, the eternal recurrence inherent in the cycle of procession and return was largely displaced by a dynamic linear movement, with a new emphasis on movement in time towards eschatological fulfilment.[40] This was a highly innovative development,[41] and is reflected in Maximus' avoidance of the technical term 'return' (ἐπιστροφή), which he never uses.[42] In one passage, he uses the word in its adjectival form, 'revertive' or 'convertive' (ἐπιστρεπτική), coupled with a second adjective, 'inductive' or 'guiding' (χειραγωγική), qualifying the words ἀναφορά and πρόνοια, which together have replaced ἐπιστροφή. It is significant that this passage occurs in Maximus' most important statement about the one Logos being many *logoi* according to 'procession' (πρόοδος) and the many *logoi* being one Logos according to the movement of 'return' (ἀναφορά).[43]

---

[38] *Ambiguum* 20.5 (DOML 1:417); *cf.* Marius Portaru, 'Gradual Participation according to St Maximus the Confessor', *Studia Patristica* 68 (2013): 281–93, who argues persuasively for a 'transposition of Dionysian participation through hierarchy' into what he calls the 'territory of personal experience', which is essentially a shift away from fixed ontological categories to the role of freedom in the divinization of rational creatures.

[39] As noted by Gavin, *Angelology,* 208–209.

[40] For the impact of this new emphasis on Maximus' understanding of history and language, see: Constas, 'A Greater and More Hidden Word', cited above, n. 1.

[41] According to Gersh, *Iamblichus,* 243–45, the Christian treatment of motion presents 'many points at which real innovations are made, especially in connection with Maximus' use of motion and rest', and that 'the fullest elaboration of [the theory of creaturely motion] occurs in Maximus' *Ambigua*…which seems to have resulted from Maximus' own reflections on a particular philosophical problem and goes back to no previous source.'

[42] Maximus uses ἐπιστροφή only to describe moral and not ontological conversions to God; *cf. Chapters on Love* 1.13 (ed. Aldo Ceresa-Gastaldo, *Massimo Confessore, Capitoli sulla carità* [Rome, 1963], 54); *Myst.* 9 (CCSG 69:38, line 622); *Ad Thalassium* 49 (CCSG 7:353, line 48); *Ad Thalassium* 57 (CCSG 22:23, line 31); *Ad Thalassium* 64 (CCSG 22:225, line 616); *Ambiguum* 10.26 (DOML 1:188, line 10); ibid., 10.37 (DOML 1:207, line 18); ibid., 10.66 (DOML 1:258, line 1).

[43] *Ambiguum* 7.20: 'The one Logos is many *logoi* and the many are One. According to the creative and sustaining procession of the One to individual beings, which is befitting of divine goodness, the One is many. According to the revertive, inductive, and providential return of the many to the One—as if

In a recent analysis of this passage, Vladimir Cvetković has pointed out that Maximus' language here refers to two agents.[44] The adjective χειραγωγική points to the active role of divine providence, guiding and directing rational beings towards their proper end. The noun ἀναφορά, on the other hand, is the liturgical movement and self-offering of rational beings to God.[45] Nikolaos Loudovikos had already identified what he rightly described as the eschatological and eucharistic character of the Confessor's ontology.[46] Cvetković makes a similar move, but with greater emphasis on Christology: 'By offering themselves to God, human beings follow the example of God, who by taking human nature, offered himself to the world.' In the word ἀντιστροφή, which Maximus also uses as a substitute for ἐπιστροφή,[47] Cvetković sees the same reciprocity between the divine and the human, what the Confessor called the 'paradigmatic exchange that makes God man and man God.'[48] There is a precedent for such reciprocity in Dionysius, in the opposite yet converging movements of inferiors to superiors, and of superiors to inferiors, mutually attracted and united together by the motive force of love.[49] This reciprocal exchange of humanity and divinity brings us back to the perfect

to an all-powerful point of origin, or to the center of a circle pre-containing the beginnings of the radii originating from it—insofar as the One gathers everything together, the many are One' (πολλοὶ λόγοι ὁ εἷς Λόγος ἐστὶ καὶ εἷς οἱ πολλοί· κατὰ μὲν τὴν ἀγαθοπρεπῆ εἰς τὰ ὄντα τοῦ ἑνὸς ποιητικήν τε καὶ συνεκτικὴν πρόοδον πολλοὶ ὁ εἷς, κατὰ δὲ τὴν εἰς τὸν ἕνα τῶν πολλῶν ἐπιστρεπτικήν τε καὶ χειραγωγικὴν ἀναφοράν τε καὶ πρόνοιαν, ὥσπερ εἰς ἀρχὴν παντοκρατορικὴν ἢ κέντρον τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ εὐθειῶν τὰς ἀρχὰς προειληφὸς, καὶ ὡς πάντων συναγωγός, εἷς οἱ πολλοί) (DOML 1:100–103); cf. Ambiguum 14.4: ἀναγαγοῦ καὶ ἐπιστρεπτικῆς προνοίας (DOML 1:361), which is a direct citation from Caelesti hierarchia 15.5 (55, line 11; 333B).

[44] Vladimir Cvetković, 'The Transformation of Neoplatonic Notions of Procession (proodos) and Conversion (epistrophe) in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor', in The Ways of Byzantine Philosophy, ed. Mikonja Knežević (Alhambra: Sebastian Press, 2015), 171–84.

[45] Dionysius does not use the word ἀναφορά, but cf. Caelesti hierarchia 13.3: ἐπὶ Θεὸν μὲν ὡς αἴτιον ἀναφέρουσιν (46, lines 9–10; 304A). Compare also the liturgical language of Ad Thalassium 51.4, 6: 'Through the mediation of the intellect, creation brings to God, as if they were offerings (δῶρα προσκομίζουσαν), the spiritual principles of knowledge…When we bring (προσκομίζοντες) to the Lord the spiritual principles we have discerned in creation, we bring Him offerings (δῶρα προσφέρομεν), for by nature He has no need of any of these things. For we do not bring (προσκομίζομεν) the principles of beings to Him as if He were in need of them as others would be, but rather so that we might, on behalf of all his creatures, praise Him in song (ἀνυμνήσωμεν) for all that He has given us' (CCSG 22:397, lines 43–45 and 63–71); and the cognate passage in Ad Thalassium 54.25 (CCSG 22:461–63, lines 326–35).

[46] Loudovikos, Eucharistic Ontology, cited above, at n. 23.

[47] Ἀντιστροφή is a grammatical-logical term that refers to the conversion or exchange of a subject for its predicate, which Maximus has seemingly ontologizied, not unlike the original grammatical meaning of the logos/tropos distinction, as well as the original grammatical sense of διαστολή; cf. Jonathan Barnes, 'Ammonius and Adverbs', in Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy: Aristotle and the Later Tradition, ed. Henry Blumenthal and Howard Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 145–63; and Antonio Cacciari, 'From Grammar to Theology: History of a Word. On Διαστολή and Related Terms in Origen and in the Origenian Tradition', in Origeniana decima: Origen as Writer. Papers of the 10th International Origen Congress, Krakow, Poland 31 August–4 September 2009, ed. Sylwia Kaczmerek and Henryk Pietras (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 39–60.

[48] Cf. Ambiguum 10.9: 'For they say that God and man are paradigms of each other, so that as much as man, enabled by love, has divinized himself for God, to that same extent God is humanized for man by His love for mankind' (DOML 1:165).

[49] Divinis nominibus 4.10 (154; 705C), noted by Ysabel de Andia, Henosis: L'Union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 141–42.

equilibrium of the Neoplatonic metaphysical cycle, but with a difference, for it is now tightly coiled within the person of the incarnate Logos.

Conclusion

Comparing and contrasting the work of Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor is a complicated task. That the work of both writers resists systematic summary or facile closure has led to a range of interpretations that are often mutually contradictory. This problem is particularly acute in the case of the *corpus Dionysiacum,* inasmuch as the author's anonymity encourages virtually limitless speculation concerning his philosophical and theological antecedents, orientation, and intentions. While some, for example, have argued that he was a pagan writer, concealing his views behind a thin veneer of Christianity, others contend that he was a Christian writer appropriating Greek philosophy (and likely a pagan convert to Christianity). Or that he was a pantheist, or to the contrary made a categorical distinction between God and creation. Again, while some are convinced he was a Monophysite theologian, others are equally convinced that he was a dyophysite Chalcedonian; still others contend he was an Origenist, a crypto-Origenist, or an anti-Origenist, and so on.[50]

With respect to Dionysius' philosophical lineage, there is little doubt that he was directly influenced by the writings of Proclus (d. 485 AD), but we have no such certainty regarding Maximus' relationship to the philosophical schools and traditions of the seventh century. If Dionysius reflects the Neoplatonic philosophy taught in Athens and Alexandria from around the fourth to the sixth century, Maximus appears to be much less closely aligned to any particular school or tradition, and all attempts to tie him to one have proven inconclusive. It does seem clear, however, that Maximus derived his Neoplatonism, not simply from Dionysius, but from many other intermediaries, even if Dionysius was the major source of influence. Thus, whereas Dionysius was the principal figure in a continuum of philosophical influence, he cannot be isolated as the sole determining source or factor.

Maximus' handling of the Dionysian tradition was largely governed by his rejection of the Origenist doctrine of the fall of immaterial souls from a timeless union with God, with whom they had reached a state of satiety. Against this doctrine, Maximus articulated a radically different cosmology and anthropology, according to which creaturely movement was not the result of a primordial fall, but the natural capacity of the creature to advance towards God. Central to Maximus' transformation of Origenism was not simply a rearrangement of Origen's metaphys-

---

[50] In a summary of 'Principal Conjectures for the Identity of Ps.-Dionysius in Chronological Order', Ronald F. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970), 31–35, lists 22 different possible candidates, ranging in date from AD 129–544. Since the work of Hathaway, several more candidates have been added to the list.

ical syntax, but a complete redefinition of its fundamental grammar. That is, not simply a rearrangement of the triad *stasis-kinesis-genesis* into *genesis-kinesis-stasis*, but a redefinition of what each of these states means.[51] Maximus surely realized how the three moments in the Neoplatonic cycle closely corresponded to the Origenist account: 'remaining' was the primal state (*stasis*) of the henad, 'procession' was the fall (*kinesis*) and the advent of material creation, while 'return' (*epistrophē*) was the spiritual ascent beyond the sensible world.

If we accept the notion that Dionysius' immutable hierarchies were a response to Origenism, they offered an ontologically stable universe in contrast to a fluid metaphysical system in which individual identity and corporeality were the results of a pre-cosmic fall, to be dispensed with in a gnostic ascent towards immateriality.[52] Maximus of course accepted the ontological stability of the Dionysian universe, but reoriented it in his teleological and eschatological vision of the incarnate Logos as the beginning and end of the cosmic drama. If Dionysius' concern was to stabilize Origenian flux, Maximus' concern was to establish the primacy of the end, the goal (*telos*) of creation in the Logos, because Dionysius had not made a clear and definitive break with the entrenched cycle of remaining, procession, and return, which Maximus completely reconfigured. Though an ordered and stable cosmos remained, the rigid hierarchies were no longer central, since now it was the desire of the Logos, through the *logoi*, to be immanent in creation, Scripture, Incarnation, and in every human soul, that eliminated the need for mediating hierarchies.

We read Maximus' work with an ear for Dionysian resonances, which are resoundingly there, but there is also dissonance. While the resonances indicate where the two meet and converge, the dissonant notes reiterate that Maximus' engagement with Dionysius was a creative one, attuned to a different set of problems, requiring him to innovate the modes of Dionysian doctrine without altering their principle of being.

---

[51] Set forth in *Ambiguum* 7.6–14 (DOML 1:81–95); and *Ambiguum* 15.5–7 (DOML 1:365–71).

[52] In other words, precisely the doctrine that was condemned by the Council of 553: 'If anyone says that from the state of angels and archangels originates that of the soul, and from that of the soul that of demons and human beings, and from that of human beings angels and demons originate again…let him be anathema', trans. Richard Price, *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553,* vol. 2 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 284–285 (= canon 5); note that of the Council's 15 canons, 9 of them (canons 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, and 14) are concerned in different ways with questions of ontological instability and the obliteration of bodies, identities, and matter itself in the eschaton.

'All in all' (1 Cor 15:28): Aspects of the Unity between God and Creation according to St Maximus the Confessor

VLADIMIR CVETKOVIC

Honorary Research Associate, University of Belgrade, Serbia

This paper investigates three types of unity between God and creation in the works of St Maximus the Confessor. Following Maximus' claim that God is beginning as creator, middle as provider, and end as goal, this paper argues that, in each of these three stages, God forms different kinds of unity with created beings. I will show that the first type of unity, between God as creator and created beings, is based on the relationship between the Logos and the *logoi* of beings, in which the Logos serves as the centre of all *logoi*. The second kind of unity, between God as provider and created beings, is established on divine providence, which causes created beings to converge towards each other by the singular force of their relationship to God as both their origin and their final goal. Finally, the unity between God as end and created beings, based on full participation, presupposes the ceasing of the natural activities of created beings, and liberation from the constraints of their natural definition or *horos*.

The aim of this article is to show how Maximus perceives the unity between God and rational beings. Following Maximus' claim that God is beginning as creator, middle as provider, and end as goal,[1] I will attempt to point out the three kinds of unity between God and the world that depend on the role of God and also on the status of created beings. In the first section of my article, I will explore the unity between God as the Logos and the *logoi* of rational beings, as they are preconceived by the divine power. Next, I will deal with the unity between God as provider and rational beings, which are separated by time and space. In this section, I will mostly establish my argument upon Maximus' concepts of the 'creative and sustaining procession' and the 'revertive and inductive return' (*ποιητική καί συνεκτική πρόοδος καί ἐπιστρεπτική καί χειραγωγική ἀναφορά*),[2] as they are seen from an ontological, anthropological, and liturgical perspective. Finally, the third part of the article focuses on the unity established by God as goal and created beings after His second and glorious coming. I will argue that this unity is established on the participation of

---

[1] 1.10 (PG 90:1088A); The English translation of George C. Berthold in Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 130.

[2] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1081C); The English translation is in Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers:The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol.1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 101.

being in God. This kind of participation is the full participation of rational beings in God and differs from participation based on the receptive powers of the beings present in this life. Maximus symbolically identifies full participation, or complete identity with the Divine, as an eschatological event with the liturgical Eucharist in his *Mystagogia*. The liturgical perspective on this point will therefore be taken into consideration. Moreover, I will attempt to show that all three kinds of unity are conceptualized with the help of Neoplatonic vocabulary. The form of unity between Logos and *logoi* reveals the Neoplatonic solution for the problem of the 'one and many', while the other two forms of unity, namely, the one of the procession and reversion, and the other of the participation, are defined by Neoplatonic concepts. In spite of the fact that Maximus uses Neoplatonic vocabulary, these terms often acquire a different meaning and serve different purposes compared with Neoplatonic systems. In addition, all of these three categories of unity are successive in a logical sense, while in terms of temporal precedence they overlap each other, making it difficult to draw a distinction between them.

The Logos of God and the Logoi of Beings

The unity of God as creator with created beings is based on the relationship between the Logos and the *logoi* of beings. Maximus describes the unity of the Logos and *logoi*, commencing from the premise that 'the one Logos is many *logoi* and the many are One'.[3] The one Logos is many *logoi* on the basis of their incomparable differences among created beings and 'their specific individuality, which remains unconfused both in themselves and with respect to one another'[4]. On the contrary, many *logoi* are the one Logos on the basis of his unconfused existence in them and their return to him as the beginning and the cause of all things.[5]

Two aspects are noticeable here. First, when Maximus describes how the One is many, he does this in terms of the undivided and unconfused manifold, while, when he describes how the many are the one, he applies the term 'unconfused union'. The terms that Maximus extensively uses in relation to this point are 'undivided' (ἀδιαίρετος) and 'unconfused' (ἀσύγχυτος). In previous Maximian scholarship, these two terms are often associated with the set of the four Chalcedonian Christologic

---

[3] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1081BC): *πολλοί λόγοι ὁ εἷς λόγος ἐστί, καί εἷς οἱ πολλοί*; Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 100–101.

[4] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1077C); Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 94–95.

[5] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1077C). Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 94–95.

terms,[6] but as Törönen argued in his book,[7] more likely sources for these terms are the Cappadocians, Cyril of Alexandria, and Dionysios the Areopagite. We will explore Maximus' usage of these terms, not in a Christological, but rather in a cosmological or ontological context, that reinforces Törönen's argument.

Secondly, one can discern the Neoplatonic solution to the philosophical problem of 'one and many' behind the doctrine of the Logos and the many *logoi*. This solution is based on the premise that the unity of plurality is due to one single cause and beginning. Both these concepts need more explanation.

Maximus stresses that in plurality, the *logoi* of beings are established as unique and unconfused with others, but also undivided one from another due to their relationship with the one Logos. The unity of all the *logoi* in the one Logos is based on the unconfused existence of the Logos of God as cause and beginning in every *logos* of beings, and on the return of all *logoi* towards the one Logos.

The many *logoi* are at the same time undivided and unconfused among themselves. The *logoi* are undivided among themselves on the basis of something common that unites them.[8] Maximus claims that all beings are generically united by virtue of their 'common and universal identities'.[9] Therefore, from the most general *logoi* of being and nature, and subsequent *logoi* of the most generic genus (γενικώτατον γένος), more generic genera (γενικώτερα γένη), particular species (εἴδη), most specific species (εἰδικώτατα εἴδη),[10] to the *logoi* of individuals (ἄτομα) and accidents (συμβεβηκότα), all the *logoi* are undivided by their participations in the higher *logos* of being. Thus, the accidents are undivided due to the unity in the substance, the individuals due to the unity in the most specific species, the most specific species due to the unity in particular species, particular species due to the unity in more generic genera, more generic genera due to the unity in the most generic genus, and the most generic genus in the most general *logos* of being. The most general *logos* of being is also undivided from the one Logos of God, because it has its cause and source in him.

The second crucial term which determines the uniqueness of beings is the term 'unconfused' (ἀσύγχυτος). The *logos* of each particular being maintains the beings'

---

[6] The four Chalcedonian Christological adjectives, which describe the relationship between two natures in the Incarnate Logos, are 'unconfused' (ἀσυγχύτως), 'unchanged' (ἀτρέπτως), 'undivided' (ἀδιαιρέτως), and 'unseparated' (ἀχωρίστως). See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, translation and forward by B.E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 2003), 65–70; Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Lund: Gleerup, 1965), 21–37.

[7] Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1–6.

[8] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 41 (PG 91:1312BD).

[9] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 41 (PG 91:1312C). The English translation is in Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 116–17.

[10] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 10 (PG 91:1177C); Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 288–89.

undivided relation to the general order, but it also keeps the beings out of confusion one with another. Maximus elaborates on the fixity of every being in general in his *Ambiguum* 15:

> …they [*i.e.* created beings] are unchanging in their nature, potential, and activity, as well as in their rank and station in the general order of things, so that they do not in any way go beyond their natural properties or change into other things and become confused with them.[11]

The natural *logos* of every being is defined and circumscribed not only by the *logoi* of essence, nature or species, but also by the *logoi* of relationship, mixture, position, power, activity, passion, quantity, and quality that preserve, unconfused, particular beings from other beings.[12] By his insistence on the term 'undivided', Maximus preserves the unity of the *logoi* amongst themselves and with the one Logos, while by the insistence on the term 'unconfused' he establishes all beings as unique.

The reversible process of establishing the particularity of the *logoi* of beings is the process of uniting them in the one Logos. Maximus again uses the terms 'unconfused' and 'undivided' in order to claim that the Logos of God exists in all beings without confusion or division. The term 'unconfused' here shows that created beings are mostly defined by their own *logoi,* which prevent any unnatural mixture. The Logos exists in *logoi* indivisibly as their cause and source, while the *logoi* exist in the Logos by virtue of the transference of all beings towards the Logos as the beginning of all. Thus, Maximus metaphorically compares the Logos with the centre of a circle and the *logoi* of beings with its *radii* in several places,[13] in order to stress the existent unity. The *logoi* arranged in the Porphyrian tree are always connected with their source and, although they model the particularity and distinctiveness of the created world, they also serve as gathering agents. Once more, unity is based on the virtue of the one Logos as the cause and the source of all of the *logoi*.

It seems that Maximus, by using the Logos-*logoi* language, applies the Neoplatonic solution to the problem of 'one and many'. However, to claim the influence of Proclus and other Neoplatonists on Maximus based on the resemblance of Maximus' thought to the Neoplatonic systems would be going too far. A more likely source for Maximus' Neoplatonic vocabulary is Dionysius the Areopagite, to whom he frequently refers. One also needs to be aware of the fact that Maximus perceives Dionysius as the disciple of the Apostle Paul from the first century and not as an anonymous author from the fifth century, whose thought is coloured by Neoplatonic

---

[11] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 15 (PG 91:1217AB); Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 366–67

[12] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 15, (PG 91:1228AC). See also on this point Jean-Claude Larchet, 'La conception maximienne des énergies divines et des *logoi* et la théorie platonicienne des Idées', *Philothoes* 4 (2004), 276–83:281.

[13] *Mystagogia* 1.4 (PG 91:668A) and *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 2.4 (PG 90:1125D–1128A).

elements. Thus, although it seems that Maximus repeats Proclus' *Proposition* 5, that the manifold, posterior to the One, participates in the One,[14] he actually refers to Dionysius the Areopagite,[15] who claims that all the things that come from God, participate in God.[16] Similarly, although Maximus' premise that the Logos, as the cause and the source of all the *logoi,* unites them[17] resembles Proclus' *Proposition* 28, which states that the effect necessarily participates in the cause, inasmuch as it derives its being from the latter,[18] a more likely source again seems to be Dionysius,[19] because Maximus refers to him by name just a few lines earlier in the text. Thus, Maximus is not directly influenced by Proclus, but he receives Proclus' formulations via his reading of the Areopagite.

The highly philosophical and abstract speculation on the relationship between the Logos and the *logoi* that resembles the Proclean system finds its Christian significance in the liturgical aspect of Maximus' thought. Maximus' depiction of unity in the liturgical context clearly opposes the argument of a direct Neoplatonic influence. According to Maximus, the Logos of God has a threefold incarnation: in Jesus Christ, in the world, and in the Scriptures.[20] By incarnation in human form, the Logos of God presented 'Himself symbolically by means of His own self',[21] because the human being was created according to God's image and likeness. The incarnation of the Logos in the world, as we could see above, is through the *logoi* of both universals and particulars, which are arranged in accordance with the Porphyrian tree. The incarnation of the Logos in the Scriptures takes place through letters, syllables, and sounds (*γράμμασι καί συλλαβαῖς καί φωναῖς*), which lead the faithful to unity with the Spirit of the Logos.[22]

In the *Mystagogia*, Maximus identifies the human being with both the world and the Scriptures. The human being consists of body and soul, and he is called 'human being' because of the intelligent and rational soul according to which he is an image and likeness of God.[23] According to Maximus, the human body is identified with the historical letters of the Scriptures, while the soul symbolizes the meaning and the purpose of the letter.[24] Furthermore, the human body resembles the sensible world, while the human soul denotes the intelligible world.[25] The body and the soul of the

---

[14] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 6–7.

[15] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7, (PG 91:1080B).

[16] Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names* 5.5–7, *Corpus Dionysiacum I. De divinis nominibus*, ed. Beata Regina Suchla (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), 183–85.

[17] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7, (PG 91:1077C).

[18] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 33.

[19] Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names* 5.10, in *De divinis nominibus*, 189.

[20] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 33 (PG 91:1285C–1288A).

[21] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 10 (PG 91:1165D); Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 68–269.

[22] *Ambigua* 33 (PG 91:1285C–1288A).

[23] *Mystagogia* 6 (PG 91:684D).

[24] *Mystagogia* 6 (PG 91:684B).

[25] *Mystagogia* 7 (PG 91:685A).

human being, the historical letters and the hidden meaning of the Scripture, as well as the sensible and intelligible world are in a perfect unity due to the Logos of God as the source and unifying force of everything preconceived before the ages. The role of the Logos as unifying power is clearly expressed in *Mystagogia* 7:

> In conformity with this law [of the one who binds all thing together] there is engendered principle of the unifying force which does not permit that the substantial identity uniting these things be ignored because of their differ-ence in nature, nor that their particular characteristics which limit each of these things to itself appear more pronounced because of their separation and division than the kinship in love mystically inspires them for union.[26]

Maximus further claims that a guarantor of this kinship between beings is the invisible and unknowable presence of their cause in them, which unites them more to each other than to themselves.[27] Thus, God, by his divine energy, is indivisibly present as a whole in all beings according to their *logos*.[28] By being present as a whole in common manner in all of them, and in specific manner in each of them, the divine Logos reveals the preconceived unity of the creation.

God as Provider, or the Procession and the Return of the Created Beings

The form of union between the Logos and the *logoi* in most cases defines the union between God as Provider and the created beings. On the ontological level, the unity of God and the created being is mostly described by the Neoplatonic terms of procession and reversion, while on the anthropological level it is described by attaining the good or the logos of well-being. As the Church symbolically represents the world and the human being, the unity between God and human is also estab-lished on the liturgical level through the Mysteries.

I will begin with the ontological aspect of the unity between God and creation that Maximus portrays by employing the revised form of the Neoplatonic dialectical pair of procession and reversion (πρόοδος-ἐπιστροφή). As it is seen above, Maximus claims that the one Logos are many *logoi* on the basis of a creative and sustaining procession (ποιητική καί συνεκτική πρόοδος), while the many *logoi* are the Logos due to a revertive and inductive return and providence (ἐπιστρεπτική καί χειραγωγική ἀναφορά τε καί πρόνοια).[29] The first member of this pair consists of two elements: one creative, another sustaining. The creative procession can be identified with the creation of beings according to the wisdom of the Creator, at the appropriate moment

---

[26] *Mystagogia* 7 (PG 91:685AB). Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 196–197.
[27] *Mystagogia* 7 (PG 91:685B).
[28] *Ambigua* 22 (PG 91:1257A).
[29] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1081C).

in time and in a manner consistent with their *logoi*.[30] Maximus' understanding of the preservative procession is best presented in a passage from his *Mystagogy* 1:

> For God who made and brought into the existence all things by his infinite power contains, gathers, and limits them and in his Providence binds both intelligible and sensible beings to himself and to one another. Maintaining himself as cause, beginning and end all beings which are by nature distant from one another, he makes them converge towards each other by the singular force of their relationship to him as origin. Through this force he leads all beings to a common and unconfused identity of movement and existence …[31]

God preserves created beings by containing, gathering and limiting them. The whole process is dependent on the creative procession, because the *logoi* of beings predetermine the being. The term predeterminations should be taken in a loose sense, because the level of resemblance of created beings with their *logoi* depends either on the predeterminative quality of the *logoi* or on the inclination of the created beings. One may distinguish between the *logoi* of universals and the *logoi* of individuals. The former *logoi* strictly predetermine universals, such as genus, genera, and species, without leaving room for individual beings to escape these definitions. Thus, the individual human being can never escape the categories of being human, being perceived by sense and being created, even when he deliberately acts to establish his identity in opposition to these categories. The *logoi* of individuals, however, are not imposed by God with such strictness on individual human beings, and they can, on the basis of their deliberation and inclination, act in accordance with or in opposition to their individual *logoi*.

Maximus claims that particular beings are immutable by their *logos* of nature, while they are movable in their properties and accidents.[32] Therefore, the most general *logos* of being and nature, and the subsequent *logoi* of the most generic genus (γενικώτατον γένος), more generic genera (γενικώτερα γένη), particular species (εἴδη), and probably most specific species (εἰδικώτατα εἴδη),[33] as well as the *logoi* of time and the *logoi* of providence and judgment, establish the immutability of created nature and the inclination of the particular being cannot affect the established order.

However, the binding authority of the *logoi* of particular rational beings is weak, not because the Creator was unable to impose his power over the particulars, but mainly because he has left to them the freedom to fulfil the purpose for which they were created.

---

[30] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1081A).
[31] *Mystagogia* 1.2 (PG 91:664D–665A); Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 186.
[32] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 15 (PG 91:1217B).
[33] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 10 (PG 91:1177C).

This freedom is given to rational beings, namely angels and humans, while the sensible creation merely defined by the general *logoi,* or genera and species, is changeable on the level of properties and accidents due to their participation in the different *logoi,* such as the *logoi* of mixture, position, quantity, and quality. Balthasar rightly pointed out that 'the motion of the beings is a way of establishing itself as a particular and distinguishing itself from every other nature'.[34]

Therefore, the process of revertive and inductive return begins when the rational beings establish themselves on the basis of their movement. Every created being is endowed with movement, and movement is therefore intrinsic to the nature of being. However, every movement is directed towards an end, and we can define every movement in accordance with the goal of movement. Maximus teaches that from God 'come both our general power of motion (for he is our beginning), and the particular way that we move towards him (for he is our end)'.[35] Therefore, the rational being, through its faculty of reason, can choose in general two directions of his movement. The first way has the end (τέλος) of its movement in God, and the second way has the end of its movement in everything else, namely creation. The process of revertive return begins with the decision made by the rational being to move towards God as its cause, beginning, and end. By making the choice to revert towards God, the rational being receives divine help, or grace,[36] to persist on its course. This inductive return of beings towards God is becoming god through God.[37]

Therefore, the whole process of the unity between God the Provider and the beings begins with the creative and sustaining procession where the beings are created in proper time according to their *logos* and preserved through their relation to God as their cause, origin, and end. This is a potential union because its final result depends on the inclination of the rational beings to move towards God as their cause. If they, by their reversion, choose to have the end of their movement in God, they are led by divine grace to their final rest (στάσις).

I will turn now to the anthropological aspect of the unity between God and creation that is described as a process in which the human being attains the good, or the *logos* of well-being. God the Provider enters into unity with every human being. Human beings establish themselves by their movement, which is a proper movement (οὐσιώδης κίνησις), when it is in accordance with their particular *logos.* Maximus claims that the human being attains his proper movement according to his *logos* by harmonizing what belongs to his nature with what it is within his volition, or by following the natural will.[38] By creating the human being in accordance to his image and likeness, God attributed being and eternal being (εἶναι καὶ ἀεὶ εἶναι;

---

[34] Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy,* 155
[35] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1073); Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers,* vol. 1, 86–87.
[36] *Capita de charitate* 3.25 (PG 90:1024BC).
[37] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1084A).
[38] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1076BD).

τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ἀεὶ ὄν) to human essence to resemble his image. The elements of the human likeness to the divine being granted by God are well-being, or goodness and wisdom, and they are subsumed within the power of human will or inclination.[39] By neglecting the *logos* of well-being, Adam chose the direction opposite to his own *logos*, and he broke the link between the being and eternal well-being, establishing a separation from Divine eternity, which permanently affected human nature. However, Christ not only repaired human nature from the effects of Adam's fall, but he also accomplished the task originally assigned to Adam by his particular logos. First, Christ connected the *logos* of being with the *logos* of well-being, bridging the separation and distance Adam caused between the two *logoi*. Secondly, he drew the *logoi* of being and well-being in the *logos* of eternal well-being,[40] accomplishing the role originally designed for Adam. Therefore, the particular human being acts in accordance with its natural *logos*, only if it chooses by its will to link its *logos* of being with its *logos* of well-being. Maximus describes the inclination of the will towards its own *logos* as an aptness for well-being, having the free gift of ever-being from God as a result.[41] On the anthropological or ethical level, the ontological concept of procession and return work in the following way: God endowed human beings with being by creating them out of non-being. This could be seen as procession. The reversion, or revertive return, is the decision of a human being to bind its being with well-being in order to attain likeness with God. The divine reply, in the form of 'hand-leading transference', is conferring grace in the form of eternal being to a human being.

The third aspect of the unity between God the Provider and created beings is liturgical. It seems that, for Maximus, the ontological and ethical schemes are rooted in the liturgical context. The Mystery of Christ represents the core of the liturgical aspect of the union. Maximus teaches that all the ages of time, and the beings within those ages, have received their beginning and end in Christ.[42] The union of Creator and creation, preconceived in Christ and manifested in his incarnation, occurs by virtue of the future union of those who find the end of their movement in Christ. Thus, Christ is the beginning, middle, and end of all ages. The union of those who are deified with Christ, intended for the end of ages, has already come in potency of faith,[43] or 'one simple and indivisible grace and power of faith'.[44]

In his *Mystagogia*, Maximus symbolically interprets the liturgical moments in their proper eschatological perspective. The course of the Liturgy begins with the entrance of the bishop, who is followed by the congregation, into the holy church,

---

[39] *Capita de charitate* 3.24–25 (PG 90:1023ABC).

[40] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 42 (PG 91:1384D).

[41] *Capita de charitate* 3.24 (PG 90:1023AB).

[42] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60, in *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (CCSG 22), eds. Carl Laga & Carlos Steel (Turnhout: Brepols, 1990), 75.

[43] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 20, in *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium* (CCSG 7), eds. Carl Laga & Carlos Steel (Turnhout: Brepols, 1980), 139.

[44] *Mystagogia* 2.3 (PG 91:668B).

and this event symbolizes the incarnation of Jesus Christ and his first appearance in this world. This is the beginning of the Liturgy of Catechumens in the Orthodox tradition, or the Liturgy of the Word in the Roman-Catholic, which has its climax in the reading of the Gospels. For Maximus, the reading of the Gospels symbolizes the end of the ages.

> The holy Gospel is in general a symbol of the fulfilment of this world; in particular it indicates the complete disappearance of the ancient error in those who have believed; in the active, the mortification and the end of law and thinking; and in those who have knowledge, the gathering and ascent from the numerous and various principles [*logoi*] towards the most comprehensive principle [the Logos], once the most detailed and varied natural contemplation has been reached and crossed.[45]

One may easily notice how Maximus applies Neoplatonic language in a liturgical context. The Platonic notions of procession and reversion, transferred by Maximus into the notions of creative and sustaining procession, and revertive and inductive return, acquire a new dimension. Firstly, by referring to the comprehensive Logos (*συνεκτικώτατος λόγος*), Maximus underlines his role of sustaining the manifold *logoi* in the unity. Moreover, by using the term *anaphora* (*ἀναφορά*), which means transference and offering, Maximus stresses that the revertive movement of the created beings should be seen as the Eucharistic offering.

Secondly, the liturgical aspect symbolized by the readings of the Gospels draws together the two aspects mentioned above. On an ontological level, the reading in general signifies the divine wishes or intentions expressed through the *logoi*.[46] The reading helps the faithful to proceed to the truth of the all-inclusive Logos, by bringing together the spiritual *logoi* of sensible realities and of the providence in what concerns them.[47] The reading of the Gospels in the liturgical context also helps the faithful to draw together all the *logoi* of the Scripture expressed through letters, syllables, and sounds, in one single unity with the Spirit of the Logos.[48]

On an anthropological level, the reading of the Gospels signifies the progress in faith and the firm disposition of virtue of the faithful that lead them to the complete disappearance of the ancient error. The ancient error to which Maximus is referring is Adam's failure to link the *logos* of being to the *logos* of eternal being by the *logos* of well-being. The role designed for Adam is fulfilled by Christ, who by acting in accordance with the natural *logos* of the human being, brought man into union with

---

[45] *Mystagogia* 7 (PG 91:708BC). Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 209.
[46] *Mystagogia* (PG 91:705D).
[47] *Mystagogia* (PG 91:708A).
[48] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 33 (PG 91:1288A).

God. Therefore, by acting in accordance with one's particular *logos*, every faithful Christian is led to the unity with the divine Logos.

We may conclude that by limiting, gathering, and containing all beings by his divine power, and drawing them into union with himself as their beginning and end, Christ exercises his providential role.

The Final Unity by Participation

The unity between God as end and created beings is due to the participation of the rational beings in God. However, we should distinguish two kinds of participation: the first kind of participation is during this life, while the other characterizes the life to come.

The first kind of participation is characterized by the rational being's employment of natural energy, and by acting in accordance with its *logos*. This participation in God is called participation by energy, because the rational being employs his natural capacities represented by the energies of his nature. It means that the rational being, by participation in its particular *logos*, also participates in God. The limitations imposed on the definition, or the *horos,* of being by its *logos* causes the limitation in power and potency to receive God fully or to participate in him fully. The participation by energy of rational beings in God ends when they reach their natural consummation and the rest (στάσις) of their natural movement. Maximus maintains that 'every act (ἐνέργεια), circumscribed naturally by its own *logos*, is the end (τέλος) of the essential movement logically preceding it'.[49] However, the *telos* of the energy and essential movement is not the end of being, but the end of its natural *logos,* which determines the essence of being and it is realized in the natural energy of being. This means that, although created beings will be still distinguished among themselves on the basis of their natural *logoi*, they will be defined now by the Logos of God and will passively receive divine energies. Maximus explains this metaphorically:

> All things created in time according to time become perfect when they cease their natural growth. But everything that the knowledge of God affects, when it reaches perfection, moves to further growth. For the end of the latter becomes the beginning of the former.[50]

The end of natural growth signifies the attaining of the limits of the natural *logos*, while the new beginning is not confined within the limits of the natural definition (ὅρος) of being and its energy. Then, it begins a new mode of existence for rational beings. Maximus describes this process as a kind of departure from oneself.

[49] *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 1.3 (PG 90:1084B).
[50] *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 1.35 (PG 91:1096C); Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 134–35.

It [rational being] will not cease until it is wholly present in the whole beloved, and wholly encompassed by it, willingly receiving the whole saving circumscription by its own choice, so that it might be wholly qualified by the whole circumscriber, and, being wholly circumscribed, will no longer be able to wish to be known from its own qualities, but rather from those of the circumscriber, in the same way that air is thoroughly permeated by light, or iron in a forge is completely penetrated by the fire, or anything else of this sort.[51]

Three concepts are important for the understanding of Maximus' reasoning here. The first concept is what Constas translates as 'the saving circumscription' (σωτήριον περιγραφήν), the second is 'a voluntary surrender of the will' (ἐκχώρησις γνωμική), and the third is the concept of passivity.

As we can see above, the present union with God, where we participate in God by virtue of our natural potency and activity, determines our receptivity (ἐπιτηδειότης) to receive grace. Due to the limits of our nature, the capacity to receive grace is also limited. When a being is circumscribed by God, it experiences the cessation of its natural definition. Therefore, the being can participate in God without being restricted to its natural definition (ὅρος) and receive divine grace to an infinite extent. It means that we can fully contain one who is by nature infinite and uncontainable,[52] because we gain infinity by being circumscribed.

The second concept of 'a voluntary surrender of the will' suggests that the change in the being takes place not only on the level of definition but also on the level of will. Thus, the being does not only will to know and to unite itself with God, but also wills to be known, to be embraced and circumscribed by God. Maximus explains this as the total submission of rational beings the divine will.

And this will take place because that which is within our power, I mean our free will—through which death made its entry among us, and confirmed at our expense the power of corruption—will have surrendered voluntarily and wholly to God, and perfectly subjected itself to His rule, by eliminating any wish that might contravene His will.[53]

However, Maximus warns that this firm and steadfast disposition (θέσις) to fix our will in the divine will is not giving up of our free will (αὐτεξούσιον), but it is rather ἐκχώρησις γνωμική,[54] a 'voluntary surrender of the will' (as Constas trans-

---

[51] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1073D–1076A); Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 86–89.

[52] *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91:1076D): '…, καί ἀναλόγως τῇ τῶν μετεχόντων δυνάμει ἀχωρήτως, ἵν᾿ οὕτως εἴπω, χωρουμένου·

[53] *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91:1076AB). Maximos the Confessor, *Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, 88–89.

[54] *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91:1076B).

lates it), or a 'voluntary outpassing'[55] and 'a complete handing-over of our self-determination'[56] (as Sherwood suggests). Constas' translation of ἐκχώρησις γνωμική with 'voluntary surrender of the will' might lead someone to think that the human being voluntarily gives up its will. However, the expression ἐκχώρησις γνωμική does not connote the negation of the will, because for Maximus the will belongs to nature,[57] but rather the mode of willing (πῶς θέλειν), or better said the willing in accordance with intention (γνώμη), as a particular mode of willing affected by sin. Similarly, Lars Thunberg's identification of γνώμη with the personal and individual disposition (διάθεσις) and the habitus (ἕξις) of the will[58] may be also misleading, because γνώμη is not the actualised capacity of determination, but rather a way of using our capacity of willing in order to achieve self-determination. Only when the gnomic will acts in accordance with nature, and thus not in opposition to God,[59] may one think of γνώμη, in spite of its changeable character, as the personal and individual disposition and the habitus of the will. Acting in accordance with its *logos* of nature, the human being submits his own will to the divine will. By doing this, the human being does not negate, but affirms his own free will (αὐτεξούσιον), and by the steadfast disposition of the human will in the divine will, this self-determination is re-affirmed over and over again.

The rational being voluntarily surrenders itself to God, expecting God to act further in order to achieve union. Therefore, having unconditional trust or faith in God, the rational being expects to be embraced by the divine being and not to actively seize him. However, theoretically speaking, God is not obliged to move one step towards the rational being, and the union might, therefore, never take place.

The third concept which characterizes the new state of the rational beings is passivity in receiving God.

> Existing here and now, we arrive at the end of the ages as active agents and reach the end of the exertion of our power and activity. But in the ages to come we shall undergo by grace the transformation unto deification and no longer be active but passive; and for this reason we shall not cease to be deified.[60]

Maximus describes the nature of the future union between God and the rational beings by the metaphors of light-air and fire-iron, frequently used in Christology.

---

[55] Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Rome: Herder, 1955), 129.

[56] Polycarp Sherwood, *St Maximus the Confessor. The Ascetic Life. The Four Centuries of Charity*, ACW 21 (New York: Newman Press, 1955), 59.

[57] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:292D–293A).

[58] Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator,* 216–17.

[59] *Opuscula theologica et polemica* 7 (PG 91:80A).

[60] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 22 (CCSG 7:141). The English translation of Paul M. Blowers and Robert L. Wilken, *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 117.

By this example, Maximus shows us a few things. Firstly, that the role of God in deification is active just as light and fire play an active role in illuminating and heating, while rational beings receive divine grace passively in the same way in which air and fire receive light and heat passively. Secondly, the distinctiveness of natures is preserved in the future union. Thus, the illuminated air is still air, just as the red-hot iron is still iron. Thirdly, rational beings gain divine attributes just as the air emits light and iron radiates heat. By adopting the divine attributes fully, without leaving anything apart, rational beings establish a full participation in God. However, it is no longer plausible to use the language of participation for the attained stage of the rational being, because such language refers to a certain share in something, while the rational being does not have a share of God, but rather it receives God fully. Therefore, Maximus replaces the language of participation with the terms likeness and identity. He shows this language transformation clearly in *Ad Thalassium* 59:

> The participation in supernatural divine goods is likeness of the participants to the participated, and the likeness of the participants to the participated is the actualization of the expected identity of the participants with the participated.[61]

Therefore, participation in the uncreated divine attributes such as goodness, simplicity, immortality, life, immutability, infinity is participation in the likeness of God, or the attainment of the expected identity with him. The only distinction is that beings become gods not by nature, but by grace which unlimitedly flows in them. Therefore, humanity will be deified in every respect, lacking only the identity in essence with God.[62]

I will turn now to the liturgical aspect of the full participation, or to the future unity proclaimed at the liturgical level. To render the liturgical context clearer we have to make a few preliminary remarks. The descending of a bishop from the throne and the dismissal of the catechumens that happens after the reading of the Gospels signifies the second coming of Christ. Therefore, everything in the Liturgy from this point onwards happens in the Kingdom of God. The dismissal of the catechumens and the closing of the doors is followed by the kiss of peace, which Maximus symbolically identifies with the single unity of all the *logoi* and modes (τρόπους) of the world.[63] This unity, as Thunberg remarks, signifies the limit beyond which man can go only through the grace of God.[64] The highest point or climax of the Liturgy is the Eucharist, which represents a complete identity with Christ. Maximus describes these moments by the following words:

---

[61] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 59 (CCSG 22:53). The English translation is mine.
[62] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 22 (CCSG 7:140).
[63] *Mystagogia* 23.2–4 (PG 91:700BC)
[64] Thunberg, *Microcosm and mediator,* 429.

By the 'One is holy' and what follows, we have a grace and familiarity which unites us to God himself. By Holy Communion of the spotless and life-giving mysteries we are given fellowship and identity with him by participation in likeness, by which man is deemed worthy from man to become God.[65]

What does 'One is holy' mean for Maximus? '*One is Holy, one is Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen*' is chanted by the liturgical community immediately after the bishop (as an icon of Christ) or the priest comes out from the altar with the consecrated Gifts (bread and wine as the Body and the Blood of Christ), and it is a reply to his words '*The Holy* [*Gifts*] *to the Holy* [*People*]' (Τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις). This section of the liturgy reveals the whole economy of salvation, which consists of procession (πρόοδος) and return, or offering (ἀναφορά). Firstly, the Gifts which are offered to us symbolize the whole of creation given by God through procession. By receiving the gifts, we also receive ourselves as given. Secondly, the process of reversion (ἐπιστροφή) or return is expressed as the Eucharistic offering (ἀναφορά), where we offer ourselves back to Christ. By offering ourselves to Christ, we receive him through the Holy Mysteries.

Maximus explains that the chant 'One is holy' signifies the grace that unites us with God. Holiness, goodness, eternity, and other gifts of divine grace make us participants of the divine likeness. It is clear in the second part of the quotation which deals with Holy Communion that Maximus closely connects the terms likeness and the expected identity with the term participation. The whole logic of Maximus' reasoning is as follows. By participating in divine attributes, we participate in the likeness of God. Maximus uses the language of participation when the rational beings participate in God by their natural energies, because the complete identification with God has not been achieved at this stage. The complete identification with God is an identification which ought to happen in the future Kingdom, and it is symbolically revealed at every Eucharistic liturgy through the reception of the Holy Mysteries. Thus, by the total submission of our will to the Divine, we allow God to act in us and increase our participation in him to the level of full identity. Moreover, in the liturgical gathering the future flows into the present, and the expected identification with God in the future realm lays the foundation for our participation in God by our energy in the present realm. Thus, the future union of human beings and God established on likeness serves as a model for the present union established on faith and the grace of God, and is realised through the Divine Mysteries.

We may come to the conclusion that the future union of deified beings with God is formed through the full participation by grace (κατὰ χάριν μεθέξει), as Maximus calls it.[66] This kind of unity between God and the relational beings who participate in him is different from the union between God and beings achieved by the natural

---

[65] *Mystagogia* 24.2 (PG 91:704D); Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 207.
[66] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 22 (CCSG 7:139); *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60 (CCSG 22:70).

powers and activities of the beings. The former unity is perfect unity of identity and likeness, while the latter is not. Once more, Maximus portrays his doctrine by means of Platonist vocabulary. The term participation, which is originally Platonic, gains a new usage. The whole process of participation is based on the likeness of the participants with the participated, and every participant will imitate the participated.[67] However, in Maximus the participated assimilates the participants and elevates them to the position of participated.[68] Moreover, in the full participation by grace, God is the one who by his energy increases the likeness of the participants to him, forming the union of identity between him and participating beings. The unity of beings in God formed by full participation is the last and eternal union between God as end and rational beings themselves.

Conclusion

The final union between God and the world is not something that should be formed in the course of the movement of rational beings towards him, rather it is something which is preconceived in God before all ages, preserved through time and transferred to eternity. The unity of Logos and *logoi* established through creation is the initial form of unity between the Creator and creation which leads to the next step. The next step happens in the course of history, and it represents the positive answer of rational beings to the divine call. On the ontological level, this unity is established through the conversion of rational creation and its offering to God. Anthropologically, unity is achieved when human beings act in accordance to their particular *logoi*. Moreover, this unity is expressed by the firm determination of the human being to adopt well-being as a crucial element of likeness with God. On the liturgical level, the unity between God and human being is established through the faith of believers and grace of God, and it is revealed through the Holy Mysteries. According to Maximus, everything that was created, including the two above-mentioned unions, exists on account of this final union, and this final union itself exists on account of nothing.[69] This final goal will be achieved at the end of time by the submission of our will to the divine will and through the work of one single divine activity, which penetrates all things and makes God to be *all in all*.[70]

---

[67] Proclus, *The Elements of Theology,* pr. 28, 63, 65, 103, 138.
[68] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 22 (CCSG 7:139).
[69] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1072C); *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60 (CCSG 22:75).
[70] *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7 (PG 91:1076C).

How Can We Be Nothing?: The Concept of Non-being in Athanasius and Maximus the Confessor

EMMA BROWN DEWHURST
Durham University

For Athanasius, non-being describes the original state of creatures, and the state that creatures return to when they are not sustained by God. 'Being' is a gift given to creatures. Sin, for Athanasius, is creaturely rejection of God and therefore rejection of being itself. This suggests that when we sin, humans fall into nothingness and cease to exist, leading to the implication that fallen human nature and personal sin should result in our immediate non-existence. In this paper, I describe Athanasius' position on non-being and sin, and then go on to look at how the theology of Maximus the Confessor may offer a means to understanding the difficulty implied in Athanasius' work. I look at how Maximus understands being to be transformative, and something into which humans grow. Perfect being, which is full communion with God, or absolute non-being are, through Christ, reserved for the time after this life on earth.

This paper concerns Athanasius' understanding of non-existence and how human beings relate to it and to God. This consideration is important because it sheds light on how we understand human rejection of God. Without a definite affirmation of the reality of human rejection of God, we have very little grounds to talk about human freedom and co-operation with God. One of the things Athanasius allows us to do, is to conceive of both the moment of creation and sustaining providence as pivotal, continuous relationships between the created order and the Creator. These relationships are broken by sin. In *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius poses the premise that: if creatures are brought forth out of nothing by the Word and sustained by him, then when creatures break from him and withdraw themselves from him, they reject being itself. To return to non-existence, or non-being, is thus a result of sin, of choosing to reject God. This paper is about how literally we can understand Athanasius' dedication to the idea that sinning returns us to a state of nothing identical to that we were first brought out of in Genesis. On the one hand, we need a strong affirmation of the reality of human choice to turn from God, but on the other, sin clearly does not result in an immediate lapse into non-being equivalent to that from which we have been brought forth, since we continue to go about our daily lives. To address this difficulty, I draw on the logic of Maximus the Confessor to think about how sense can be made of this seemingly paradoxical situation.

Before continuing I wish to clarify what is meant by the term 'non-being' or 'non-existence'. In the passage on which I am focussing in *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius uses the term *μὴ εἶναί*.[1] The nuance of what he means by this is given by the context in which we find the term, rather than the precise terminology used. Athanasius uses *μὴ εἶναί* to describe the state of creatures before they were called into existence. Creation had no being, no existence; it was nothing. Before being called into being, we were nothing. When we reject God, we return to that same state, to absolute non-being. It is the doctrine of creation out of nothing that grounds Athanasius' references to absence of being in this passage. This absolute nothingness, key to the Christian tradition, is what is referred back to by Athanasius when he talks of human loss of the knowledge of God, as we shall come to in a moment.

In the passages I refer to from Maximus, creatures are gifted being – *τὸ εἶναι*. In this paper, I argue that the way Maximus talks about the movement of creatures from *being* to *eternal well-being* can be useful for understanding Athanasius' discussion of non-being. While I do not directly compare Maximus' passages on non-being to Athanasius' here, we do see Maximus use the same phrase as Athanasius elsewhere in a similar context. For example, in *Ambiguum* 29, Maximus clarifies a grammatical difficulty and concludes that by the phrase '*Ὡς γὰρ ἀδύνατον εἶναι λέγομεν πονηρὸν εἶναι Θεὸν ἢ μὴ εἶναι*', we should understand that it is impossible for God to be evil, as well as impossible for God to not exist. Maximus writes that '*καὶ στίξαι καὶ πάλιν ἄρξασθαι νοήματος ἑτέρου καὶ προσεπαγαγεῖν*, '*ἢ μὴ εἶναι*', ἀντὶ τοῦ '*ἀνυπάρκτου εἶναι*', which in Constas's translation reads 'and so make the final clause the beginning of a new idea, so that "or not to be" means "or not to exist"'.[2] Unlike creatures, it is not possible for God 'not to be', which is '*μὴ εἶναι*' the same term that Athanasius uses. We see this reiterated in *Ambiguum* 34, where Maximus writes that, 'But all things that are "around" the essence do not disclose what the essence itself is, but what it is not, such as not being created, not having a beginning, not being finite, not being corporeal, and any other such things that are around the essence, and indicate what it is not, but not what it is'.[3] Maximus uses the same phrase 'what is not' (*μὴ εἶναι*) to talk apophatically about what we cannot know about God and how this allows us indirectly to have a certain kind of knowledge of God. The use of *μὴ εἶναι* here is less terminological and reads more like a turn of phrase, as in 'that which is not the case', suggesting that *μὴ εἶναι* is not used to refer to 'non-being' in any capitalised or consistent way. However, the context of both these citations allows us to affirm that Maximus is aware of the usage that Athanasius provides of *μὴ εἶναι* referring to creaturely non-existence before creation. Thus, while I do not directly compare

[1] Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 4.5, in *Sources Chrétiennes,* ed. C. Kannengiesser, vol. 199 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1973).

[2] *Ambiguum* 29 (PG 91:1272D–1273A), in *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua,* ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 2 (London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 34–35.

[3] *Ambiguum* 34 (PG 91:1288B) in *On Difficulties*, vol. 2, 66–67.

statements on non-being in Maximus and Athanasius, it is clear that there is at least some continuity in the way that the term 'being' (εἶναι) is being used by both theologians. We may therefore consider Maximus' comments on being – well-being – eternal well-being (τὸ εἶναι – τὸ εὖ εἶναι – τὸ ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι) which I go on to explain, as being applicable terms that can be added to Athanasius' understanding of creaturely being and non-being.

Athanasius' Understanding of Non-Being and Sin

For Athanasius, non-being describes the original state of creatures, and the state to which creatures return when they are not sustained by God. Being is a gift given to creatures. God causes and sustains their existence, continually granting them being, which is of God. Sin, for Athanasius, is creaturely rejection of God and therefore rejection of being itself. This implies that when we sin, humans fall into nothingness and cease to exist, leading to the implication that fallen human nature and personal sin should result in our immediate non-existence.

Athanasius explains that creatures are made out of nothing. He draws on Exodus 3:14 to say that *being* is gifted from God, since God *is.* Athanasius writes that in despising and rejecting God, humankind devised evil and

> …received the condemnation of death with which they had been threatened; and from thenceforth no longer remained as they were made, but were being corrupted according to their devices; and death had the mastery over them as king. For transgression of the commandment was turning them back to their natural state, so that just as they have had their being out of nothing, so also, as might be expected, they might look for corruption into nothing in the course of time.[4]

Athanasius suggests that it is the act of rejecting God himself that brings about this change in human nature. In rejecting God, humans make a choice that results in eventual death and non-being. This is also apparent later when Athanasius writes that; humans, 'having rejected things eternal, and, by counsel of the devil, turned to things of corruption, became the cause of their own corruption in death'.[5] However, as Athanasius goes on to explain:

> For if, out of a former normal state of non-existence they [humans] were called into being by the Presence and loving-kindness of the Word, it followed naturally that when men were bereft of the knowledge of God and

---

[4] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 4.4, in *Athanasius: Selected Works and Letters*, trans. A. Robertson and ed. P. Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 219.
[5] *Ibid.* 5.1.

were turned back to what was not (for what is evil is not, but what is good is), they should, since they derive their being from God who IS, be everlastingly bereft even of being; in other words, that they should be disintegrated and abide in death and corruption.[6]

Here, Athanasius suggests that to be bereft of the knowledge of God, is to fall into non-being. If God *is*, then to turn away from him is not just to have a curse of mortality, as implied earlier, but to lapse into non-being and total absence of being. We can recall Psalm 104 where, 'When thou takest away their breath they perish and are turned again to their dust. When thou lettest thy breath go forth they shall be made and thou shalt renew the face of the earth' (Ps 104:29–30). The integrity of a creature's existence is tied to the breath of God who goes out amongst them and creates and sustains them, and without whom, they are nothing.

Though Athanasius seems to attribute a corrupt and fallen life to humans who turn away from God, noting that they will eventually die and fall into nothing, his logic suggests that to be fallen, is to reject *being* itself. This is because (1) Athanasius gives importance to human choice, saying that we either choose to follow God, know him, and continuously share the gift of being from him, or we reject him and knowledge of him, making being foreign to us. And (2) if we refer back to my introductory remarks on what non-being is for Athanasius, we can immediately see that there is no minor way of rejecting being. We have being itself because it is gifted to us. If we refuse this gift, we return to the nothingness that was before creation was brought forth from it. If we take this understanding of sin to be valid, it would seem sensible to suggest that when humanity fell, or at any moment that we personally sin, we fall immediately into non-being, since we have chosen to alienate ourselves from *being itself*. My question is this: how can fallen human nature exist and *persist* if Athanasius is right that God is being and that to turn away from him is to choose non-being? How can we be nothing, when we clearly persist in our fallen lives and have a chance of redemption in Christ?

Maximus' Understanding of Being and Completion

I think we can make sense of this difficulty by looking at the cosmic theology of Maximus the Confessor. Maximus describes the movement of the created cosmos in a triad that he calls creation – movement – rest (γένεσις – κίνησις – στάσις).[7] This also corresponds to another triad that he uses to explain the ethical movement of the cosmos through humanity as its mediator: being – well-being – eternal well-be-

---

[6] *Ibid.* 4.5.
[7] *E.g. Ambiguum* 15 (PG 91:1220CD), in *On Difficulties,* vol. 1, 372–374; *Cf.* Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism, Studia Anselmiana XXXVI* (Rome: Orbis Catholicus, 1955), 92–93.

ing (τὸ εἶναι – τὸ εὖ εἶναι – τὸ ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι).[8] In the act of creation (both the original moment and continued creation in all that is about us), God grants creatures *being*. In the movement that is gifted to all creatures, we have the capacity to move towards God. According to Maximus' interpretation, humans have been given the gift of rationality and free will, which enables us to choose to love on behalf of all creation. Ordinarily, this is a choice that brings all of creation into well-being, a choice that is creaturely acceptance of God. This paves the way for eternal well-being which is gifted through grace by God. This corresponds to *theosis*, of which we may have a foretaste in this life, but which is ultimately reserved for new creation after the death of this world.[9] For Maximus, the fall and corruption of human nature is the human rejection of God, and therefore the loss of the ability to move towards this 'well-being', without which the cosmos cannot find its perfect end and rest (*telos*) in God. Christ restores this possibility, and human nature that partakes in Christ is restored in and through him (as is the rest of the cosmos that is completed in him as human and divine mediator).

The most significant part of this for our problem is that Maximus has quite a complex understanding of what being is. As implied in the triad creation – movement – rest, there is something incomplete about creation and the existence of creatures themselves that is not fulfilled until rest in eternal well-being. This understanding of being as something that can be transfigured and perfected, as something not yet complete, may also help us understand non-being as something not yet fully realised, but whose threat lingers with us. Through the opportunity we have in Christ, sin does not seem to result in an immediate lapse into nothing. Rather than wondering at what stage in sinning we might expect a lapse into non-being, we might rather consider at what stage we have truly attained real being. Maximus implies that we are not truly human until we have chosen to partake in well-being and are received into eternal well-being. Our communion with God is essential to our full-existence. We have not yet *become* fully human. Our calling, and God's will for each of us, expressed in the *logoi* of creation, is that we choose to move towards him and are received into full communion with him so as to become gods by grace. Through Christ, we have been given the opportunity in our lives on earth to choose whether we wish to receive God or reject him. Though we can have foretastes of rejecting God in our lives, and foretastes of deification in our lives, it is at the end of this time on earth that our choices to be reconciled to or to reject God have final weight.

Crucial to this is understanding the role Christ plays. Without Christ, the full immediate reality of which Athanasios speaks would be upon us. Because of Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection, however, we are granted the time needed to choose to live in him. In Maximus' words, we are granted the crucial stage of *movement,* of human choice to choose well-being, and time on earth to learn how

---

[8] Maximus, *Ambiguum* 7 (PG 91:1073C), in *On Difficulties*, vol. 1, 86.
[9] Maximus, *Ambiguum* 15 (PG 91:1220C), in *On Difficulties*, vol. 1, 372.

to love, to learn how to be human, and how to participate in what it means to be human.

An image which I found helpful for thinking about this kind of incomplete understanding of being, is the parable of the fig tree in Luke which continues to bear no fruit. The Gardener asks the Orchard Owner to give him one more year to try and cultivate the tree and encourage it to bear fruit (Luke 13:6–9). Though the tree is dead and refuses to bear fruit, it has a grace period by the intercession of the Gardener, which, through his love, may bring it new life. In this time, it is neither consigned to death, nor has its full fruit-bearing potential been realised. It is a tree, but it is not the fullest perfect expression of what was intended for it. Its life on earth with the Gardener will determine what it becomes of it in a year's time.

Ultimately, we still see in Maximus' work a dedication to Athanasius' clear distinction that rejection of God results in a return to the primordial nothingness from which creatures were created. By considering Athanasius' thought through Maximus' however, we can understand how this lapse back into nothing is reserved for the eschaton, where the grace period of human striving will determine the final rejection or reception of God by creatures.

Conclusion

A way of staying true to Athanasius' important understanding of sin as non-being and rejection of God is to marry it to Maximus' understanding of transformative being, of nature as always having been about a journey towards perfection through hypostatic choice. The fall as a corruption of human nature meant that the choice to participate in God and transfigure the cosmos was rejected by humans. In honouring that choice, humanity is granted Christ—the Gardener—who effectively suspends that ultimate fall into absence and non-being. Through him, we may again choose to live in transfigured human nature, participate in being, move towards well-being and may even be graced by the gift of eternal-wellbeing. Athanasius' 'sin as nothing' still exists, but is instead reserved until after that year of intercession in the orchard is done. We can both acknowledge non-being as mistaken creaturely movement that is given an opportunity for 'true being by participation' in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and know that if a creature persists to reject life, it can only, at the end of time, fall back into the primordial nothingness that Athanasius describes.

Desire and the Practical Part of the Soul according to Maximus the Confessor

NEVENA DIMITROVA

Institute of Art Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria

In the works of St Maximus the Confessor, the term 'desire' encompasses a number of notions, which have been studied by scholars such as Bathrellos, Blowers, Bradshaw, Gauthier, and Loudovikos. Considering Maximus' views as part of Byzantine philosophy, my focus in this article is primarily based on the famous differentiation of philosophy as a way of life, as certain *praxis*, from philosophy as a thinking activity. Throughout the Middle Ages, *Philosophia Christiana* was regarded as a practical way of life. It subsequently became the 'science of sciences' and, as Jean-Luc Marion says, this itself embodies the crisis of philosophy: the divergence of these two ways of understanding philosophy. From this perspective, the text begins with the practical and theoretical differentiation inherited by Maximus from ancient philosophy describing the activities of the soul, and then moves on to the notion of desire in relation to practical reasoning or action.

> Tennyson said that if we could but understand a single flower we would know who we are and what the world is. Perhaps he was trying to say that there is nothing, however humble, that does not imply the history of the world and its infinite concatenation of causes and effects. Perhaps he meant that there is no deed, however humble, that does not imply universal history and its infinite succession of effects and causes. Perhaps he meant that the visible world is complete in each representation, just as Schopenhauer tells us that the Will expresses itself entirely in every person. The Kabbalists believed that man is a microcosm, a symbolic mirror of the universe; as would everything, according to Tennyson.[1]

Beginning and end are terms that stand at the basis of any philosophical or theological quest. The origin and the goal of human existence have shaped, and still raise interest in, dynamic topics like the one which we are presently considering. Motion and fulfilment in search of perfection have formed anthropological views throughout the history of humanity. Wholeness is acquired at the end of experience. In other words, the possibility of becoming a human 'being', already incorporates a human 'doing'.

---

[1] J.L. Borges, *El Aleph*, trans. Anna Zlatkova, (Sofia: Colibri, 1995), 104.

How does desire move humans towards completion, and what are the activities necessary for completing the path that culminates in the sublime state of knowing the divinity, or deification? What we call 'desire' in Maximus' language has different notions about which there are articles and works written by Bathrellos, Blowers, Bradshaw, Gauthier, and Loudovikos. Since this presentation comes under the heading 'Maximus the Confessor and Byzantine philosophy', my focus here is based more on the famous differentiation of philosophy as a way of life, a certain praxis, as opposed to philosophy as a thinking activity. *Philosophia Christiana* during the whole medieval period is regarded as practical life. After that it became the science of sciences and, as Jean-Luc Marion says, this itself contains the crisis of philosophy, the diverging of these two ways of understanding of philosophy.

Therefore, I will begin with the practical and theoretical differentiation that Maximus inherits from ancient philosophy in describing the activities of the soul, and will then proceed to the notion of desire and practical reasoning or action.

In the *Chapters on Love*, philosophy (φιλοσοφία) is used solely in the sense employed by the patristic tradition, which understands it as a 'love of wisdom' that entails certain ethical and ascetical practices. Yet, in line with Athanasius of Alexandria, Basil the Great, and Gregory of Nyssa, φιλοσοφία is also identified with human striving towards God in *Chapters on Love*. The distinction between the type of noetic activity that is based on divine wisdom and that of Hellenic philosophy, which is based on human wisdom, is overcome in two respects. This reformulation of the definition of philosophy is a natural consequence of the new horizons that open up for human thought in the Christian milieu. Philosophy is an act of the mind, but as such, it is not opposed to the enlightenment that is given by the Holy Spirit. Even so, a love of wisdom not only changes the content of divine wisdom; it also transforms the wisdom of this world.

In other words, the initial *tropos*—the love from and to God, which is the main motivating factor in communion with him—turns into a transforming and transcending event that links the practice of the virtues and contemplation of the divine *logoi* to participation in the divine energies. Thus, although in Evagrius' thought the final aim of the soul's strivings is the pure mind—which is the state from which it has fallen—for Maximus, spiritual life mirrors the way we love. 'As the memory of fire does not warm the body', he declares, 'so faith without love does not bring about the illumination of knowledge in the soul.'[2]

Elsewhere, Maximus says: 'And unless the mind finds something better than these to which it can transfer its desire, it will not be completely persuaded to disdain them. And better than these by far is the knowledge of God and of divine things.'[3] Overcoming the passions and disciplining the flesh generally do not have a

---

[2] *Capita de caritate* 1.31, in *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, trans. C. George Berthold (London: SPCK, 1985).

[3] *Capita de caritate* 3.61.

negative meaning in Maximus' works. Instead, the emphasis is placed on love and its purifying and transformative role. 'The soul is pure when it has been freed from the passions and rejoices unceasingly in divine love', Maximus avows.[4] This is another place where the transformation of Evagrius' teachings can be seen. The intellectual achievement of a purified mind is not the ultimate goal for Maximus.

Therefore, for Maximus, thinking is not simply brainwork that delivers a sterilized definition at the end of the process of knowing; rather, it actively engages the whole composite of body and soul in overcoming the fall of the first Adam and moving towards the new Adam, the divine *Logos*, and life and love in Christ. This means that gnosis is closely related to the whole gamut of human existence and has ontological dimensions.[5]

According to Aristotle, practical wisdom is 'a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man.'[6] Thus, the exercising of practical knowledge is action. Having practical knowledge involves not only having true beliefs or having reasoned correctly, but having the right sort of desires as well. Aristotle says that only the good man can know what is good. Knowledge is thought of by Aristotle as a kind of disposition, which he calls 'habit'. All habits are dispositions, but not all dispositions are habits. This distinction between merely having knowledge and exercising one's knowledge stands between a potentiality and an actuality. Both scientific and practical knowledge are described as capacities acquired by training or teaching. And 'one who possesses the knowledge of a science but is not actually exercising it knows the science potentially in a sense, though not in the same sense as he knew it before he learnt it.'[7]

In the same way, Maximus regards knowledge as acquired disposition and actualized virtues. He understands knowledge in an even more dynamic way, where the practical and contemplative parts of the soul are conceived of as a unity and, according to Maximus, they lead, in the end, to deification.

The Practical Part of the Soul

Maximus presents his clearest sketch of the soul's functions in a section of the *Mystagogia* that is devoted to the characteristics of its practical and theoretical parts.[8] The soul's endeavours eventually lead to Goodness by virtue of the activity of reason ($\lambda \acute{o} \gamma o \varsigma$) and to truth through the activity of the mind ($vo\tilde{v}\varsigma$). Evil (ignorance) results from a misuse of the human will that has an impact upon the principles of (or divine will for) all beings. These *logoi* are not Platonic ideas; rather, they represent

---

[4] *Capita de caritate* 1.34.
[5] *The Disputation with Pyrrhus of our Father among the Saints Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Joseph P. Farell (South Canaan, PA: St Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1990), 32.
[6] Aristotle, *Nicomahean Ethics* 1140B5-10.
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] See especially Chapter 5 in *Mystagogia* (PG 91:672D).

the divine intention for every created being to acquire its proper place by relating nature to energy, or *logos* to *tropos*, to use Maximus' terms. The Confessor's originality is evident when he relates the *logoi* to the *Logos*.[9] Indeed, the actualization of the *logoi* within the *Logos* constitutes the foundation of his theory of knowledge. He even describes sense perception as the faculty that has revealed the *logoi* ever since ignorance became part of human existence and prohibited contemplation of the divine *logoi*. In the view of Maximus, the reliance upon sense perception results in the soul's movements being defined by the dialectic of pleasure and pain.

In his longest *Ambigua*, Maximus says that 'every forbidden pleasure has come to be through passion aroused through the senses by some object of sense. For pleasure is nothing else than a kind of feeling formed in the sense, or a form of sensible energy constituted by an irrational desire.'[10] For Maximus, the main point is not *where* pleasure is experienced, but *what* object produces pleasure. This conception reflects the Epicurean emphasis on the joy of the mind and the pleasure of the body, as well as the views of pleasure formulated by Nemesius. In other words, Maximus is primarily concerned with what causes reason to be distracted from direct contemplation and what eventually leads it to embrace sense perception and discursive reasoning. Misuse of the soul's faculties is the source of *apostasy* from direct contemplation. That is why Maximus perceives that all of the soul's faculties are grounded in '*logicised*' meaning, both in the case of reason and with regards to the *logoi* of creation.

For the Confessor, actualization of the *logoi* of creation and human completion in knowledge and deification are inconceivable apart from free will and free choice. Maximus quotes Athanasius, who maintains that the mind is 'either will, or desire, or motion according to something' and refers to Clement of Alexandria, who, in *Stromata*, book 6, defines the will as a mind desiring something and purpose as a rational desire or will directed towards some particular object.[11] In *The Disputation with Pyrrhus*, the issue of will is considered in terms of the relationship between nature and hypostasis, which is to say, between nature and person. Maximus follows his observation that in the postlapsarian state, human beings have become possessors of gnomic will with this analysis: 'Because of this, then, the gnomic will is fitly ascribed to us, being a mode of the employment [of the will] and not a principle [*logos*] of nature; otherwise nature [itself] would change innumerable times.' Maximus goes on to add:

> It is thus not possible to say that Christ had a gnomic will. For the Same had being itself, subsisting divinely, and thus naturally hath an inclination to the

---

[9] *Ambigua ad Iohannem* 7 (PG 91:1081D).

[10] *Ambigua ad Iohannem* 10 (PG 91:112C). See also the translation of Maximos Constas, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 161.

[11] See *The Disputation with Pyrrhus*, 40.

good, and a drawing away from evil, just as Basil, the great eye of the church, said when explaining the interpretation of the forty–fourth Psalm: 'By the same line of interpretation, Isaiah said the same thing: 'Before the child knew or advanced in evil, he chose the good', because he also said 'before the child knows [to seek] good and to refuse evil, he chose the good'. For the word before 'indicates the he had by nature what is good, not inquiring and deliberating as we do, but because he subsisted divinely by virtue of his very being'.[12]

Maximus explains that in this case, the word 'before' is used to indicate that divine knowledge of the Good is not like human knowledge of such, which is acquired 'through examination and thinking.'[13] In this regard, human knowledge of good and evil is once again associated with sin and falling away from direct contemplation of the *logoi* that are in God. Maximus maintains that we, by nature, have an appetite simply for what is good by nature, but we gain experience of the goal in a particular way, through inquiry and counsel. It is believed that this is why human beings have gnomic will. Although nature remains unmoved (and unmoving) in its *logos* (λόγος), it has the capacity to act and move in different modes (τρόποι) of existence. These movements depend on a person's choice, which means that these modes of natural activity are defined by the human *hypostasis* in accordance with the disposition of the will (γνώμη) and its choices (προαίρεσης). As von Balthasar writes: The motion and realization are due to nature; the hypostasis is manifested first in the 'how' of realization.[14]

In *The Disputation with Pyrrhus*, Maximus appears to reduce the connection between *logos* and *tropos* to simple naturalism, but he simultaneously differentiates these two concepts quite well. While the virtues are definitely characteristic of nature, they are not manifested in the same way by everyone because 'we do not all practice or exercise the things that we all have by nature in the same way.'[15] Therefore, the individual human *hypostases* and the dispositions of will (*gnōmē*) are responsible for the presence of evil in the world; yet, the key to human *theosis* also lies in the way these personal endowments are used. In the passage cited above, well-being depends on the individual human personality and its gnomic inclinations and desires. Maximus' entire line of reasoning is based on personal asceticism.

The difficulty here is that Maximus appears to relate will to *hypostasis*—that is, to the *person*—rather than to nature.[16] This would mean that Maximus' argument

---

[12] *Ibid. Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:308D).

[13] *Ibid.*, where the Greek text reads as follows: καθ' ἡμᾶς ζητήσας καί βουλευσάμενος.

[14] See Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy. The Universe According to St Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003).

[15] See Plotinus, *Enneads* I.2.19., LCL, trans. A. H. Armstrong, vol. 440 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1969).

[16] Maximus identifies the notions of hypostasis (ὑπόστασις) and person (πρόσωπον).

affirms the Monothelites' belief that the will is a characteristic of the hypostasis. However, this is not true, as Maximus himself rejects the Monothelites' position when he makes a clear distinction between nature and person. Here, the main focus is not on the important contribution that Maximus makes to Christian history with his teachings regarding Christ's two wills. Rather, the point of interest is related to the Confessor's affirmation that, even if Christ has a human nature and human will, he does not will the way human beings do because there is no gnomic will in Christ. Maximus thus succeeds in rewriting the prevailing theories of will and *apokatasta-sis*. He maintains that there are two natural wills in Christ that are responsible for his divine and human natures. Yet, he also holds that there is a mode of willing that is specific to each and every person. Therefore, for Maximus, there is no 'will in principle' that can be abstracted from its hypostatic 'application' or use. The clari-fication of terms describing the human and divine wills in Christ provides a better understanding of the way will operates in human beings. The specific notions of nature and *hypostasis*, or *logos-tropos* distinction are well applied in Maximus' an-thropology where every nature is a hypostasised nature and is manifested through the unique mode of willing of each person. *Gnōmē* represents the way of willing in humans that differentiates them from the way of willing in Christ.

'*Gnōmē*' (γνώμη) is one of the terms in Maximus' writings that is difficult to translate. Maximus understands *gnōmē* as speaking of deliberation caused by ignorance of what is the right course of action. It is also associated with free will, opinion, and individual positions. Human beings are subject to this ignorance and deliberation, but Christ is not, because the humanity of Christ does not simply subsist (in a manner) similar to us, but divinely, for he who appeared in the flesh for our sake was God. It is thus not possible to say that human beings deliberate because they are ignorant of what is good, but God does not need such deliberation, because as man his humanity subsists in the divine Son, and so as man he knows what is good in a way that he would not if his *hypostasis* were human.

According to Maximus, the will is a natural feature of human *and* divine nature; it is a distinctive, constitutive element of every rational, contemplative being. In Hellenistic philosophy, there are discussions of the will, especially in the Aristotelean and Stoic traditions, but the term 'will' does not yet have a concrete ontological and anthropological content in the pertinent texts. In the fifth century, a statement by Diadochus of Photiki about the new context in which Christian thought considers the question of the will concludes that 'self-determination [αὐτεξούσιος] is the rational wish of a soul that strives [towards] everything…she wishes for.'[17] Maximus bases his own perception that self-determination is the ontologically unifying principle within human beings on this sentence from Diadochus' *Gnostic Chapters*,

---

[17] Diadochus of Photiki, *Gnostic Chapters* 5, in *Diadoque de Photicé*, Sources Chrétiennes 5, trans. E. des Places, 2nd edition (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966).

which he repeats almost verbatim.[18] However, the concept of will receives its most profound ontological content in the context of Maximus' Christological and anthropological reflections.[19] The will is the ontological unity of the self, or in the words of the Church Fathers, the image that must acquire its eschatological fulfilment in its likeness to God.

Maximus identifies will with the natural motion that unites all of the other natural attributes in the course of human ascent. He maintains that rational beings possess a type of self-motion (αὐτεξούσιος κίνησις) or self-determination, which he calls will. The actions of those who have will are not dictated by the senses or the flesh. Paraphrasing Diadochus' wording, these persons are guided solely by a rational self-determination or self-authority that enables them to manifest their freedom. Maximus stresses that the will is affiliated with nature because it is a natural attribute. All *natural* powers and attributes, as well as nature itself, are invariably disclosed by their mode of *existence*. Thus, according to the Church Fathers, the will is always a defining power of a hypostasized nature.

The special position occupied by gnomic will is related to this differentiation between the *logos* of nature and the *tropos* of existence.[20] Natural will (θέλημα φυσικόν) is the attribute through which nature exhibits its own dynamics and relates the gnomic will (θέλημα γνωμικόν) to the elements of difference and otherness, as well as to the mode by which the personal will and its energies may be used. Gnomic will involves the personal (hypostatic) use and manifestation of natural will; therefore, it is related to the *hypostasis*, which is to say, to the individual person. As Maximus says in *The Disputation with Pyrrhus*, 'the *gnōmē* is nothing [other] than an act of willing in a particular way, in relation to some real or assumed good.'[21] The gnomic will enables the free, self-determined realization of the *logos* of the natural will, and provides the personal (hypostatic) dimension of the existential motion of the *logos* of nature with its eschatological goal, which entails attaining life in Christ—or life in the likeness of God.[22]

The following passage picks up on these themes:

Not only those who have examined the nature [of things] with their reason, and thus who have surpassed the multitude, but the usage of the uneducated hath also affirmed that what is natural is not taught. So if natural things be not acquired through teaching, then we have will without having acquired

[18] See S. Toutekov, *Личност, Общност, Другост* (Велико Търново: Синтагма, 2009), 34–35.

[19] See D. Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). According to N. Loudovikos, Maximus is the first to use the term 'will' ontologically. See his *Η Κλειστή Πνευματικότητα και το Νόημα του Εαυτού: ο Μυστικισμός της Ισχύος και η Αλήθεια Φύσεως και Προσώπου* (Αθήνα: Ελληνικά Γράμματα, 1999), 187–93.

[20] John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 63–68.

[21] *The Disputation with Pyrrhus*, 30.

[22] Toutekov, *Личност, Общност, Другост*, 41.

it or being taught it, for no one hath ever had a will which was acquired by teaching. Consequently, man hath the faculty of will by nature. And again, if man by nature possesses the faculty of reason, and if rational nature be also self-determining, and if self-determination be, according to the Fathers, the will, then man possesseth the will by nature…And again, if man was made after the image of the blessed and super-essential Godhead, and if the divine nature be self-determined, then he is by nature endowed with free will. For it hath been stated already that the Fathers defined the will as self-determination.[23]

Thus the *gnōmē* refers to particular acts of willing. For Maximus, therefore, *gnōmē* refers to sinful human hypostatic deliberation between good and evil, caused by human ignorance of what is good.

Desire

Paul Blowers says the following regarding the Maximian approach to desire:

Maximus understands desire, in all its cosmological and psychosomatic complexity, as the principal register of creaturely passibility and affectivity, as integral to the definition of human volition and freedom, and as central also to the subtle dialectic of activity and passivity in the creaturely transitus (διάβασις) to deification. In the opening section of *Ambiguum* 7, we have a serene portrait of the natural desire (ὄρεξις) or longing (ἔφεσις) of creatures for God which has no end until it reaches the ecstatic state of 'eternal well-being' (τὸ ἀεὶ εὖ εἶναι) where it is sublimely sated.[24]

As David Bradshaw affirms, rational wish (*boulesis*) and choice (*prohairesis*), which in classical thought are the primary acts of a volitional nature, are understood by Maximus as modes of *thelesis*. *Boulesis* is imaginative desire both of things that are and are not up to us, or equivalently, an act of will (*thelesis*) directed towards a particular object that may or may not be in our power.[25] According to Aristotle 'we deliberate about things that are in our power and can be done', and 'we deliberate not about ends but about means'. Since deliberation always involves our thinking by what means we are to realize some assumed end,[26] the starting point of deliberation is some assumed end, which is an object both of thought and desire.

---

[23] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:304CD); *The Disputation with Pyrrhus,* 24-25.
[24] 'The Dialectics and Therapeutics of Desire in Maximus the Confessor', *Vigiliae Christianae* 65, no. 4 (2011): 425-51.
[25] D. Bradshaw, 'St Maximus the Confessor on the Will' in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection*, ed. Bishop Maxim Vasiljevic (Alhambra: Sebastian Press, 2013), 143-57, at 145.
[26] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1112a30 and 1112b13.

'Choice is the deliberate desire of things in our power'.[27] It cannot be identified with *boulesis* (wish); for while we can wish for what is impossible, we can choose only what is in our power and what can be brought about by our own efforts. Furthermore, says Aristotle, 'wish relates rather to an end, while choice to the means'.[28] As we read in Nemesius of Emessa: 'free choice is a preference (*prohairesis*) of one thing to another but nobody would prefer a thing before deliberation, and would not choose, before judging'.[29]

Maximus inherits this differentiation between the imaginative desire and concrete choice. If *orexis* is the broader notion, *boulesis* is already a more specific one and although sometimes *orexis* and *boulesis* are used by Aristotle as synonyms, the latter one is connected with imagination and is translated as wish, not desire. Wish (*boulesis*) is thoroughly rational. Whenever we are moved to act by reason or deliberation or calculation, we are moved to act by wish.[30] This much is explicitly stated by Aristotle. He also clearly implies the converse, that every action according to wish is an action according to reason or calculation. For, what appears to be a conflict between reason and irrational desire is taken to be a conflict between appetite and wish.[31] The term 'wish' (*boulesis*) was generally used in a sense practically equivalent to desire (*orexis*) and was sometimes used by Aristotle in that sense.[32] Bathrellos maintains that the verb βούλομαι, which was normally used instead of the verb θέλω, 'always has—at least in classical and classicistic Greek—the connotation of planning which precedes the decision to act', and 'denotes, in its traditional use, deliberation plus decision rather than volition'. For that which is rational by nature has a natural power that is a rational appetite [*logikēn orexin*], which is also called the will [*thelesis*] of the intellective soul. By this power we reason willingly [*thelontes logizometha*]; and when we have reasoned, we desire willingly [*thelontes boulometha*].[33]

Maximus follows the tradition coming from Aristotle through Nemesius to distinguish the imaginative desire from concrete choice. However, the Confessor succeeds in further clarifying the existing usage of the language in describing the act of willing. Will and desire in their existential, and even more in their ontological, meaning are presented in the works of Paul Blowers and Nikolaos Loudovikos respectively.

---

[27] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 1113a10-15.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Nemesius of Emessa, chapter 33, in *On the Nature of Man*, trans. and ed. R.W. Sharples and Philip J. Van der Eijk (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

[30] Aristotle, *De Anima* 433a23-25.

[31] Aristotle, *De Anima* 434a10-15.

[32] A. K. Griffin, *Aristotle's Psychology of Conduct* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1931), 27, and also in R. Milo, *Aristotle on Practical Knowledge and Weakness of Will* (The Hague: Mouton & Co, 1966).

[33] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:293B); cf. *Opuscula theologica et polemica* 7 (PG 91:77B).

According to Blowers,

…desire, far from being an unfortunate superaddition to reason or the human intellectual constitution, lies at the very core of human nature. The levels of the soul and the soul-body relationship indicate hierarchy and differentiation, to be sure, but in their actualization they disclose a deeper moral unity of the mind in its relation to all subsidiary faculties, including the affections. Called to the highest knowledge of, and participation in, the Trinity the intellect is helpless without the inclination and passionate pursuit afforded by desire. Stating here, as he does also in *Ambiguum* 7,39 that the creature's proper τέλος includes also its ἀρχή, Maximus means that deification is not simply the monistic return to an ontological baseline. In the historical 'middle' (μεσότης) between ἀρχή and τέλος, a creature's desire expands rather than attenuates. Sanctified desire broadens (πλατύνεται) along with the mind in the pursuit of divine realities. As Maximus further suggests, rational and conceptual knowledge of God feeds desire (ἔφεσις), which in turn motivates the urge towards a higher, experiential and partici-pative knowledge of God in deification. At this level, in concert with faith and hope, love (ἀγάπη) as the ultimate theological virtue prepares the mind to become sublimely immovable in God's loving affection (στοργή), affixing the mind's entire faculty of longing (ἡ τῆς ἐφέσεως δύναμις) to the desire (πόθος) for God.[34]

The understanding that holds true in Byzantine thought is that freedom is an internal component of rational beings and of God. Thus, Maximus declares that 'the natural actions of rational beings…are not subject [to] compulsion.'[35] God, angels, and human beings are free in their natures and not by virtue of their self-defini-tion.[36] In the *Ambigua*, Maximus returns to Origen's schema regarding the motions of creation, which holds that no creature is an end or an exemplar of perfection in itself; yet, if every activity of a created being is directed towards an end, that end must be God who, since there is nothing prior to him, is his own end.[37]

Maximus' teaching on will and his differentiation of natural and gnomic will has been at the centre of serious scholarly work. In Maximus, self-determination and human will have a different meaning as compared to those in ancient ethics. In the tradition of Hellenistic philosophy, there are different discussions on the problem of

---

[34] P. Blowers, 'The Dialectics and Therapeutics of Desire in Maximus the Confessor', *Vigiliae Christi-anae* 65, no. 4 (2011): 425-451.

[35] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:293C).

[36] See M. Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 105.

[37] S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseu-do-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 183.

will (especially in the Aristotelean tradition), but in these contexts, the notion of will is not connected to ontological or anthropological meaning.

Conclusion

Desire is the driving force moving human activities towards completion. The understanding of a particular term and its usage requires us to properly reconstruct the historical context that gave rise to it. Questions surrounding the understanding and usage of 'desire' highlight the need for a clear exposition of Maximus the Confessor's teachings on the subject. Being a synthesis of previous Hellenistic thought, it is Maximus' most distinguished example of Christian philosophy that makes him 'the father of Byzantine philosophy'. In order to acquire the ability to read this new type of anthropology in its ontological dimensions, it is necessary to look at the main definitions found in the Maximian corpus.

Maximus' reformulation of the Aristotelean and Evagrian understandings results in an engagement of the whole human being, with both its practical and theoretical powers, on the way of perfection and deification. We have seen how practical and theoretical activities receive their meaning through the *tropos* of willing. Recognizing the *logoi* of things after the fall, and becoming one with the *Logos as its final aim*, becomes the new challenge before humankind. Sense perception, practice, and theory are incorporated into human existence through mode of will or specific *gnōmē*. Although ancient philosophy does not recognize will in the way in which it is understood in the Christian tradition, both Aristotelean and Maximian perspectives see desire through actions as possessing a particular aim and a point of completion. Nevertheless, Maximus sees the realization of the *logoi* in the *Logos* as the result of moving powers that mobilize the practical and contemplative forces of the human composite of body and soul The novel element in Maximus' thought is the understanding of will on an ontological level, as a necessary *tropos* of existential expression that needs to fulfill itself from the perspective of the Logos, from the standpoint of the human end.

Aristotle and the Stoics indeed believed in something *like* will, but it was different in kind from the type that we find emerging in the Christian tradition and from the notion of will that later received a more systematic formulation in the thought of the Confessor himself. In the fifth century, Diadochus of Photiki defined the concept of will according to the new context in which Christian thought places the important term: '*Autexsousios*, self-determination is a rational wish of the soul, that readily strives towards what she wills.'[38]

According to Nikolaos Loudovikos,[39] this text is very important because it shows how 'will' is used in the ascetic tradition prior to Maximus. Moreover, Loudovikos

---

[38] See Toutekov, *Личност, Общност, Другост*.
[39] N. Loudovikos, *Η Κλειστή Πνευματικότητα και το Νόημα του Εαυτού: ο Μυστικισμός της Ισχύος και*

observes that its usage here is psychological, with clear reference to ancient psychology. Additionally, 'desire/wish' is not a technical term, but a common notion used for defining self-determination. As Loudovikos also affirms, Maximus succeeds in describing something meta-philosophical through the use of a poetic and popular term—*thelesis*, *thelema*, wish, will—marking the inclusion of the will in ontology for the first time. However, this inclusion is not a product of abstract philosophical speculation. Rather, it is the fruit of existential knowledge of the human being that sees in 'will' the opening of the human being towards its eschatological fullness revealed in the Logos. Maximus not only bases his understanding of will on the Aristotelian term *prohaireseis,* with its more psychological and moral connotations, but also relates 'will' to existential growth, to the desires of reason. The dynamic completion of human nature is related to the will, which directs the natural motion towards its realization in eternal well-being.

η Αλήθεια Φύσεως και Προσώπου (Αθήνα: Ελληνικά Γράμματα, 1999), 188.

Moral Judgement in Maximus the Confessor: Reflections on an Analogical Ethic

DEMETRIOS HARPER

Visiting Research Fellow, University of Winchester, UK

The point of departure for this paper will be an explication of Maximus the Confessor's approach to moral judgment in light of the ancient tension between Stoic and Platonic/Aristotelian threads of thought regarding moral incontinence (ἀκράτεια) and the determination of the good. This paper shall seek, on the one hand, to account for the way in which these sometimes incongruous elements are utilized by the Confessor, and on the other, examine the consequences of his approach for moral theory at large. Of critical importance will be the attempt to understand better how Maximus would consider the determination of moral good to be epistemically possible in the face of diverse human experience and natural circumstances, as well as the various levels of moral training. As such, this essay will attempt to derive a Maximian answer to Rousseau's dilemma regarding the apparent human tendency to know the common good and yet disregard it.

The *aporia* posed by the ancients regarding knowing the good and being good has remained a perennial question and has divided ethical theorists up to our current era, resonating both explicitly and implicitly throughout the centuries in ethical thought.[1] I do not think it a hasty generalization to say that the early Christian tendency to rigorously emphasize some sort of unconditioned and free will in human moral agency, though at times diverse in its expression, is at least in part directed at this question.[2]

---

[1] The origin of this debate in ancient thought surrounds the question of ἀκρασία or moral incontinence, the philosophical background of which will be covered below. The original dispute is also described concisely by Terence Irwin in his *The Development of Ethics,* vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43. See also Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 14–17, 32–34, and Michael Frede, *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 20–25. See generally Inwood's *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* Frede's *A Free Will,* and Richard Sorabji's *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) for later responses to this *aporia* up through Late Antiquity.

[2] The Christian emphasis on free will and moral culpability on the part of all human agents has divided commentators. The thesis of Michael Frede's book *A Free Will* is that the precedents and concepts that would be taken up by the Christian thinkers of Late Antiquity can be found already in the Stoic school of thought. This is disputed by Kyle Harper in *From Shame to Sin* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 120–27, who argues that the notion of will and emphasis on moral freedom articulated by Christian writers is the result of the uniquely Christian world view. Another example of this conflict is manifested in the interpretation of the thought of Maximus the Confessor on the question of will. In *Emotion and Peace of Mind,* 337, Richard Sorabji argues against René Gauthier *et al.*, saying that Maximus' understanding of θέλησις is not really original but is merely the recapitulation of the Stoic notion of οἰκείωσις.

The perennial nature of this difficulty is disclosed by Alasdair McIntyre in his *A Short History of Ethics,* where he notes that the question as to why a human being acts against the good is a puzzle that occupies the Enlightenment thinker, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who was particularly frustrated by the fact that knowledge of the common good coexists with rampant societal corruption.[3] Though cast in accordance with the terms and expressions of the Enlightenment, Rousseau arrives at a conclusion that is not dissimilar to that of the Stoics, arguing that a human agent always wills the good, but he or she may or may not know what the good is.[4] Consequently, a typical rational being never errs morally but only fails to intellectually recognize the good. Both Marx and Kant would concern themselves with this same difficulty, whose thought continues to provide material for contemporary ethical discourse.[5]

While serving as a point of departure and the means for demonstrating the perennial character of the *aporia*, this paper will leave aside the modern context of the debate and return to the dawning of the Medieval period and the thought of Maximus the Confessor, who is regarded by many as also possessing perennial import. As it would be rather ambitious to determine definitively the Maximian approach to this issue in such a brief study, the essay at hand shall strive to lay portions of the groundwork and test some ideas towards the eventual construction of a complete Maximian response to the difficulties raised by human agency's rejection of the good. With this ultimate goal in mind, this paper shall re-examine some of the elements of moral psychology in the thought of the Confessor, an area that has received some scholarly attention but which is far from exhausted.[6] In particular, it shall seek to shed some light on Maximus' approach to moral judgment in light of the classical disagreement between Stoic and Peripatetic schools of thought regarding the question of moral incontinence,[7] a disagreement made all the more

---

This is disputed directly by David Bradshaw, *St Maximus the Confessor on the Will,* in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation Resurrection,* Proceedings of the Symposium on St Maximus the Confessor, ed. Maxim Vasiljević (Alhambra: Sebastian Press, 2013), 143–58; at 150–51, and indirectly by Nikolaos Loudovikos, *Η Κλειστή Πνευματικότητα και το Νόημα του Εαυτού: ο Μυστικισμός της Ισχύος και η Αλήθεια Φύσεως και Προσώπου* (*Αθήνα*: *Ελληνικά Γράμματα*, 1999), 187–93.

   [3] (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2002), 180–82.

   [4] Ibid. See also J. B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 474–75, who notes that Rousseau regards the attainment of morality as being contingent upon the transition from 'nature' to 'society'. See his *Discourse on Political Economy and the Social Contract* II. vii, trans. Christopher Betts (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). What creates the *aporia* in the view of the French philosopher is how individuals seem to choose against the good even when this transition from nature to society has been effected, a situation that should facilitate a common knowledge of what the good is.

   [5] MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics,* 182.

   [6] Of notable mention are Frederick Aquino's article, 'The Synthetic Unity of Virtue and Epistemic Goods in Maximus the Confessor', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26(3) (2013): 378–90, and Paul Blowers's 'Aligning and Reorienting the Passible Self: Maximus the Confessor's Virtue Ethics', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26(3) (2013): 333–50. Both articles offer excellent insights into the Confessor's approach to moral psychology, demonstrating, in particular, the role of passibility and desire in attaining to a state of well-being.

   [7] See especially Brad Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* who details the objections to

interesting given that fact that elements from both schools were heavily appropriated by the Christian tradition that informs Maximus himself.[8] While it is broadly acknowledged that these sometimes disparate approaches were synthesized by Middle and Neoplatonists as well as Christian theologians, the way the incongruous elements are integrated and function together in a single mode of thought has, to my knowledge, received considerably less attention. A secondary objective of the paper, then, is to move towards clarifying how the Stoic and Aristotelian elements interact in Maximus' moral thought. Finally, and most importantly, the essay shall propose that the key to understanding Maximus' view of the matter lies in his use of the concept of analogy in relation to the ethical dimensions of human existence.

The Philosophical Background: The Question of Moral Continence and its Correlatives

The difficulty concerning knowing the good and being good emerged rather early in philosophical thought and is tied to the ancient disagreement concerning moral incontinence (ἀκράτεια or ἀκρασία), a conflict that will likely be familiar to most students of moral philosophy. To trace the disagreement, we must start with the veritable philosophical prototype, namely, Socrates himself. In the early Platonic dialogues, Plato's Socrates exclusively identifies virtues with knowledge and the proper choices made by the intellect, apparently rejecting the notion of a tripartite soul and the impetus to act on the basis of the passible elements of the soul (ἐπιθυμία and θυμός).[9] The Socratic psychological model is therefore monistic, positing the intellect, the ἡγεμονικόν in this context, as effectively the only determining force at work within the human psyche. In rejecting a tripartite soul, Socrates in turn rejects the possibility of a psychic conflict between the judgment of reason and the pull of the incensive and appetitive portions of the soul of the human ψυχή. Consequently, it would not be possible for a human being to act on the basis of an irrational desire or incensive movement against the proper perspective provided by reason, thereby precluding the existence of moral incontinence and actions that might be committed in opposition to the recognition of the good by reason. This comes through in the *Protagoras,* where Socrates rejects the implication of his interlocutor that a human being would act primarily due to the desires and irrational movements of a non-rational portion of the soul:

How are you in regard to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)? Do you share the view that most people take of this, or have you some other? The opinion generally held of knowledge is something of this sort—that it is no strong or guiding

(ἡγεμονικόν) or governing thing; it is not regarded as anything of that kind, but people think that, while a man often has knowledge in him, he is not governed by it, but by something else—now by passion (θυμός), now by pleasure (ἡδονή), now by pain, at times by love, and often by fear; their feeling about knowledge.[10]

As he goes on to argue, it is inconceivable that someone would possess knowledge of the good and yet still be compelled like 'a slave' (ἀνδράποδον) by the impulses induced by irrational desires.[11] In short, a human agent will only act in accordance with what he or she believes to be good and beneficial, and if an action turns out to be something other than good, it is due to the fact that the agent mistook the un-good thing for the good. Actions that turn out to be harmful and not reflective of the good come about as a result of mistaken beliefs, never due to an improperly regulated παθητικόν or non-rational portion of the soul. As such, virtue is nothing more than the proper deployment of right reason and the general disposition to discern the good, a position which would invite the criticism of Aristotle and his intellectual heirs.[12]

This exclusively intellectualist approach to virtue and the good gives way to a tripartite soul in the later Platonic dialogues, the most well-known appearances of which can be found in the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*. Indeed, the allegory of the chariot from the *Phaedrus*, wherein the λογιστικόν or rational faculty of the soul is implicitly portrayed as the charioteer, reigning in and guiding the irrational portions of the soul,[13] has become perennially iconic and would be an image that would reappear not only in later philosophical treatises but in the writings of Christian ascetics as well.[14] It is due in part to the paradigm shift in moral psychology that contemporary scholars have concluded that the views expressed in the middle and later Platonic dialogues are those of Plato himself and a corrective of the historical views of his mentor, Socrates.[15] The outcome of this shift is, of course, the introduction of the concept of ἀκράτεια or 'moral incontinence' and the belief that it is possible for untrained or unregulated desires and appetites to cause a human agent to act against the right-ordering power of reason.[16] Those who have not developed right reason

---

[10] *Protagoras* 352b.

[11] *Ibid.* 352c.

[12] *Nicomachean Ethics,* book 7.13, trans. F. H. Peters (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2005). See Irwin, *The Development of Ethics,* vol. 1, 43, and Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* 88–90.

[13] *Phaedrus* 246a–247b , LCL, trans. Harold North Fowler, vol. 36 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1914).

[14] For example, an explicit reference to the 'charioteer' in conjunction with a discussion of the tripartite soul appears in *On the Virtues and Vices,* a work that is praised by Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and which he ascribes to John of Damascus. See *The Philokalia,* trans. and ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, vol. 2 (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), 334–42.

[15] *Cf.* Irwin, *The Development of Ethics,* vol. 1, 75–80.

[16] *Cf. The Republic,* book 4, LCL, trans. and ed. Christopher Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy, vol. 237 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013). *Cf.* Joshua Wilburn, '*Akrasia* and Self-rule in Plato's

or belief—the 'base rabble', as the mature Socrates delicately puts it—are slaves to their appetites and are moved unrestrainedly by the lesser powers of the soul.[17] Conversely, a human agent who has undergone proper moral training ($\pi\alpha\iota\delta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$), will possess a faculty of reason capable of properly deliberating regarding certain actions and, in so doing, rightly direct the urges and movements of the incensive and appetitive faculties, acting harmoniously with them when an action is deemed to advance the good or reigning them in when it is not.[18] We should not overlook the fact that the passages from the fourth book of the *Republic* imply that only those who have received a proper education possess a properly developed faculty of reason, suggesting that the 'rabble' of hapless irrationally oriented creatures are unaware of their lack of temperance. This lays the ground for the stronger implication in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* that moral intemperance proper is only found in those who have received some degree of moral education and who are capable of recognizing the deleterious character of acting unrestrainedly on certain irrational impulses, a point that will further concern us below.[19]

Aristotle famously appropriates and develops this later Platonic approach, building his doctrines of virtue and character upon the example set forth by Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, arguing both for a tripartite soul and for the *akratic* consequences of a failure to initiate moral training that facilitates the human agent's rational acquisition of prudence or $\varphi\rho\acute{o}\nu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$.[20] He explicitly criticizes the early Socratic rejection of the notion of moral incontinence and his refusal to allow for a psychic conflict between a rational faculty and the passible portion of the soul. In Aristotle's words: 'Now, this theory [Socrates'] evidently conflicts with experience…For it is plain that, at any rate, he who acts incontinently does not fancy the act is good till the passion is upon him'.[21] The rational faculty ($\lambda o\gamma\iota\sigma\tau\iota\kappa\acute{o}\nu$), though perhaps fully aware or perfectly capable of being aware that a particular action does not advance an agent towards the good, may nevertheless be overwhelmed by an irrational impulse that arises from the untrained lower soul. There is some difference of opinion, however, when it comes to interpreting Aristotle's view of an akratic event. Michael Frede argues that the conflict between the non-rational and rational aspects of the soul does not manifest itself as a mental event at the moment the agent gives in to moral continence.[22] Indeed, the examples Aristotle gives do not give the impression of an 'acute conflict' between two psychic poles vying for supremacy.[23]

Laws', in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy,* ed. Brad Inwood, vol. 43 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25–55.

[17] *The Republic* 431c.

[18] *Ibid.* 423e.

[19] See *Nicomachean Ethics,* book 7, trans. F. H. Peters (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2005).

[20] *Ibid.* 1.13, 3.6, 6.5, 7.1. See Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 44–46.

[21] *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.2.

[22] *A Free Will,* 22–29, 31–40.

[23] *Ibid.,* 23.

The agent might have a pre-existing knowledge that would inform him or her of the fact that a given action would be harmful, but in a moment of impulsiveness brought on by an irrational impulse he or she simply acts without hesitating to consult the dictates of reason.[24] An *ex post facto* recognition of the imprudence of the action would also presumably be a necessary condition for defining it as 'akratic'. Even if there is an instance of acute psychic conflict, the Aristotelian view proper would not constitute a struggle between two choices—between the counsel of reason and an irrational impulse—but an action *against* one's rational choice, or against one's προαίρεσις.[25] That is, it constitutes a movement against what you would rationally choose if in fact you had not been overcome by an akratic movement. To regard the akratic struggle as a choice between the two rigorous alternatives presented respectively by the rational and irrational faculties, suggests Frede, would be the imposition of a modern conception of mind on to a rather different ancient principle.[26]

While it is by no means possible to do complete justice to this question here, it is interesting to consider the fact that Frede does not seem to take into consideration in this context Aristotle's insistence that deliberation is an indispensable aspect of rational action, a point that differentiates Aristotle and his self-proclaimed heirs from the Stoics, as Inwood confirms.[27] Indeed, later thinkers like the peripatetic, Alexander Aphrodisias, or the Christian bishop, Nemesius of Emesa, take Aristotle's psychic conflict precisely in the sense of a choice between two conflicting faculties, a point that is affirmed by Frede himself.[28] Inwood, in his examination of the concept of ἀκρασία, argues that the syllogism Aristotle uses as a model for the interaction of the faculty of reason and the *desiderata* of the παθητικόν do not commit him to assert that the human being is rationally conscious of a process of deliberation when he acts.[29] Nevertheless, claims Inwood, in all probability Aristotle did believe that the human being is consciously aware at least of the 'informational component' of the cause of an action, suggesting to some extent the presence of cognitive realization in the rational subject.[30] Inwood uses the logical structure of Aristotle's syllogisms to demonstrate his point, but one could just as easily look to his emphasis upon deliberation to prove that there is, at the very least, a strong precursor for what Alexander Aphrodisias and Nemesius would develop into a 'doctrine of choices'. All this is not to say that Frede is wrong in his interpretation, but that his analysis is incomplete. Even if Aristotle does not provide explicit examples of what we would now consider to be a psychic conflict, it could be argued that Aristotelian deliberation

---

[24] *Ibid.*
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Ibid.,* 23.
[27] *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* 44–5.
[28] *A Free Will,* 19, 96–97.
[29] *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* 15.
[30] *Ibid.*

provided the logical groundwork for, and a tacit implication of, the kind of conflict later thinkers, and especially Christians, would be keen to endorse.

In any case, as Aristotle argues, the elimination of a distinctively functioning παθητικόν makes virtue pointless, and, in making moral determination merely the function of the intellect, in turn eliminates the positive use of passion, character, and, we might add, represses the dynamism inherent within human nature.[31] It is helpful to note the fact that Aristotle has a compelling anthropological reason for rigorously grounding virtue in the irrational parts of the soul. Richard Sorabji, contrasting Aristotle's views with those of the Stoics, explains that the Stagirite philosopher regarded all emotions as having a 'physiological' dimension and therefore psychosomatic basis.[32] Passions, or πάθη, are not merely mistaken beliefs or incorrect judgments—as they are in the 'Socratic' or Stoic view[33]—but are indicative of a natural actualizing on both a psychic and somatic level. This approach is confirmed by Aristotle himself in the tenth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: 'But the moral virtues, being bound up with the passions, must belong to our compound nature; and the virtues of the compound nature are emphatically human. Therefore the life which manifests them, and the happiness which consists in this, must be emphatically human.'[34] Proper moral judgment and the attainment of ἕξις προαιρετική (a virtuous state in which the human agent 'elects'),[35] then, depends not merely upon the acquisition of the right sort of belief about something—which Aristotle does not deny—but also requires a diachronic education and formation of natural human powers to the extent that the human agent is free to deliberate and distinguish when a desire is in accordance with the καλόν or the good. Of particular significance here is the fact that the irrational powers of the soul and psychosomatic actualities, when properly directed by the powers of reason, seek the attainment of things that are genuinely good and advance the holistic well-being of a moral agent. Nevertheless, this state of moral and natural functionality is not one that can be extended equally to all of humanity. As mentioned above, the attainment of a morally continent state is contingent upon proper training or παιδεία, a process that must begin while the human subject is yet in his or her youth if it is to be truly effective, a point which Aristotle emphasizes early on in his work.[36] In order for agents to even be regarded as intemperate and experience some form of psychic conflict, they would have had to undergo sufficient moral training so as to recognize 'bad' desires from the 'good'. And while Aristotle emphasizes that in the early stages of life the acquisition and habituation of virtue are voluntary, he argues that at a certain stage these existential attributes become fixed and immutable characters, permanently and irrevocably

---

[31] *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.13, 7.2, and 10.8.
[32] Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind,* 25
[33] Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* 127–31, 136.
[34] *Nicomachean Ethics,* 10.8.
[35] Irwin, *Development of Ethics,* vol. 1, 161.
[36] *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.1.

imprinted upon the human agent.[37] If, therefore, typical rational agents lack the op-
portunity to participate in proper modes of moral training and voluntarily respond
to it, the window of opportunity will close, and they will forever be stunted human
beings, falling short of their natural *telos*. To use a colloquialism, humans deprived
of *παιδεία* are simply 'out of luck'.

While Aristotle and the Peripatetics are adamant in their rejection of Socratic
monism, the early Stoic schools of thought consider Socrates' approach to virtue
and the good, *mutatis mutandis*, as being essentially correct.[38] Though also in many
respects heirs to the Aristotelian legacy, the Stoics are extremely uncomfortable with
the Aristotelian notion that a human agent could act against the determinations of
right reason.[39] This discomfort with the Aristotelian innovation is due largely to
the way in which the Stoics regard emotion and passion, or for that matter, somatic
function in general. Michael Frede, summarizing their reasons for objecting to the
Platonic and Aristotelian psychic model, explains that the Stoics were uncomfort-
able with the notion that incensiveness and appetite as well as the emotions asso-
ciated therewith could be aimed at the good.[40] The introduction of a non-rational
element of the soul divides human nature, creating the impression that what we are
essentially is a rational soul obliged to 'cohabit' the body with these alien and ani-
malistic powers, powers over which the untrained do not have complete control.[41]
The Aristotelian/Platonic perspective, the Stoics argue, runs the risk of exculpating
the human agent of responsibility, of providing an unruly and untrained animal soul
as a scapegoat for our irrational actions. The *παθητικόν* is merely the invention of
our mind, an attempt to escape the culpability associated with a vicious action by
positing an uncontrolled and irrational movement.[42] The passions or *πάθη*, then,
constitute incorrect judgments and improper beliefs that are always irredeem-
ably evil.[43] Inasmuch as the passions do not originate from an irrational portion
of the soul, it is therefore impossible for them to be cultivated and included in a
properly functioning character. This is not to say that the Stoics do not, in some
sense, acknowledge the existence of other powers within the soul besides right
reason, though they are certainly different from the Aristotelian conception of the
soul's powers. It is certainly beyond the scope of this paper to articulate in detail
differences between the two schools on this point. Suffice to say for the present
purposes of the topic at hand, the 'orthodox' Stoics tend towards a nominalistic view
of the soul's powers and, more importantly, regard the soul as being *functionally*

---

[37] *Ibid.*3.4.
[38] Irwin, *The Development of Ethics,* vol. 1, 43, 342. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,*
62–63.
[39] Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* 9–11, 14–17.
[40] *A Free Will,* 32–34.
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] *Ibid.,* 33–34.
[43] Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* 127–31, 136. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of
Mind,* 7, 25–30, 44–6.

monistic, a point that Inwood convincingly argues.[44] Another point of interest is the fact that this monistic exercise of right reason is also intended to function independently of somatic realities, thereby detaching moral psychology from all physiological concerns, which the Stoics regard as morally indifferent. The Stoic sage, the exemplar of virtue, is the one who has acquired the right hermeneutic—if I may be permitted the anachronism—who assents to the right moral imperatives and refuses to assent to the wrong ones, and, whatever his physiological status, who is able to cognitively shut out the agitations of morally indifferent physical mechanisms.[45] The moral indifference of physiology and the inherently evil quality of emotion helps to explain the reasons why the Stoics so strongly emphasize the centrality of ἀπάθεια, a feature of their thought that Richard Sorabji suggests should be retrieved and reintegrated into modern ethical paradigms.[46]

St Maximus, the Question of Moral Incontinence, and Moral Luck

This classical tension between these two modes of thought regarding knowing and acting in accordance with the good is especially interesting in light of the fact that they are both so heavily appropriated by later philosophical schools and by Christian theologians, the representatives of which synthesize the sometimes, but by no means always, disparate approaches. In the case of Christian writers, the synthesis of Stoic and Aristotelian or Platonic elements often results in the coordination of mutually complimentary elements that serve the Christian vision.[47] However, it is arguable that when it comes to moral psychology, the synthesis of the tripartite model with Stoic intellectualism and their respective purposes sometimes renders the situation a bit more complex. Within the Christian tradition, it might be argued that situations arise in which they are both appropriated, but the latent presuppositions associated with one of the views winds up taking precedence over the other. Here, I have in mind both Evagrius and Origen, who, some would certainly argue, wind up being more Stoic when it comes to humanity's eschatological state, inasmuch as both *tend* to leave the παθητικόν outside of the rational being's ultimate restoration to a relationship with the divine and its pursuit of the ultimate good.[48]

---

[44] *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* 29–33. The term 'orthodox' is used by Inwood to distinguish the original Stoic monism from the views of later Stoic thinkers who would re-assimilate the Aristotelian distinction between rational and irrational elements of the soul. The tendency of the later Stoa to reintegrate the Aristotelian dichotomy is also noted by Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator,* 2nd edition (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), 182–83, who quite rightly sees this synthesis of Stoic intellectualism and psychic trichotomy as a precedent for what would be utilized by many Christian thinkers.

[45] Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* 176–77, 187.

[46] See his introduction to *Emotion and Peace of Mind,* 1–13.

[47] A paradigmatic instance of this is the *Dialectica* of St John of Damascus (PG 94:521–676).

[48] *Cf.* Henri Crouzel, *Origen,* trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 87–89, who demonstrates that Origen regards the lower aspects of the soul as being associated with post-lapsarian existence and the result of the intellect's (νοῦς) movement from spirit towards matter. Panagiotes Tzamlikos shows in *Origen: Philosophy of History and Eschatology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 45–46, Origen tends to consider the

As indicated above, it is no ground-breaking discovery to say that St Maximus the Confessor appropriates and creatively re-deploys expressions from his forebearers that originate in the aforementioned schools of philosophical thought.[49] This is no less true of his moral psychology, which, as both Lars Thunberg and Paul Blowers are careful to note, simultaneously reflects both elements of Stoic intellectualism and Aristotelian psychological divisions.[50] As Blowers explains, Christian thinkers like Maximus considered both the Stoic and Aristotelian approaches to passions to be instructive, regarding them both as misjudgements of mind and diseases of the soul.[51] For example, the Stoic notions of ἀπάθεια (impassibility) and συγκατάθεσις (assent) certainly make a prominent appearance in his corpus, and the latter concept plays an unquestionably significant role in Maximus' descriptions of contemplation.[52] Nevertheless, despite the presence of these Stoic elements, I would argue that when it comes to the Confessor's moral thought, Maximus generally allows the dynamism of the Aristotelian psychic model to dominate, an approach that Maximus very likely inherited from Nemesius.[53] This tendency is most clearly disclosed through his reliance upon the tripartite model of the soul, which of course is coupled with his rather emphatic insistence that both θυμός and ἐπιθυμία are indispensable aspects of the human being, the urges of which are meant to be healed and redirected in post-lapsarian humanity, not repressed, ignored, or regarded in Stoic fashion merely as mistaken judgments.[54] The Aristotelian features of moral psychology, coupled as they are to an inherent sense of physiological causality, are also quite convenient for the Confessor's adamant defence of the fundamental significance of the body and corporeality in anthropology.[55] As such, Maximus must be regarded as a firm believer in the real existence of moral incontinence or ἀκρασία. He affirms that there can be an actual conflict between the faculty of reason and the irrational

realities associated with the actualizations of the passible aspects of the soul as being morally indifferent, neither good nor evil, and therefore outside the scope of the human pursuit of the good. Evagrius, as Thunberg notes, allows for the positive use of both θυμός and ἐπιθυμία, but their positive purpose is usually restricted to 'man's purification and mortification' and is therefore not included in the attainment of the higher good. See *Microcosm and Mediator,* 190–91.

[49] For the Aristotelian/Platonic composite elements in the Confessor's thought, see Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Melchisedec Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[50] Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator,* 169–212. Paul Blowers, 'Aligning and Reorienting the Passible Self', 343.

[51] Blowers, *ibid.*

[52] Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator,* 212. Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 36.

[53] *Cf.* Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* 88–89, 253–56, and Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator,* 192–95.

[54] *Cf. Ambiguum* 7 (PG 91:1069B, 1073AB, 1088CD); *Ambiguum* 48 (PG 91:1361A); *Ambiguum* 65 (PG 91:1392C); and *Ad Thalassium (*PG 90:449B, 548C). See generally Blowers, 'Aligning and Reorienting the Passible Self'.

[55] *Cf. Ambiguum* 7 (PG 91:1092BC, 1088C, 1097D); *Ambiguum* 21 (PG 91:1248AB); and *Ambiguum* 42 (PG 91:1316B, 1325D).

psychic powers, actions in which reason's better judgment is simply overwhelmed by an impulse from either the incensive or appetitive faculty, or in which there is an acute conflict between the untrained incensive and appetitive faculties. This is a recurring theme throughout the Confessor's *Chapters on Love,* but is perhaps most clearly rendered when he warns the reader away from the psychic condition of the demons, who engender evil through 'irrational anger, [and] desire uncontrolled by the intellect'.[56] It is, therefore, quite appropriate that the Aristotelian/Platonic concept of ἐγκράτεια or moral continence makes several implicit and explicit appearances throughout the Maximian corpus and, though it cannot be regarded as the end of moral practice, it fulfils an instrumental role in the pursuit of virtue and, as Maximus puts it elsewhere, enables the imposition of a proper τάξις or order upon the human psyche.[57] As Maximus explains in the first few pages of the *Chapters on Love,* it is only through moral continence, through the control of our passible faculties that love for God and one's neighbour is achievable.[58] Yet, moral continence is not the end but rather the means by which this is accomplished. A truly virtuous soul will eventually outgrow its need for continence and will naturally co-operate with the intellect in its directedness towards the ultimate Good.[59] In *Ambiguum* 6, we find an especially vivid expression of the virtuous soul that has undergone and moved beyond the transformative process of ἐγκράτεια or moral continence, now functioning under the guidance of reason and the intellect: 'it is because I have fittingly brought the irrational powers of the soul—I mean anger and desire—under the control of reason, and through reason have led them into intimate association with the intellect, so that anger is transformed into love and desire into joy.'[60]

It is critical to affirm that when Maximus speaks of love, whether for one's Creator or fellow creature, he is not describing only the alteration of the human agent's belief, though this is certainly included. He is describing an activity that springs first from the incensive and appetitive faculties. Not only is there a real παθητικόν present, but it exists as a vital mechanism for the attainment of the good, the pursuit of which, it should be noted, is inextricably linked with the human quest for eschatological fulfilment.[61] Put in another way, the force that drives us to determine ends that are within our power and to participate in those that are not is comprised of both rational and irrational elements. The formation of human character, the realization of the virtues, and, consequently, the cultivation of natural human potential, comes about as a result of the transformation of the faculties of the

---

[56] 3.5, in *The Philokalia,* vol. 2. See also 3.1 and 3.3.

[57] *Ibid.* 2.2.

[58] *Ibid.* 1.1–3.

[59] *Cf.* Demetrios Harper, 'The Ontological Ethics of St Maximus the Confessor and the Concept of Shame', in *The Fountain and the Flood,* ed. Sotiris Mitralexis (Leuven: Peeters, forthcoming).

[60] *Ambiguum* 6, in *On the Difficulties in the Church Fathers,* trans. Maximos Constas, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 71.

[61] *Ad Thalassium* (PG 90:449B, 548C).

παθητικόν.[62] Indeed, Maximus' entire corpus is redolent with the affirmation of the role of irrational elements in our search for the good and the quest for ontological consummation, clearly demonstrating throughout that the incensive and appetitive elements do not merely discharge an instrumental role but are designed to enable the human agent to respond to the uncreated intentions of the Creator. In his famous *Ambiguum* 7, the Confessor expressly grounds a being's movement to its appetitive quest for its divine cause, saying, 'nothing that moves has yet come to rest, because its capacity for appetitive movement has not yet come to repose in what it ultimately desires (τῷ ἐσχάτῳ ὀρεκτῷ)'.[63] The Confessor's forty-eighth *Ambiguum* likewise echoes this view, stating that both πόθος or longing and ἔρως—emotions that are associated with the non-rational portions of the soul—were placed in human nature in order to provide an impetus to seek the divine who is simultaneously the good, and therefore the end of humanity's ontological and simultaneously ethical quest.[64]

All of this is to say that I think it safe to conclude that Maximus' moral expressions favour the structural dynamics of Aristotelian moral psychology, though likely read through thinkers like Gregory of Nyssa, Nemesius of Emessa, or Leontius of Byzantium, and often retooled for his specific theological purposes. It is also safe to claim that Maximus emphatically rejects the Stoic assumption that the passible portion of the soul is but the creation of mind, used as a device to release the human agent from culpability. Yet, it must be asked, how would Maximus respond to Aristotle's claim early on in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that those who have not received moral training will not be capable of recognizing that which is noble, much less be able of acting on it? Or, further, how would Maximus answer the Aristotelian assertion that regards the opportunity for the voluntary habituation of character as being a finite period, a relatively brief window of opportunity in which to begin the process of acquiring moral continence and lay the foundation for the habituation of virtue? These claims, as any good Aristotelian scholar will know, are based on the broader assertion by Aristotle which essentially affirms that those who have failed to receive proper moral training and did not learn to habituate virtues in their youth are

---

[62] *Cf.* Paul Blowers, 'Hope for the Passible Self: The Use and Transformation of the Human Passions in the Fathers of *the Philokalia*', in *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality,* eds. Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 216–229.

[63] *Ambiguum* 7, in *On the Difficulties in the Church Fathers,* vol. 1, 76–79. The reader will note that Maximus uses the term ὀρεκτόν here for the 'thing desired'. Ὀρεκτόν is a correlative of the word ὄρεξις or 'appetite', a term whose history reflects the ambiguity of the Stoic/Aristotelian disagreement. Inwood in *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism,* 13, 114–15, explains that the Stoics use the expression in the sense of a monistic rational impulse towards what the agent perceives as the good, while Aristotle seems to regard it as encompassing the desiderative aspect of the soul and, therefore, non-rational desire, a feature common to both rational and non-rational beings. Given Maximus' frequent mention throughout his corpus of non-rational desire's (ἐπιθυμία) role in moving the human being towards the divine good, it is most probable that the Confessor's reference to the 'thing desired' is meant to encompass the non-rational powers of the soul. In Leontius of Byzantium, whose works Maximus almost certainly knew, we can find a precedent for the interchangeable use of ὄρεξις and ἐπιθυμία. See, for example, his *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos (*PG 86:1345B).

[64] *Ambiguum* 48 (PG 91:1361A).

'out of luck', doomed to be morally stunted and naturally unrealized. Consequently, we are obliged to write off the untrained and wild 'barbarians' as inevitably hopeless in moral terms, as being permanently bound by their akratic state. Morality defined in this way can properly be said to exist only within a particular society with a very specific set of guidelines, and, under such circumstances, it certainly cannot be seen as possessing a universally 'binding' character. This has quite naturally invited criticisms of both Aristotelian and Neo-Aristotelian ethics, including the formulations of thinkers like Alasdair MacIntyre. The contemporary virtue-ethicist, Robert Merrihew Adams, readily concedes this point, affirming that the Neo-Aristotelian model, while the best one, can only work under certain conditions and necessarily excludes those who have not undergone the proper sort of moral conditioning.[65] In short, the acquisition of virtue is a matter of 'moral luck'. This is also Bernard Williams's take on the matter, who, in his eponymous book, *Moral Luck,* suggests that the term 'constitutive luck' is the best description of how the ancients viewed the conditions under which an agent would be in a position to acquire a proper moral character.[66] This assessment, Williams argues, naturally applies to the Stoics as well as Aristotle. As Williams quite correctly affirms, the typical modern westerner immediately recoils from any notion of moral luck because the vast majority of modern westerners, voluntarily or involuntarily, possess an inherently Kantian conception of morality.[67] Of course, this view is also problematic from the standpoint of the pre-Kantian Christian point of view: that is, if moral behaviour, or, more to the point, the recognition of the good, is wholly contingent upon proper training, how can anyone who has received such training be culpable in any way for his or her actions? The Stoics, of course, posit their compatibilistic views as an answer, ascribing culpability to the agent to the extent that he or she fails to assent in the right sort of way to phenomenal presentations. Both the rigorous determinism and the moral luck associated with the acquisition of character remain unsatisfactory to the pre-Renaissance Christian and the post-Enlightenment westerner. It is partly in response to this question, and a reaction no doubt to his Calvinist upbringing, that Rousseau posits the basic moral good will of the human agent and attributes ignorance to the failure to act in accordance with the good.

Given the frequency with which he mentions ascetic practice and emphasizes the habituation virtue in his corpus, not to mention his authentic monastic pedigree, it is quite obvious that Maximus has an exceedingly high regard for moral training and regards it as indispensable for the proper pursuit of the good and the natural fulfilment of the human agent. Yet, without even looking at his texts, it seems intuitively right to say that Maximus' inherently Christian vision would not permit him

---

[65] See Part 3 of his book, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[66] *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 20–21.

[67] *Ibid.*

to posit 'moral luck' to explain the unfortunate 'brute' and simply consign those who did receive moral training in their youth to a perpetually decadent state. The ascetic tradition that stands behind Maximus assuredly regards repentance as being possible at any stage of life and thoroughly condemns the despair associated with the continued struggle with misdirected passions. We might add, however, that it recognizes Aristotle's point regarding the practical challenges associated with the alternation of an agent's mode of life if he or she has lived a thoroughly incontinent life and habituated vice.

How then would Maximus respond to this *aporia*, allowing not only the insufficiently trained the hope of being able to repent and choose the good, but also those who never encounter proper moral instruction at all in this life? To begin to deal with this question, which cannot be fully resolved in the present paper, requires us to take a closer look at the role reason and intellect play in Maximus' moral psychology, and it is here in particular that Maximus shows himself to be first and foremost a monk of the Macarian tradition. Let us consider the aforementioned text from the *Chapters on Love,* where Maximus sets forth the demonic state of the tripartite soul as a warning to the God-seeking gnostic. Following the Areopagite's formulation in *On the Divine Names,*[68] Maximus explains that evil takes the form of 'mindless anger (θυμὸν ἄλογον), and desire uncontrolled by the intellect (ἄνουν ἐπιθυμία)'.[69] However, Maximus does not stop here but also specifically implicates the intellect and reason, saying that evil is also engendered by 'impetuous imagination (φαντασίαν προπετῆ)'.[70] He goes on to say that 'mindlessness, lack of intellectual control and impetuosity in rational beings are privations of reason, intellect and circumspection'.[71] What is apparent from this rather straightforward passage is that Maximus does not think that moral incontinence is merely a matter of reining in the irrational parts of the soul, but is also contingent upon the practice of ἐγκράτεια by the faculty of reason and the intellect, a view that advances beyond the Aristotelian model. While the connection of moral continence to the intellect might owe its primordial form to Stoicism, what is presented here in Maximus is a uniquely Christian formulation.[72] This *enkratic* approach to reason or mind is further affirmed by a host of other passages from the *Chapters on Love* where, for example, Maximus says that evil occurs as a result of neglecting (ἀμέλεια) the energies of our intellect,[73] or, yet again, that the sinful intellect (φαύλος νοῦς) assents to unnatural movement on the basis of the images it perceives through the imagination while the continent intellect restrains itself.[74] And, lest we forget, in the prologue to the *Ad Thalassium,* Maximus

[68] *De divinis nominibus (*PG 3:725B).
[69] *Chapters on Love* 3.5, in *The Philokalia.*
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] See Sorabji's chapter, 'First Movements as Bad Thoughts', in *Emotion and Peace of Mind,* 343–56.
[73] *Chapters on Love* 2.82.
[74] *Ibid.* 2.56.

blames the intellect's turn towards an inordinate obsession with sensible things
for humanity's fall and the ensuing post-lapsarian state.[75] We might, therefore, say
that Maximus thinks that there is a form of 'rational' or intellectual ἀκρασία that
directly afflicts the rational faculty and the intellect. This is all the more evident in
passages where Maximus speaks of the 'misuse', παράχρησις of the natural world
and the intellection thereof. To quote the Confessor himself: 'A rational (εὔλογος)
use of sensible things and thought-images is productive of self-control, love, and
knowledge. An irrational (ἄλογος) use brings about licentiousness, hatred, and ig-
norance'.[76] Furthermore, it is 'by the misuse (κατὰ παράχρησιν) of the powers of the
soul—that is, the powers of reason and desire—that evil afflicts us. The misuse of
our rational power results in ignorance and thoughtless folly, while the improper use
of our incensive and desiring faculties leads to hatred and licentiousness'.[77] In short,
like the non-rational portions of the soul, the rational faculty and intellect are also
passible, a point that is made more explicitly by Maximus' predecessor, Nemesius.[78]
Moreover, like the *pathetic* element of the soul, the morally continent intellect is
not meant to fulfil a static passive role in which it wholly refrains from contem-
plating sensible things, nor is it meant to assent passively in a rational fashion to
the thought-images offered by the phenomenal world, as the pure Stoic notion of
συγκατάθεσις (assent) would imply.

The Confessor's rather rigorous endorsement in *Opusculum* 1 of the concept of
deliberation (βούλευσις) as the 'appetite to inquire among those things that are up
to us' (ἐφ' ἡμῖν) suggests that he has a somewhat more complex concept in mind
when he uses the term 'assent'.[79] Rather, Maximus seems to regard the intellect as a
dynamic instrument of the human composite, intended to properly use the mental
images provided by the phenomena through the senses to anagogically seek out the
divine *logoi*;[80] it is intended to recognize the divine volitions and their *en-ergo* op-
erations within the created world, the highest levels of which are dependent upon
first, the moral continence of the totality of the soul, rational and irrational, and,
second, the habituation of virtue that pertains to both the rational and irrational
portions of the soul as well as the intellect.[81] This means that there is a *symbiosis*, a
co-existent reciprocity between the searching out and attainment of true knowledge
and the stability of the soul, in which the pure and virtuous soul facilitates a dialogue
through the intellect with the divine itself that in turn informs the ethical mode of

---

[75] *Ad Thalassium (*PG 90:253CD).
[76] *Chapters on Love* 3.1.
[77] *Ibid.* 3.3.
[78] See *Nemesius: On the Nature of Man,* trans. R. W. Sharples and P. J. Van Der Eijk (Liverpool: Liver-
pool University Press, 2008), 84.
[79] (PG 91:16B).
[80] *Chapters on Love* 1. 86–91.
[81] A point that is also implied by Maximus' introduction to his *Ambiguum* 10 (PG 91:1108A–1112A).

existence of the human subject, enabling him or her to recognize those actions that advance the good.[82]

We cannot, therefore, attribute a pure Aristotelian notion of ἀκρασία to Maximus, according to which the human being fails to choose the good simply because the rational faculty is overwhelmed by the movements of the παθητικόν, or because in the process of deliberation the human agent chose against the dictates of right reason in favour of an irrational impulse. The intellect is equally complicit in the human subject's failure to choose the good through its misuse of the knowledge of sensible things, a notion that emerges with particular clarity in Maximus' *Ad Thalassium*.[83] Indeed, we might describe the process in selecting the good as a dialectic between the non-rational and rational faculties in which one or the other—or both simultaneously—may encourage the human subject's movement towards the natural and the good or, conversely, a retreat into self-indulgent φιλαυτία.[84]

The Analogical Dimension of Maximian Ethics

But how does this narrative help us with the problem at hand? What does Maximus' approach to moral psychology tell us about those who fail to receive proper moral training or παιδεία, or, worse, are never fortunate enough to encounter practical expressions of truth at all? Maximus' insistence on the acquisition of higher knowledge being dependent upon our proper contemplation and the proper anagogical interpretation of the phenomenal and the sensible reveals the fact that he considers the initial stages of knowledge to be written into the very mundane realities of the physical world and everyday life.[85] Consequently, there is no stage at which even the most underdeveloped human agents are without some semblance of the good. Indeed, the entire purpose of the physical world and all that it contains functions as a pedagogical and anagogical instrument to elevate our attention to higher truth, to the very causes of beings and the good itself. As Maximus argues in the twenty-first *Ambiguum,* not only do the senses iconize the powers the soul,[86] but the very *logoi* of beings are revealed and disclosed in and through the phenomena of the sensible world.[87] This is echoed in *Ambiguum* 22 when he tells us that it is via the

---

[82] *Ibid.*
[83] (PG 90:253CD).
[84] *Ibid.*
[85] For a thorough and systematic examination the Confessor's understanding of natural contemplation, see Joshua Lollar's book, *To See into the Life of Things: The Contemplation of Nature in Maximus the Confessor and his Predecessors* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013). For the philosophical and theological background that gives rise to this 'anagogical' approach to the natural world, see Andrew Louth's *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Hans Boersma's book, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), provides an excellent analysis of the anagogical quality of the natural world in Gregory of Nyssa, one of Maximus' most significant and self-acknowledged resources.
[86] (PG 91:1248AB).
[87] (PG 91:1249BC).

diversity in the sensible world that we are led to the truth of the multiplicity of the divine *logoi*.[88] In his *Mystagogy,* the Confessor follows the anagogical paradigm set forth by the Areopagite, affirming that 'the whole spiritual world seems mystically imprinted on the whole sensible world in symbolic forms, for those who are capable of seeing this'.[89]

However, the most powerful testimony to the divulgence of the true and the good through the mundane comes via Maximus' multiple discussions of the inter-relatedness of the natural and written laws, which has found its most thorough exposition in the work of Paul Blowers.[90] In *Ambiguum* 10, Maximus argues that the Logos gives us the phenomena of the natural world, which are akin to the letters and symbols of the Scripture, and through which he 'analogously' (ἀναλόγως) leads us to a 'unitary' realization of the Logos, who is both the good and the cause of all being in himself.[91] Later in the same *Ambiguum*, this principle reappears when the Confessor argues that the saints of the Old Testament beheld a foreshadowing of the grace that would come in the letter of the written law of Moses, revealing through the mundane imperfection of human expressions and symbols the truth of the Incarnate Logos.[92] The manifestations of the divine *logoi*, the divine intentions of the Logos himself are disclosed through the beauty and order of the natural world, via the face of the other—as Maximus indicates in his *Epistle on Love*[93]—and even through the imperfect intellectual expressions of humanity. Though perhaps untrained and untaught, human agents nevertheless have access to a semblance, to an εἰκών of the knowledge of the divine and the good, imperfectly expressed though it may be. The divine Logos, the one who defines the good by his own existence, reveals himself in a way that is analogous to the particular circumstances of the human subject and proportional to his or her limitations, and, as we see in Maximus' example of the Old Testament law, according to a mode of expression that will be comprehensible to those who may be quite distant from the archetypal expression of truth itself. This principle of analogy is more explicitly and beautifully expressed in Maximus' *Chapters on Theology.* Regarding the Apostle Paul's affirmation in 1 Corinthians 9:22 that he has 'become all things to all men' (τοῖς πᾶσι γέγονα τὰ πάντα) as a Christological antitype, the Confessor affirms that by his Crucifixion, Death, and Resurrection, Christ the Incarnate Logos became all things to all people and 'adapted himself according to each person's analogous strength' (κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογούσαν ἑκάστῳ δύναμιν γίνεσθαι).[94] This echoes and reaffirms the aforementioned text from

---

[88] (PG 91:1256D–1257A).

[89] *The Church's Mystagogy,* in *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings,* trans. George C. Berthold (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 189.

[90] *Cf.* his book, *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy in Maximus the Confessor* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), especially pp. 104–7.

[91] (PG 91:1129A–1132A).

[92] *Ibid.,* 1149A–1152B.

[93] *Epistulum* 2 (PG 91:393A–408A).

[94] *Two Hundred Texts on Theology and the Incarnate Dispensation of the Son of God* 2.27, in *the Philoka-*

Ambiguum 10: 'he leads us through pious accumulation of diverse appearances unto a single representation of truth, proportionally [or analogously] offering himself for us to behold through visible things as Creator'.[95] The truth and the good are analogously present and uniquely presented to every human subject. On this basis, it is perfectly reasonable to assume that Maximus thinks that the human response can only be judged in terms that are analogous to the modes of presentation in which the good is presented. This mode of analogy is also reflected in the *Disputation with Pyrrhus* when Maximus informs his interlocutor that virtue, like nature, is a univocal reality, a unitary truth, but, also like nature, is expressed multiplicitously in humanity, being practiced and realized to varying degrees.[96] Consequently, what Maximus discloses is an ethical view that presupposes radical difference in terms of the ethical starting points of human subjects and broadly differing capacities, but which nonetheless is still held together and defined by a progressive movement towards the same good, that is, the Incarnate Logos. To the extent that we can capture such an approach with a single expression, we might define this moral view put forth by Maximus as an 'ethic of analogy'. And if this is true, it would seem that Maximus would also implicitly regard each human agent as analogously culpable for his or her analogous recognition of the good, a perspective that presupposes an underlying apophatic approach to the vicissitudes of human moral life. Despite the inherent usefulness of Aristotelian moral psychology and a favourable reception of aspects of the Stoic intellect, Maximus has moved far beyond the ancient philosophers and located the locus of practical philosophy in a dialogue with the Incarnate Logos and his multiplicitous incarnations, in a search for the ultimate Good iconised in the here and now by creation and its creatures. This 'apophatic' approach or 'ethic of analogy' is not easily reconcilable with the post-Enlightenment emphasis upon a system of imperatives, which, unconsciously conditioned as it is by a Kantian hermeneutic, frequently demands a categorical judgment of human action regardless of the circumstances surrounding the human agent and extracted from his or her existential particulars.

A brief mention of Maximus' complex views of the process of willing help to shed further light on what I refer to as an 'ethic of analogy'. It is critical to note that Maximus affirms in the *Disputatio* that each human subject naturally possesses an appetite for the good, an ὄρεξις τοῦ καλοῦ, that drives us to the ζήτησις, to 'search out' the good.[97] Coupling this expression from the *Disputatio* with what we have seen thus far, we might say our natural appetite functions as the impetus that pushes us to seek out the good that has been disclosed to us by analogy (κατ᾽ ἀναλογίαν).

---

lia. I alter the translation here slightly in order to emphasize the sense of analogy presented in the original text.

[95] This is Blowers's translation in *Exegesis and Spiritual Pedagogy,* 104.

[96] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho (*PG 91:309B).

[97] (PG 91:308D).

This view is repeated with even greater clarity in the first *Opusculum,* the complete theological and philosophical of depth of which, in my opinion, has yet to be fully explored. In a way that is reminiscent of his seventh *Ambiguum*, Maximus again speaks of the appetite's role in 'self-establishing enjoyment of the good', (ὡς ἀπόλαυσις ἀγαθῶν αὐθυπόστατος) when the worthy (οἱ ἄξιοι) shall attain unto the 'fulfilment of their longing' (πλήρωσις πόθου).[98] The topic of this discourse, however, is θέλησις or θέλημα, the faculty of will, which the Confessor links to the same appetitive longing we find described elsewhere in his texts and frequently in context with a discussion of the passible aspect of the soul and its redirection, as most good Maximus scholars would confirm. The will, he argues, is a naturally arising 'appetitive power' (δύναμιν τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν ὄντος ὀρεκτικήν), but which is also 'a rational and vital' appetite (λογικὴ τε καὶ ζωτική) and, among other things, *desires* the fullness of its being.[99]

Maximus' formulation here is regarded by many thinkers—including René Gauthier, John Madden, and Nikolaos Loudovikos—as a truly original contribution to the development of will.[100] Richard Sorabji, among others,[101] does not have such a high appraisal, regarding Maximus' formulation as merely the regurgitation of an earlier Stoic concept. As Sorabji notes, Maximus employs a correlative of the term οἰκείωσις, a Stoic term aimed at the maintenance of the rational creature's physical constitution, which means that the Maximian will, θέλησις, is nothing but the rational impetus to preserve natural wholeness.[102] Sorabji is directly countered by David Bradshaw, who, following Gauthier's example, argues that Sorabji fails to notice the fact that Maximus makes it abundantly clear that the will is a distinct faculty, 'capable of motivating action in a way that is rational but not *determined* [italics mine] by reason'.[103] To Bradshaw's corrective we might also add that Maximus clearly inherits and intentionally deploys an Aristotelian sense of the diachronic *maturation* of the human soul's *pathetic* aspect, a process that leads not merely to natural realization but to an ineffable encounter with that which is *naturally* desired, *i.e.* the uncreated Logos himself. This Maximian vision is a far cry from the Stoic concept of an internalized physical 'maintenance', which is presupposed and conditioned by a rigorously deterministic view of the cosmos and natural law.[104] Indeed, as

---

[98] (PG 91:9A).

[99] (PG 91:12C).

[100] René Gauthier and Jean Yves Jolif, *Aristote: l' Éthique à Nicomaque,* 2nd edition, vol. 1 (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1970), 255–66. John D. Madden, 'The Authenticity of Early Definitions of Will (*thelēsis*)' in *Maximus Confessor: Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur, Fribourg (2–5 Septembre 1980),* eds. Felix Heinzer and Christoph Schönborn (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaire Fribourg, 1982), 61–82. Nikolaos Loudovikos, *Η Κλειστή Πνευματικότητα και το Νόημα του Εαυτού: Ο Μυστικισμός της Ισχύος και η Αλήθεια Φύσεως και Προσώπου*, 2nd edition (Αθήνα: Ελληνικά Γράμματα, 1999), 187–204.

[101] Charles Kahn, for example, does not reject Gauthier's claim outright but sees it as an exaggeration. See Kahn's essay, 'Discovering Will from Aristotle to Augustine', in *The Question of 'Eclecticism': Studies in Later Greek Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 234–259; at 238.

[102] *Emotion and Peace of Mind,* 337.

[103] David Bradshaw, St Maximus the Confessor on the Will, 151.

[104] *Cf.* Demetrios Harper, '*Autexousion* as Assent or Co-actuality?: Compatibilism, Natural Law, and

mentioned above, the portion about the natural appetite is strikingly close to what the Confessor says elsewhere in his corpus regarding the redirection of the passible portion of the soul. What arguably emerges in this *Opusculum* is the fact that the will seems to express a convergence or a cooperation of the rational and irrational elements of the soul, embracing them as distinct elements but also as unified in force, desiring the Good itself (*i.e.* God) as its τέλος.[105] This is not to deny Bradshaw's affirmation that the will is a distinct faculty.[106] Rather, it is to suggest that the will's purpose *qua* faculty is to unite and channel the vital and rational powers of the soul, enabling the creature to determine and univocally realize the fulfilment of its ardour, an event that simultaneously encompasses human nature's *natural* drive to encounter the divine and the passible suffering of divine grace.

While several Maximian commentators have rightly argued that the Confessor's conception of will cannot be seen merely as an expression of reason's intentionality, to my knowledge only one has noted the fact that θέλησις specifically includes and embraces the incensive (θυμός) and appetitive (ἐπιθυμία) aspects of the soul in a positive and, more to the point, eschatological fashion. I refer here to Loudovikos, who argues in his *Closed Spirituality and the Meaning of the Self* that the sense conveyed by the Maximian view of will could be described by the Modern Greek expression, καημός, that is, a 'burning ardour', which in the context of *Opusculum* 1 is directed towards the realisation of all the elements of human nature through perichoretic assimilation unto the divine.[107] All the more extraordinary, and this shall inevitably conflict with some other readings of Maximus, is that the will is informed by the portions of the soul that enable biological preservation, thereby making them also participants, no, a driving force in the search for and election of the ultimate good, insofar as they are linked to an agent's desire to become a 'complete being'.[108] In taking this route, Maximus indeed preserves Aristotle's ancient affirmation of the relationship of physio-causality to moral psychology, but simultaneously diverges from the Stagirite thinker's paradigm by making appetite (ὄρεξις) anterior to 'rational desire' or βούλησις.[109] The Confessor thereby implies that the selection of physically necessary and temporal goods is not somehow disconnected from the ultimate Good but is meant to enable the analogous recognition of and participation in it. Neither are these 'pedestrian' realities associated with post-lapsarian existence merely empty, morally indifferent phenomena that must be tolerated

---

the Maximian Synthesis', in *Maximus the Confessor as a European Philosopher,* ed. Sebastian Lalla and Sotiris Mitralexis (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, forthcoming).

[105] As Maximus indicates near the beginning of *Opusculum* 1 *(*PG 91:9A).

[106] 'St Maximus the Confessor on the Will', 151.

[107] *Η Κλειστή Πνευματικότητα και το Νόημα του Εαυτού*, 189–91.

[108] *Opusculum* 1 (PG 91:12C).

[109] For Aristotle, *cf. Metaphysics: Volume II* 1072a, LCL, trans. Hugh Tredennick and G. Cyril Armstrong, vol. 287 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935). For Maximus, *cf. Opusculum* 1 (PG 91:21D). This 'appetite' is of course the will (θέλησις), which is described in the *Opusculum* as a synthesis of both rational and non-rational forces.

until we are liberated by ecstatic transcendence. On the contrary, the same 'actu-alities' that are responsible for 'instinctual' acts of self-preservation—*e.g.* eating, drinking, the avoidance of death—are naturally disposed to search out and locate the Good, a process that begins on a mundane level through the search for temporal or physically necessary goods but which is defined by its eschatological trajectory; spatiotemporal deliberation and election of the good involves engagement with the phenomenal and iconic semblances of the ultimate Good and constitute movements of the eschatological quest for an encounter with the fulfilment of natural longing, the Divine Logos, who has concealed himself in the 'interweaving of everyday trifles and ordinary events', to borrow a phrase from Georges Florovsky.[110]

If the foregoing analysis is correct, we should have a somewhat clearer sense—at least in broad strokes—of the Maximian way of dealing with the perennial difficul-ties associated with moral psychology and human agency. Nevertheless, what we have seen thus far has been directed primarily towards answering one facet of the question, namely, how would Maximus regard the plight of the 'morally unfortu-nate'? Another significant and, as yet, unmentioned facet of this discussion concerns those who have attained to virtuous stability of soul and the enjoyment of the good that accompanies it. Having reached such a state, is their character fixed, deter-mined, and absolute? Would Maximus think it possible for the man or woman of both virtuous disposition and a contemplative realization of the good to turn from the object of his or her ardour and return to psychic disorder and chaos? David Bradshaw takes up this question of what he terms 'character-based determinism' in his aforementioned essay on Maximus and the will.[111] As Bradshaw reminds the reader, the original Aristotelian view seeks to make room for the voluntary habitua-tion of virtue and the establishment of good-directed character.[112] Those who are in a state of moral incontinence may yet acquire continence and advance to the virtues.[113] However, Aristotle strongly intimates that once having attained to a virtuous state, the virtues become a fixed and necessary function in the human psyche. In Aristotle's words, 'When you have discharged a stone it is no longer in your power to call it back'.[114] It should be pointed out that, by the same token, Aristotle appears to regard the prodigal (ἄσωτος) as possessing similarly necessitated character, albeit one that is vicious.[115] By contrast, Bradshaw argues, Maximus' doctrine of will enables the

---

[110] *Ways of Russian Theology,* ed. Richard Haugh and trans. Robert Nichols, vol. 2 (Belmont: Bücherver-triebsanstalt, 1987), 64–65. Florovsky's expression serves as the inspiration for another paper on a rather similar topic. *Cf.* Demetrios Harper, '"Determined in the Interweaving of Everyday Trifles and Ordinary Events": Georges Florovsky's View of History and its Significance for the Future of Christian Ethics', in *Bringing Forth Treasures Old and New: Themes in Contemporary Orthodox Theology,* ed. Dylan Pahman and Alexis Torrance (Jordanville: Holy Trinity Publications, forthcoming).

[111] St Maximus the Confessor on the Will, 147.

[112] *Ibid.*

[113] *Cf. Nicomachean Ethics,* book 7.

[114] *Ibid.,* 3. 5.

[115] *Ibid.,* 7.8–10.

human subject to retain an intrinsic 'spontaneity', that is, a faculty of self-determination that is 'responsive' to reason and its dictates but not exclusively determined by it: 'it operates like a "vote" in relation to the results of judgment; that is, the will takes these results into account while also deciding from within, through its own spontaneous movement'.[116] Moreover, though spontaneous, the movements of will are not arbitrary inasmuch as its impetus is towards the fulfilment of that which accords with nature.[117]

Bradshaw's point regarding the dynamics of the will itself is certainly sustained by *Opusculum* 1. Perhaps the most obvious support for the enduring freedom and spontaneity of will comes via Maximus' definitive rejection of Monothelitism, where he argues that even at the *eschata* human beings retain and *actively* use their θέλησις, their distinct capacity to will.[118] In this state, a σύμβασις, 'a communion of wills', is established between the Creator and his creatures, which is defined by the common objective (in Maximus' words, τὸ θεληθέν) of their intentionality but which nonetheless leaves the volitional capacities of uncreated and created intact.[119] For this reason, Maximus' use of the term 'gnomic surrender' (γνωμικὴ ἐκχώρησις) should not be interpreted—even in his earlier works—as a mere surrendering of will.[120] It seems that it would be better to regard it as a surrendering of the agent's particular judgment or, perhaps, the offering up of the particular intentions of an agent's will in exchange for a nexus of agreement between the consubstantial community of creatures and their Creator. Nevertheless, positing the ongoing *viz.* eternal activity of the will and the fact that it is not exclusively dictated by reason does not in itself prove that Maximus rejects the notion of character-based determinism. Given that the Confessor defines the will as a faculty that is informed by the rational as well as irrational aspects of the soul, one could counter by arguing that the virtuous disposition and the established character of the παθητικόν compel an agent to choose the good; that is, though distinctive and unconditioned in relation to external causation, the will automatically responds to the internal impetus instigated by the virtuous desires of the passible aspect of the soul and its longing for ontological fullness.

Fortunately, we are not left to vainly speculate or deductively extrapolate as to what might have been the Confessor's view as he provides a fairly clear answer elsewhere in his corpus, and in an entirely different context. If we turn to *Ambiguum* 6, we find that Maximus provides us with a description of the exemplary human being, one whose appetitive and incensive aspects have been redirected from soul-destroying passions to 'joy' (χαρά) and 'love' (ἀγάπη), and who having attained to a 'deiform habit' (θεοειδὴς ἕξις) reaches the heights of divine contemplation.[121]

---

[116] St Maximus the Confessor on the Will, 154.
[117] *Ibid.*
[118] (PG 91:24D–25B).
[119] (PG 91:25AB).
[120] *Ambiguum* 7, in *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers,* 90.
[121] In *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers,* 72.

Nevertheless, both following and interpreting Gregory Nazianzen, the Confessor suggests that even such a virtuous state is still vulnerable to disruption; it is still possible through laxity to be distracted by the sensible world for its own sake, being led away from Logos to the self-absorbed narcissism that accompanies an inordinate love of the body.[122] Despite having attained to a stable and virtuous habit of soul, the human agent must continue to 'will', to recapitulate, as it were, the directedness of his or her appetites, both rational and irrational. Virtue brings stability of soul and a greater disposition to act in a virtuous way, but it does not create an environment of internal necessity. Though not a philosophical answer *per se*, *Ambiguum* 6 sustains Bradshaw's assertion, if indirectly.

But does Maximus' rejection of character-based determinism make him vulnerable to an Origenistic notion of satiety (*κόρος*), to an unstable eschatological future where freely-determining agents may arbitrarily swerve away from their voluntary 'communion of wills' and abandon their former ardour for the divine? Maximus spills much ink correcting what he perceives to be the excesses of Origen's thought,[123] so it should be no surprise that his texts would anticipate such a question. However, the Maximian answer moves us still further from philosophical speculation and further into the ineffable realm of theology. To return to *Ambiguum* 6, Maximus provides an interesting preface to his comments regarding the potential for those of 'deiform habit' to be disrupted from their divine focus. Anagogically interpreting John the Forerunner's 'leap for joy' in the womb of his mother, Maximus explains that, like the Forerunner, human beings are clothed, as it were, in a womb of darkness, only able to perceive the Word obscurely through the medium of materiality.[124] In short, even those who to attain to the divine heights in this life have yet to experience the 'birth' of the ineffable eschatological future, suggesting that those who voluntarily turn away from the Logos do so while possessing only an incomplete knowledge of him. Allusions to the Pauline principle of 'seeing through a glass darkly' (1 Cor 13:12) and the Platonic parable of the cave are evident here. Nevertheless, the prominent point that emerges is that the human agent, despite his or her virtuous habit, is not at rest while yet in historical becoming and possesses only a partial realization of the eschatological knowledge of the Logos. In order to understand the rest of the story, however, we must advance to Maximus' *Ambiguum* 7:

> And it is to this end that every lofty way of life and mind hastens, an end 'in which all desire comes to rest and beyond which they cannot be carried, for there is nothing higher "towards which all good and excellent movement is directed" than the repose found in total contemplation by those who have

---

[122] *Ibid.*

[123] *Cf.* Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of St Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Orbis Catholicus, 1955).

[124] In *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers,* 72.

reached that point', as our blessed teacher says. For in that state nothing will appear apart from God, *nor will there be anything opposed to God that could entice our will to desire it* [italics mine], since all things intelligible and sensible will be enveloped in the ineffable manifestation and presence of God.[125]

This principle is echoed in the *Mystagogy*, albeit without the sense of eschatological finality, where the Confessor speaks of the angels communicating through chant in the divine services, thereby 'preserving and strengthening enchantment of the divine and ardent desire for God'.[126] When, therefore, the lovers of God reach their eschatological future, encountering the divine Logos directly and no longer through the mediation of images and symbols, then no other thing will be able to distract them or 'entice' their desire. To put it in allegorical terms—which seems appropriate given the Maximian topic—why would the one who has been confined to a deep dungeon, and upon being freed and returned to the natural light of the sun, wish to return to his torment? Who after years of solitary confinement is finally restored to the circle of his beloved friends and longs for his former state of suffering? In short, who after such darkness and doubt receives the light of the Logos *in actuality* and desires to return to the agony of post-lapsarian existence? As such, Maximus believes that the synthetic appetite comes to a state of rest, not because it is no longer active or has succumbed to a necessitated or fixed character, but because it will be so thoroughly enchanted and 'enticed' by the object of its ardour, by its beloved, that no other thing will be capable of wooing it. In this context, it becomes much clearer as to why Maximus insists on defining all the virtues by the chief virtue of love.[127] Furthermore, this state of 'appetitive rest' is a reality that will not grow stale or that will lead to the satiety of the subject. As Maximus goes on to explain in the seventh *Ambiguum*, 'For our knowledge of each and every thing created by God will have reached its limit, and there will remain for us only the enjoyment of participation in the infinite and incomprehensible.'[128] As such, the eschatological 'rest' of the synthetic appetite will be an 'ever-moving rest', continually delighting in the inexhaustible enjoyment of the divine Logos. In plain human terms, this eternal and ineffable delight will have all the freshness of the joy experienced by the lover, who, in finally meeting his beloved, realizes that she too ardently returns his love.

As stated at the beginning of this study, it is by no means possible to reconstruct adequately or comprehensively the Confessor's views of moral judgement and the human tendency to reject the good in such a brief study. The topic arguably deserves a work of monograph length, a work with the space to examine directly not

---

[125] *Ibid.,* 93.
[126] In *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings,* 204.
[127] *Ambiguum* 21 (PG 91:1249B).
[128] In *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers,* 93.

only Stoic and Aristotelian moral paradigms that appear in Maximus' thought, but also the way in which these ideas were received and retooled by the thinkers who preceded him. For there it is certain that the Confessor, as his typical of his style, does not simply repeat the ethical formulations of thinkers like Nemesius of Emesa but carefully evaluates, synthesizes, and even alters the nuances of their thought. A thorough understanding of his views therefore requires an even more careful evaluation of the ethical presuppositions and assumptions that he received and to which he in all likelihood also reacted. Regardless of which biographical account we accept, it is also reasonable to assume that Maximus probably read at the very least Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* a work that retained its relevance and continued to inspire and provoke thinkers up to Maximus' era and beyond. And if this is the case, we can infer that Maximus is not ignorant of the ethical dilemmas and *aporiai* posed by the ancients and re-evaluated by generations of subsequent thinkers. Indeed, given what we know already about the scope and depth of the Confessor's thought, we may conclude that he entertained and wrestled with many of these questions himself as he composed his works, folding carefully crafted and implicit theological responses into his synthesis. If I am indeed correct, the ethical dimensions of Maximus' thought and their possible horizons of application to ongoing moral discourse are far from exhausted.

The Mystery of Christ: God's Eternal Gospel towards Humankind and the World*

ATANASIJE JEVTIĆ

University of Belgrade, Serbia

The following paper seeks to demonstrate the way in which St Maximus the Confessor identifies the holy *Gospel*, as the eternal Word of God, with Christ himself, specifically with the *great mystery of the incarnate Christ*. By living a life according to the *Gospel*, every man recapitulates in himself this great incarnational mystery, and is thereby renewed by the grace of the Holy Spirit to participation in the life of the Holy Trinity, a life of eternal deification. It is Maximus' practical experience of the *Gospel* as personal participation in the Incarnation which underpins his entire theological outlook, in particular his defence of Chalcedonian Christology, and which made his own life a true continuation and 'completion' of the *Gospel* of Christ.

The *Gospel* is the eternal word of life (John 6:68; 1 John 1:1–2). This means that the *Gospel* is word, eternal, and life. It is word, because, as Saint Maximus demonstrates in his corpus, it is identified with the eternal Word of God, Christ the Word, the Son of God who made all things in the beginning and who is himself God's *Gospel* to creation, to the world, and to humankind. That it is eternal is apparent in Revelation, where Saint John the Apostle saw an angel bearing the *eternal Gospel* (Rev 14:6).[1] That the Gospel is life is self-evident because it is the eternally alive Word of God, who is eternally begotten by the Father. According to John, *life was in him*, and this life was manifested (1 John 1:2) in the world as the Word and Son of God, who is eternally with the Father and is the one through whom the Father created all things. And, of course, with the Father and the Son there is also the Holy Spirit, who is the eternal giver of Life. The Father is the *Intellect*, the Son is *Word*, and the Holy Spirit is *Life*, says Saint Maximus in his *Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer*, in the *Chapters on Love*, and in other works.[2]

Maximus often mentions the *Gospel*, refers to the *Gospel*, quotes the *Gospel*, begins with the *Gospel*, breathes and lives the *Gospel*, and thinks and theologizes through

---

[1] 'The *Eternal Gospel*, [that is] the one foreordained by God from the ages' according to Andreas of Caesarea, *Commentarius in Apocalysin* 14.6 (PG 106:344D).

[2] See, for example, *Capita quinquies centana* 3.4 (PG 90:1177–1180).

the *Gospel*. He neither received it nor was taught it by other teachers, though he was conversant with Aristotle, Origen, and even the Areopagite.[3] However, Maximus did receive his learning from two great teachers of the *Gospel* itself, the Apostles John and Paul. By John the Theologian, the faith and theology were revealed to him: the eternal Word and Son of God is he who is, was, and will be, and that he is the *eternal Gospel* and the eternal life of the world: 'And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent' (John 17:3). Of course, the Holy Spirit is also implied here, as Saint Gregory the Sinaite so beautifully adds to this verse of John's.[4]

In addition, Maximus was also taught the *Gospel* by Saint Paul, because this Apostle continuously emphasizes the *Gospel*, since he preaches Jesus Christ *crucified* and *risen* and says that the *Mystery of the Gospel* has been revealed to him, this mystery being the *Mystery of Christ*. He shows this particularly in his Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, as well as in other Epistles, frequently referring and returning to the theme of the *Mystery of Christ*. This is why Saint Maximus the Confessor, in his own *Gospel*, recorded, expressed, attested, and testified to it, in such a way that he united the *Gospel* of the two Evangelists, John and Paul. This union is the *Gospel*, which is identified with Christ himself. Throughout his life, Maximus strove to attest, bear witness to, live, and seal his *Gospel* with his confession. He stands before it very humbly, when he says 'as I deem', because of the enormous content and limitless dimensions of the *Mystery*.

So, for Maximus, the *Mystery of Christ is Christ* as the *Gospel,* equal to 'the good news' ($\varepsilon\grave{v}$-$\alpha\gamma\gamma\varepsilon\lambda\acute{\iota}\alpha$), which God planned, foreordained, and brought to fruition in Christ, for our sake, as salvation and eternal life, eternal glorification for us and the whole of creation. Here, in his own words, Maximus expresses himself when he identifies the *Gospel* with Christ: 'For this, I believe, is perhaps God's *Gospel*: intercession from God and encouragement to us through the Incarnate Son, who, as a reward for our reconciliation with the Father, gives unbegotten deification to those who believe in him'.[5] This is repeated by Saint Gregory Palamas in the Synodal Tome of 1351.[6]

---

[3] Maximus read and understood the writings of many philosophers and Church Fathers, as is apparent from his *oeuvre*. We mention this because there are important scholars and experts on Maximus, such as Polycarp Sherwood—author of *The Earlier Ambigua of St Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Orbis Catholicus, 1955)—who, although he rejects Balthasar's position that Maximus experienced some sort of crisis of Origenism and thinks that Maximus was never actually an Origenist, nevertheless accepts that the problematics of Origenism imposed themselves on the themes and expressions with which Maximus concerned himself. We believe, however, that, in his theology, Maximus starts from the internal experience and contemplation of the *Mystery of Christ* as God and Man, and that this living experience within the Church led him to 'clearing the paths of the Lord and putting aside the stones from the way', as he himself says, quoting the Prophet Isaiah in *Letter 2: On Love*, in *Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Andrew Louth (Abingdon: Routledge, 1996), 91.

[4] *On Commandments and Doctrines* 32, in *The Philokalia*, trans. and ed. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, vol. 4 (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).

[5] *Ad Thalassium* 61 (PG 90:637D).

[6] (PG 151:745).

We might add another, rather more extensive passage here from Maximus on the *Gospel*, drawn from *Ad Thalassium 65*: 'Therefore the Holy Gospel is a product of God's handiwork (Eph 2:9–10), that is the energy of God [Christ] through the flesh, which has the Kingdom throughout infinite ages, in which we know unbounded joy and delight, as in a never-ending day without night. For he says: "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it (Ps 117:24)"'.[7] 'Day' is what he calls the *Gospel* grace, or the mystery of him who made this grace (*i.e.* Christ), in which mystery, in which grace, according to Saint Paul, he (God) wishes us to walk properly as in the day of knowledge and truth (Rom 13:13). For Christ is eternal light, in whom those who believe in him should live in the propriety of the virtues. For he alone became flesh by God without seed (*i.e.* Christ from the Virgin), adopting new laws in the place of the laws of nature. He was prepared as the revelation before all the gentiles and to be the light of his people, Israel (Luke 2:30–32). For our Lord is truly the *light* of the *Gentiles*.[8]

So this second passage, from *Ad Thalassium 65*, is a new expression of the same fact: that Christ and the *Gospel* are one and the same. It is extremely important to say that the *Gospel* is a product of God's handiwork, of the energy of Christ which contains the Kingdom through infinite ages. In this way, Maximus returns to the identification of the *Gospel* with Christ, and the *Gospel* has the original meaning of 'gladsome tidings'. It is joy, truth, knowledge, union, and glorification. It is the grace of God. It is in this mystery, according to Saint Paul, that God wishes all of us who believe in Christ to walk with propriety, as in the day, living well, joyfully, with the virtues of decency. When they live like this, people become a new creation, made by Christ as God/Man, made by God, just as Christ became incarnate of the Virgin and who, in this way, made new the laws of nature. This renewed law, which had been prepared before the ages, was revealed in Christ before all peoples, as light for all the gentiles and light for Israel, as light for the nations.

All the expressions in this passage concerning the *Gospel* indicate that it is identical with the great *Mystery of the Incarnate Christ*. Because this Mystery, this *Gospel*, was, indeed, brought about in Christ and, indeed, was realized as *Christ*. Saint Paul and Saint Maximus preach precisely this in their personal *Gospel*: Christ incarnate in the world and for the world, in us people and for us people, in creation and for the whole of creation. This is why both Saint Paul and Saint Maximus struggled for Christ throughout their lives in the way they did, for the mystery of Christ, who as God was made manifest to the world (1 Tim 3:16), in life, in thought,

---

[7] (PG 90:768BC).
[8] (PG 90:768–769). See also, in Maximus' *Opusculum* 4 (PG 91:57AB): 'His (Christ's) merciful condescension towards us through his manifestation [Incarnation], deifies by grace those who ascend (to him) by their will and who accept his fullness through his emptying, in the completion of the virtues'. This is the interweaving of Maximus' ideas: emptying brings riches. Although emptying implies evacuation, here it gives fullness, the fullness of Christ.

and in action. They devoted their life to the defence, witness, and realization of the true faith in Christ, the incarnate Word, the true God-man.

Maximus studied Christology in the Apostles and, beyond doubt, the Holy Fathers who followed them, principally the Cappadocians. In particular, he received Christological faith and theology from Saint Gregory the Theologian. At the same time, however, he was taught this theology/Christology by the Synod of Chalcedon, which is why he often repeats words and expressions from the Council. He affirms that Christ is *two natures* but *one hypostasis*; he is two natures truly united in one Christ, with all their natural characteristics/capacities, with their wills and energies, with everything that the divine and human natures have, but 'unconfused, unchanging, indivisible, inseparable', as the fourfold definition in the Chalcedonian Creed puts it.

We know that Maximus, in his defence of the true and complete Christology, waged a struggle initially against the heresy of the Monophysites, especially against their leader, Severus of Antioch. After the Justinian era, the Monophysites emerged into the open, having been encouraged in this somewhat by Justinian himself, but they then went too far. The next great Emperor after Justinian, Heraclius, tried to win them over, as his predecessor had done, because the eastern part of the empire was in a difficult situation: the Orthodox in the East, the Chalcedonian Christians, were suffering and, indeed, in danger of extinction. For this reason, Heraclius and Patriarch Sergius, supported by a group of bishops, attempted to promote unity with the Monophysites, through compromise 'formulae' designed to emphasize the person of Christ. These were designed to remove any suggestion of separation in Christ as proposed by Nestorius, by indicating and affirming the one energy and one action of Christ, and then the one will. So it was that, in the time of Maximus, the twin heresies of Monoenergism and Monotheletism arose, as milder versions of Monophysitism.

Initially with Saint Sophronius, and later by himself, Saint Maximus very energetically opposed this theology of compromise of the faith, that is the alteration of the Church's faith for the sake of political gain. To put this into the language of today, this was the ecumenism of the time: to achieve *unity*, by sacrificing the truth. Since Maximus was a confidant of the emperor—a relative, in fact—and was a person of high standing, he knew many prominent people in the empire and was able to influence a good number of these contacts. He began to write extensively. He spoke, acted as intermediary, travelled, and encouraged the convocation of Synods. He even went as far as Rome, where he urged Pope Martin to call the Lateran Council in 649 to condemn those compromises which imperial edicts attempted to impose: the *Ekthesis* by Heraclius and the *Typos* by Constans. As a result of this he was persecuted, as was Pope Martin. Maximus was hounded for longer, but more circumspectly, because he was so well regarded. His adversaries repeatedly questioned him with great persistence, since it was important to them to win him over to their side and

make him a supporter of the policy of compromise. In the end, they cut off his right hand and removed his tongue. Thus maimed, he was exiled to Lazica, or Georgia as it is today, where he died in the Lord's peace on 13 August, 662.

Eighteen years after Maximus' repose, the Sixth Ecumenical Council was held, at which the theology and Christology of Saint Maximus triumphed completely, even though it is not directly mentioned in the proceedings of the Synod.[9] It is indicative, however, that the *Horos* of the Sixth Ecumenical is expressed in language which is word for word the same as that of the Synod of Chalcedon: like Chalcedon, it speaks of the *two natures* in *one Christ*, while now adding: and two energies, two wills, but again one Christ, who, as one activates his divine and human energy, just as he activates his divine and human will.

It is clear that Saint Maximus' *Gospel* of Christ, which is also that of John and Paul, is, at the same time, that of the Fathers of the Church. It is the Ecclesiastical and Synodal *Gospel*, because the *Gospel* and the Christological Synods of Chalcedon and Constantinople (Sixth Ecumenical) agree with the whole of Orthodox Patristic Christology. Let us then return to and repeat Maximus' words regarding the *Gospel*: 'For this, I believe, is perhaps God's *Gospel*: intercession from God and encouragement to us through the incarnate Son, who, as a reward for our reconciliation with the Father, gives unbegotten deification to those who believe in him'.[10] These words

---

[9] This is precisely why, at the time of the Sixth Ecumenical Council, a start was made on the first full *Life* of Saint Maximus, while, a little later, the infamous Syriac-Monophysite Ψόγος (*Censure*) made its appearance and sought to defame Saint Maximus. This was a kind of 'counter-*Life*', an attack on the Church against the true Father of the Church, the *Third Theologian*, as the Fathers called him. Of course, it has long been proved that this leaflet, the *Censure*, is a forgery, though some still quote it as genuine. Maximus never went to, nor lived in the Holy Land and did not know the Near East/Palestine at all, even though he is reported as having been born and brought up there, in a village on the Golan Heights. Nor did he become acquainted with Sophronius in the Holy Land; they met later in Alexandria. We have found at least two passages in his work which indicate that Maximus was never there at all. Had he been born there, he would have known that the source of the Jordan was some 10–15 kilometres away, close to ancient Paniada, in Caesarea Philippi. Instead, he says in *Quaestiones et dubia* 2.8: 'They say that the River Jordan has its source in Aermon' (CCSG 10:166). No one from that part of the world would have said that, even if he had gone to the monasteries there as a young man. And in his interpretation of the miracle of the paralyzed man who was let down through the roof he says: 'People who have actually seen these places say that the roofs of the houses in Palestine are made of pumice stone and, as such, are very light' (*Quaestiones et dubia* 162 (1.65) CCSG 10:113). No Palestinian would say this. These proofs, however, have not been mentioned by anyone until today. Even the Russian Epifanovich (end of the nineteenth to the beginning twentieth century), an otherwise excellent student of Maximus, is unaware of them. So around the time of the Sixth Ecumenical, a genuine *Life* was put together, initially brief, for the *Synaxarion*, then later expanded and supplemented. Anastasios the Sinaite was aware of this, as were later historians, such as Theophanes. Later, the Ψόγος was published, attacking the 'Maximian heresy' (*i.e.* the Orthodox doctrine of two natures and two wills). Indeed, the Monothelite patriarch Makarios of Antioch, in his address to the Sixth Ecumenical Council, requested that the 'heresy of Maximus' be condemned. This is the only mention of the name of Maximus in the Proceedings of the Synod (Mansi 11:357A). Why he was not directly mentioned is readily understandable, however, since Emperor Constantine IV Pogonatos, son of Constans II and great-grandson of Heraclius, was present at the Synod of Trullo. Thus, although Sophronius and Pope Martin are mentioned, there is silence as regards Maximus. Be that as it may, the theology and confession of the Sixth Ecumenical are fundamentally Maximian.

[10] On the meaning of the expression '*unbegotten deification*', see the study by Panagiotis Christou: Ἄνθρωπος ἄναρχος καὶ ἀτελεύτητος, Κληρονομία, vol. 12*B* (Thessaloniki, 1980), 251–81.

reveal that the pre-eternal will of God, his *good pleasure* (Luke 2:14), the bedrock of his goodness, as Maximus says, the whole depth of the will of God regarding the world and the people in it was that the Son of God should become also the Son of Man. The *only-begotten* was to become the *first-born among many siblings*. And so, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, which is activated and realized by the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, we and the world are granted eternal life, eternal salvation, *eternal deification*, though only in the closest *union with Christ*, with whom, and through whom and in whom our glorification will eternally be worked: '*we shall not expire, being eternally deified*', says Maximus in *Ad Thalassium* 22.[11]

This is the greatest *good news*, joy, and conviction which God had to proclaim and grant to us and the world. The Creator/Instigator and *Evangelist viz. Messenger* of this truth, of this mystery, of this event (Luke 2:15), which transcends all human reason and is what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived (1 Cor 2:9), is the personal incarnate God, Christ the God/Man. This is revealed by God the Father, witnessed by the Holy Spirit, and is given to us in the Church by the Mystery of Christ. The preacher of this event, the messenger and evangelist, or 'fifth Evangelist'—to use the words of Father Justin Popovitch—is none other than Saint Maximus the Confessor.

Saint Maximus wrote a continuation to Christ's *Gospel* with his life, his works, and his struggles. I remember what Saint Justin said: 'What does Saint John's Gospel end with? It is a little strange: But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, "I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written"' (John 21:25). Is this an exaggeration? Father Justin says not, because every person is called by God and endowed by him to extend the *Gospel*, which, for this reason, is our own *Gospel*. Father Justin says that we have a unique opportunity to repeat the *Gospel* in our life, our deeds, words, and thoughts, and, in so doing, we can add to it. Therefore, there are not only four Evangelists; every Christian person is an Evangelist. Saint Justin bases this view on the bold position of Saint John Chrysostom, who, interpreting Saint Paul, says that the Church 'completes' Christ, it is *the fullness of him who fills all in all* (Eph 1:23). It is the saints, the members of the Church, who complete Christ. Therefore, we dare to say of Saint Maximus that he completes the *Gospel* of Christ, that is, that he engaged with it by expressing the unique and all-encompassing truth: that the great mystery of God and the wonderful counsellor of the Holy Trinity is *Christ as God-man*. For he is the *eternal Gospel* of God, the everlasting *Annunciation* for the world and for humankind.

Let us also add here what Saint Maximus says—in *Ad Thalassium* 60[12] and elsewhere—which he repeats often and emphasizes: that Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God and Son of Man, includes in himself and contains in his *Body* the

---

[11] See also the whole of the *Ad Thalassium* 22 (PG 90:317–324).
[12] (PG 90:620B–625D).

whole *Church*, and that we, as Christians, are members of the Church, members of Christ. Not merely as bodily organs, but something much more: we are persons; we are not impersonal. This is the pre-eternal idea/concept and providence of God, which is focused on Christ the God-man and is realized and embodied in him: that we, as God-like and Christ-like persons, exist in the theanthropic *communion* of the holy, tri-hypostatic Godhead. Because, in reality, the Church is the communion of the Holy Trinity, *the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ,* which is realized as the goodwill of God the Father, as the pre-eternal *love of God* for us, and as *the communion of the Holy Spirit* (2 Cor 13:13). Behold, this is the great mystery of godliness, as Saint Paul says about Christ: *Christ appeared in the flesh* (1 Tim 3:16) and brings about this mystery in the Church and as the Church, which, for precisely this reason, is the *pillar and buttress of the truth*. This is the dual, but unified, theanthropic *Mystery of Christ, the eternal Gospel*, as Saint John beheld it on Patmos. The angel bore the eternal *Gospel*, and Saint Maximus the Confessor conveyed it to the Church, through his life and theology. This is why Maximus, as one of the '*Godly-wise, mystical guides of the Church*,[13] frequently repeated the central truth of the whole faith and theology of the Church: 'Of all the divine mysteries, the most mysterious is the mystery of Christ.'[14] This is Saint Maximus' 'song for the Beloved' (Ps 44:1).

[13] (PG 91:296B).
[14] *Ambiguum* 42 (PG 91:1332C).

Dialogical Nature, Enousion Person, and Non-ecstatic Will in St Maximus the Confessor: The Conclusion of a Long Debate

NIKOLAOS LOUDOVIKOS

Professor of Dogmatics and Philosophy, University Ecclesiastical Academy of Thessaloniki; Visiting Professor, Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Cambridge, UK; Research Fellow, University of Winchester, UK

In this article, I strive to conclude a long theological debate with modern Orthodox Personalism and show that, in the Confessor's thought, nature is essentially *dialogical*. That is, I argue against the imposition upon Maximus of any abstract separation of nature from person. Person is *enousion*, not an abstract ecstatic detachment from nature. Will, for Maximus, is an expression of the inner life of nature, both in anthropology and Christology, and stands in opposition to any transcendental conception thereof. This article also strives to show that neither Trinitarian life nor human fulfilment can be theologically articulated without the concept of *homoousion*. Finally, it seeks to inaugurate a systematic discussion of these notions within the context of modern philosophy and psychology.

I think that sometimes philosophers make theologians feel happy. This is precisely the case with philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Luc Marion, and Richard Kearney in our era, or Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Mounier, Nikolai Berdiayev, and Maurice Blondel, amongst others, in the recent past. What do they all have in common? It is that they created philosophies partially inspired by theological concepts and sources but, at the same time, faithful to the requirements of philosophical rigour. This sort of philosophy can often speak directly to the intelligent modern but theologically uncommitted man, using his language and his ways of thinking. On the other hand, these philosophies tend to leave the historical apparatus of theology intact, since they do not claim full domination or possession of theological tradition.

The above-mentioned claim of domination or possession is usually made by theologians. However, also in order to meet the requirements of the modern mind, some theologians also use philosophy, albeit in a way that seems to be the opposite of the method espoused by the aforementioned philosophers. These theologians use some philosophical concepts or methods *a priori,* thus trying both to assimilate and to interpret theological tradition in a way that is existentially convincing for their epoch. Perhaps the most well-known amongst them in the twentieth century are

Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich. The Heideggerian persuasions of the former lie behind his theological reading of the Scripture as *Entmythologisierung,* while the latter's emphatic endorsement of existentialism, along with some other philosophical concepts, inform his method of *correlation,* which form the very core of his renowned *Systematic Theology.*

I believe that there are many positive aspects to their enterprise. Bultmann draws attention to the deeply existential meaning of the Gospel, despite his exclusive *anthropocentrism,* or an individualism that is detached from the actual world. Tillich creates a new existential language within modern theology, though some of his main conceptual tools, starting from that of existential correlation and ending with his Christology, as well as his way of discussing the Trinity, have been controversial.

It is not difficult to discern an analogous or even identical tendency in modern Orthodox theology. However, several legitimate questions arise here: does this *a priori* adoption of philosophical criteria have the tendency to put limits on our very understanding of crucial points pertaining to Biblical or Patristic tradition, *i.e.* of the continuity of meaning that dwells in the shared interpretations of fundamental texts, which was transmitted within the Church through the centuries? To what extent can we allow ourselves not only to use these criteria—because it is absolutely necessary to study and to understand them in a fertile way—but to become dominated by them? In being dominated by them, do we not turn the flow of Christian theology exclusively towards the mouth of certain tributes of the modern or post-modern river, instead of merely taking them into account (as we must do), or even becoming enriched by them, while also correcting some of the very presuppositions of modern or post-modern thought? Can we also check the limits of our modern conceptual tools through the Patristic texts, instead of merely imposing them upon these texts? Do we need a 'historical' legitimacy that is prior to our plausible interpretations?

If the answer to the last two questions is 'yes', then we can perhaps switch to an engagement with the specific characteristics of a similar outstanding trend in modern Orthodox theology. It has become evident today that some of the criteria of modern transcendental subjectivism, usually in the form of existentialism and/or personalism, seem to be the main criteria applied thus far in the reading of Patristic doctrine on person, nature, and will by most of the prolific Orthodox theologians of the 'generation of the sixties', as they have been called—although this sort of reading had begun even before then, with Vladimir Lossky under the influence of Etienne Gilson. It is undoubtedly true that the final outcome was not just an affirmation of existentialist*, inter alia*, discoveries, but also a new theological opening; this is an opening, however, *decisively marked* by the philosophical tools that have been used.

It is, of course, a kind of intellectual *utopia* to expect to discover an ultimate detached meaning composed of primordial theological concepts, since the totality of our understanding is always bound within our personal, spiritual, philosophical, and cultural context and capacity. For this reason, it is much more honest for a

theologian to be open to corrections and re-considerations of his fixed interpretations, which can hardly be regarded as ultimate and definitive. On the other hand, theology, as a charisma of the worshipping community, cannot simply rely upon a forever-postponed and ever-coming final meaning. This is precisely the theological sense of *tradition*: an invaluable continuity of comprehension within the worshipping community, which provides *historical criteria* for an understanding of the fundamental doctrines and concepts held in common by the members of this community. The works of the Fathers of the Church—especially those that are respected and confirmed by Ecumenical Councils, and that now belong to our common Christian heritage—are genuine parts of this tradition and can provide us with such criteria. It is therefore absolutely essential to read them as carefully as possible before we 'understand' them in a way which answers our legitimate contemporary *aporiai.* It is all the more important to do this prior to projecting our pre-conceived philosophical convictions upon them. At the end of the day, any authentic modern 'Patristic synthesis'—I do not like the term 'Neo-patristic synthesis' since the Spirit always generates Fathers and Mothers of the Church—will not conclude by ultimately vindicating either an older philosophical system or by establishing a modern one; it will provide the depiction of the new world and the new existence in Christ.

However, it is crucially important not to underestimate or completely dismiss the intellectual syntheses made through personal philosophical projections, even if they are apparently less successful than their exponents initially thought, or even if they partially fail to do justice to history. As I already said, they represent openings, which have to be carefully considered in order to keep what is fertile and change what is not so fertile. Moreover, it is a useful rule to disconnect possible errors or intellectual limits from an author's *oeuvre* as a whole, which enables the positive evaluation of other aspects of it, when possible. I believe that, ultimately, it is the resulting *systematic* discussion that proves the value of our findings; however, I also believe that this sort of discussion is meaningful only insofar as it relies upon knowledge of the source texts to the extent possible.

Personal and Natural Otherness: Evil Nature, or Personal Possession Thereof?

For some of the devotees of modern 'Orthodox Personalism',[1] this debate over nature and personhood that has taken place over the last few years has seemed to be, at times, polemical. Though its initial phase took place entirely within the boundaries of the Orthodox Church, it has since expanded to include thinkers from other confessions. I therefore think that, today, it has become more apparent that the proper Patristic concepts of nature, person, and will shall bring new horizons to

---

[1] Though these authors in general refuse to be called 'personalists', this is precisely the term generally and, perhaps, plausibly applied to them by modern historians of Orthodox theology. See for example, Yannis Spiteris, *La Teologia Orthodossa Neo-Greca* (Bologna: EDB, 1992).

our fathoming of Patristic anthropology and will generate new, perhaps more fertile approaches to modern thought. Until recently, Patrisic interpretation has tended to be heavily conditioned by a series of philosophical prejudices, the most fatal of which has been what I call *ecstaticism.* This will be elucidated in the following pages.

This article seeks to conclude, on my part, this lengthy debate, which started marginally with my book, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatological Ontology Of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*,[2] and culminated with my article, 'Person instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness: J. Zizioulas' Final Theological Position'. [3] As a result of this article and Jean-Claude Larchet's book, *Personne et Nature,*[4] that followed, we witnessed not only the beginning of a serious and vivacious debate, but John Zizioulas trying to somehow reconsider his theology in light of the above suggestions in his Belgrade presentation, 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor'.[5] Yannaras also responded to my criticism in his recent book, *Six Philosophical Paintings*.[6] Two other books followed in English, the first of which is by Chrysostom Koutloumousianos and entitled *The One and the Three: Nature, Person and Triadic Monarchy in the Greek and Irish Patristic Tradition*.[7] In this work, Koutloumousianos eloquently criticizes Zizioulas' Trinitarian theology in the light of the Greek and Irish Patristic Triadologies. The second, Paul Blowers's brilliant *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World*,[8] among many other things, examines in a profound way the Orthodox Personalists' one-sidedness concerning the interpretation of person and nature in Maximus the Confessor. Some other interesting academic books and articles have also followed in Greek, criticizing the personalists' excesses. Thus, in a sense, this discussion seems to have practically ended, ultimately leading to a sort of *consensus,* at least among many experts. What, perhaps, still remains to be done is to give a final account of this debate by discussing Zizioulas's Belgrade article and Yannaras' final position concerning nature and person with a view to further decipher Maximus' thought concerning all the related topics in both a historical and a systematic perspective. This analysis will also seek to give an account of some fertile aspects of their thought. A good part of the present article is based upon my 'Possession or Wholeness? St Maximus the Confessor and John Zizioulas on Person, Nature, and Will'.[9] What I take from that article is presented here in a final, revised edition in order to pronounce in printed form my *ultima verba* on this long, painful, but, I think, extremely fruitful debate.

[2] (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010).
[3] *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011): 684–99.
[4] (Paris: Cerf, 2012).
[5] In *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection. Proceedings of the Symposium on Maximus the Confessor,* ed. Maxim Vasiljević (Alhambra: Sebastian Press, 2013), 85–113.
[6] In Greek as *Έξι Φιλοσοφικές Ζωγραφιές* (Αθήνα: Ἴκαρος, 2011).
[7] (Cambridge: James C. Clark, 2015).
[8] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
[9] *Participatio* 4 (2013): 258–86. http://www.tftorrance.org/journal/participatio_vol_4_2013.pdf.

Let us begin with Christos Yannaras. Yannaras has been, and still is, one of the most prolific Christian thinkers of our epoch, and his work encompasses many fields of both theology and philosophical theology. I have positively engaged with various aspects of his thought in my own work, and our intellectual relationship spans from a genuine agreement—concerning, for example, his ontological interpretation of ecclesiology[10]—to a partial disagreement concerning his ontology of personhood. This disagreement centres on the author's initial *ambiguity*, as I have called it, concerning his understanding of nature. This initial ambiguity consisted in identifying in his revised and extended doctoral dissertation, *Person and Eros*,[11] nature with necessity and person with an *ec-static* freedom from nature, on the one hand, while still giving nature a chance by affirming the possibility for its acceptance when it exists in the natural *ecstasis* of *eros*, on the other. This is a view that comes close to that of Vladimir Soloviev as well as St Maximus the Confessor. However, as I strive to show elsewhere, Yannaras, in general, draws in his book on Heidegger's understanding of the concept of *mode of being* as concrete being *par excellence,* combining it with a Sartrian reading of *ekstasis* as the unique characteristic of human being instead of a given essence.[12] All these elements are then arranged and presented upon a Losskian canvas, and in a permanently anti-western perspective, since, as Yannaras believes, Heidegger represents an attempt to deconstruct Western thought. However, what is extremely positive in Yannaras' approach is his passionate emphasis upon the reality of the concrete and unique 'personal' human being and his tendency to resist all forms of an *ousiocratic/essentialistic* abrogation of personal otherness as a result of a moralistic or pietistic *pseudomorfosis* of Christian anthropology. Beyond our present disagreement, the value of his enterprise remains priceless.

However, this initial ambiguity displayed in his earlier work has been decisively withdrawn by Yannaras in one of his latest systematic works called *The Enigma of Evil*.[13] Displaying a perspective that is quite different from that of Maximus the Confessor, this book explicitly identifies evil with the 'created mode of existence' itself (77). Thus, 'man is created and by necessity the *given* mode of his existence (his nature or essence) is the individual entity, *i.e.* the instinctive impulses of self-preservation, domination, perpetuation; it is self-interest (*ιδιοτέλεια*) in the antipode of the good, namely, evil' (77–78). Furthermore, 'if the mode of the Uncreated is the good (the existential fullness) and the mode of created is evil (existential limitations/the death), we understand evil as a term/presupposition of human freedom

---

[10] See my *Church in the Making: An Apophatic Ecclesiology of Consubstantiality* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016), 92–93.

[11] Trans. Norman Russell (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011).

[12] *Closed Spirituality and the Meaning of the Self: Mysticism of Power and the Truth of Nature and Personhood,* in Greek as *Η Κλειστή Πνευματικότητα και το Νόημα του Εαυτού: ο Μυστικισμός της Ισχύος και η Αλήθεια Φύσεως και Προσώπου* (Αθήνα: Ελληνικά Γράμματα, 1999), 285–91.

[13] *Το Αίνιγμα του Κακού* (Αθήνα: Ίκαρος, 2008). See also *Person and Eros*; for my criticism of Yannaras' initial ambiguity, see my *The Terrors of the Person and the Ordeals of Love,* in Greek as *Οι Τρόμοι του Προσώπου και τα Βάσανα του Έρωτα* (Αθήνα: Αρμός, 2009), 67–111.

(his dynamic transition from the image to the similitude of God)' (79). And, of course, 'nature is man's opponent, a threat, even a sadistic conspiracy (ἐπιβουλή) for man; nature is identical with evil' (43). It is extremely important to note that created nature does not *become* evil or necessity, *etc., after the Fall,* but *is* evil *according to its very mode of (created) existence.* On the other hand, God is free because he lives by a 'mode of relationship, the loving *ecstasis* from every determination and necessity of [his] nature or essence' (77). Thus, 'man is free only through being in conflict (ἀντιστρατευόμενος) with his own nature' (80). Spiritual life means that man 'free[s] himself from the restrictions of his nature (from the predeterminations of created-ness) by realizing his existence *as relationship* of loving *ekstasis* from ontical indi-viduality (ὀντική ἀτομικότητα)[author's italics]' (91). Yannaras does not dedicate a word to a possible gracious transformation of nature, and, of course, does not allow for the possible admittance of a theology of natural will, since it is only through an ecstatic gnomic/personal will *against nature* that this outlet from nature can be achieved. Relationship is the opposite of nature, the definition of which is un-related individuality. Accordingly, relationship is 'the event of *ekstasis* of an existence from the predeterminations of natural homogeneity, *i.e.* the event of the freedom from nature, which freedom defines the person' (248). For all these reasons, the ancestral Fall, as a historical event, never happened (96, 101–104, 107–108), since nature and necessity/corruption/death are identical (111). Maximus is abundantly used in this scheme, especially when the author needs to show that the Incarnation is completely independent from any fall, since it forms the primordial will of God.[14] Salvation in this perspective is nothing other than for a man 'to exist, after the death of his natural entity, hypostasizing existence as Grace, without any intervention (διαμεσολάβηση) of created nature' (256). As it is further explained, this grace is the uncreated energies of God. Thus, it seems that createdness is ultimately abolished by being swallowed up by grace. However, if my created existence no longer exists, since it becomes, as Yannaras asserts, an 'empty hypostatic shell' to be filled by divine energies, then I am not saved but simply flooded by divinity! Moreover, the author never explains how we can reconcile the ecclesial belief in the resurrection of the dead with his scheme. And, of course, we remain in the dark concerning whether or not the Incarnation is absolutely necessary in order for this sort of salvation to be brought about. Is Christ then simply a paradigm of a double 'personal' *ecstasis*/outlet from his two natures?

I think it is clear that the deep underlying concern of Yannaras is the problem of freedom, a problem common to all the Orthodox Personalists. Their definition of freedom is typically existentialist: a subject's freedom is his freedom for 'personal' self-determination, independently *of* any natural/*ousiocratic* restriction. However, the Biblical and Patristic—and, of course, Maximian—model of divine freedom has nothing to do with God's freedom *from* his nature, as we shall see. Thus, man's

---

[14] See *Ad Thalassium* 60 (PG 90:620B–625D).

freedom does not need to be freedom *from* his nature, which is divinely created and given to man as a gracious gift by his Creator's loving will. It is precisely the possibility of this nature becoming divine and immortal that causes the divine Incarnation. From a Maximian standpoint, Yannaras's philosophical understanding of Christian existence fails to realize that freedom and personal/reciprocal dialogue have been explicitly inserted by God into the very formation and transfiguration of created nature.

John Zizioulas shares, in his own way, most of Yannaras's convictions, and many of their philosophical sources are the same. We shall discuss some differences between them later on. What helps to form Zizioulas' distinctive philosophical identity is his specific reading of Levinas. But, most of all, he displays an almost absolute dependence on Tillich, through whom (and, secondarily, through Yannaras) he is connected with existentialism. Tillich's ontology is devoted to the demonstration of human finitude,[15] of beings inherently threatened by non-being who have nothing in their composition which is able to resist this threat. Being is somehow in itself a victim of death and annihilation; this is the first lesson Zizioulas learned from his teacher. Being is identified with necessity, and then '*freedom* in polarity with destiny is the structural element which makes existence possible because it transcends the *essential necessity of being* without destroying it [my italics]', in Tillich's words (182). Given this stark juxtaposition between being-as-necessity and existence-as-freedom, even the very notion of God is understood precisely in opposition to this being that is identified with necessity: 'However, if the notion of God appears in systematic theology in correlation with the threat of non-being, which is implied in existence, God must be called the infinite power of being which resists the threat of non-being' (64). According to Tillich, this happens because God is the first to free himself from his essential necessity by his hypostatic existence, as we shall see later on. Anthropologically speaking, we need an ecstatic 'power of infinite self-transcendence' (191), in order to realize 'the negation of non-being' inherent in this being that he conceives of as sheer necessity.

The second lesson that Tillich passed on to Zizioulas is the opposition between 'individualization' and 'participation', *i.e.* the need for a balance and counteraction between individuality and communion, or the need for a balanced *being as communion,* a synthesis between *communion* and *otherness*. In Tillich's words: 'When individualization reaches the perfect form, which we call a *'person'*, participation reaches the perfect form, which we call "*communion*" [my italics]' (176). Thus, 'person can grow only in the communion of personal encounter' (177), and '*in polarity with individualization*, participation underlies the category of *relation,* as a basic ontological element [my italics]' (177).

---

[15] Tillich was Zizioulas's teacher at Harvard. For the Tillichean theses described here, see his *Systematic Theology,* vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 186–204, 174–78.

We thus have all the essential conceptual tools John Zizioulas uses to under-
stand Patristic ontology: being as inherently threatened by non-being, being identi-
fied with necessity *versus* ecstatic personal freedom, a need for 'personal' liberation
from nature for both man and God, being as communion, individual against person,
and individualization *versus* relational ontology. As we shall see later in this essay,
even the Metropolitan John's principles of Trinitarian theology are borrowed from
Tillich, though synthesised with some Levinasian nuances. The main difference
between them is that Tillich strives to formulate his theological syntheses by using
Biblical material, while Zizioulas, following Florovsky, relies upon Patristic works.
Zizioulas purports to follow his own theological path, asserting that he relies upon
the Cappadocians for his ontology of personhood. He has in the recent past pro-
claimed that he has advanced beyond Tillich's brand of existentialism, which focuses
upon 'the ideas of individuality and consciousness'. [16] Nevertheless, Zizioulas takes
as his ontological point of departure the ecstatic Trinitarian Persons—who have
no essential particularity—and projects this ecstaticism upon human existence.
We shall see that, even in this respect, Zizioulas has never really overcome Tillich.
Indeed, we may have a serious theological error here.

There is nothing to reproach in the Metropolitan faithfully following Tillich in
his own way and struggling to fathom his own tradition. Moreover, I personally hold
Tillich's work in high esteem. The problem is that, first, Zizioulas has never admitted,
implicitly or explicitly, his reliance upon Tillich's paradigms. Basically, he only refers
to Tillich in order to criticize him. Consequently, all those who are ignorant of
Tillich's work believe that it is Zizioulas who invented all the aforementioned con-
ceptual tools. Second, and much more importantly, the Metropolitan insists that
he deduces these principles directly from Patristic writings. Personally, my only
objection is that Maximus and the Cappadocians are immensely more profound and
rich than Tillich, and it is a pity to lose their profundity in order to save our, perhaps
legitimate, Tillichean, Levinasian, or Heideggerian projections upon them. On the
other hand, his method should not by any means lead us to dismiss Zizioulas's work,
which is invaluable precisely as an effort to combine Tillich, Levinas, *et al.* with
Florovsky and some Patristic elements, or his attempt at an ecclesiological synthesis
of Bonhoeffer with some important Roman Catholic theologians and aspects of
Patristic thought. *Seen in that way*, Zizioulas's work justifiably earns an outstanding
reputation in ecumenical theology. However, precisely in order to save the indisput-
able reputation of his work, I think that the Metropolitan and his devotees would
have to admit directly that the very core of his work consists of an attempt to synthe-
sise the aforementioned concepts and elements, instead of struggling to show that
the Metropolitan's claims are identical with those of Maximus himself.

---

[16] See his *Communion and Otherness* (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 224.

Following the criticism of his views, the Metropolitan has recently tried to modify his views of nature, person, and will. In so doing, he has created a new scheme of possession or domination of person over nature, which he again attributes to Maximus the Confessor. In what follows, I discuss the views manifested in his Belgrade paper in light of the criteria disclosed above. This is not by any means to imply a devaluation of the Metropolitan's work, which, I repeat, I consider to be extremely important *per se*, and upon which I have built a part of my own work, though I have changed its method.

So, let us now see to what extent Maximus agrees with Zizioulas's new 'turn' of theological interpretation:

1) The Metropolitan starts by correctly affirming that for the Greek Patristic tradition there is no 'juxtaposition between nature and the human subject which we encounter in Francis Bacon, Descartes, Kant, and a whole philosophical tradition leading into modern existentialism'.[17] This disjunction between nature and person was made by medieval scholastic thought, 'the first representing the "objective" and "necessary" reality and the second the "subjective" and "'free" individual who can distance himself from nature'.[18] This claim seems, at least at first sight, to be a real 'turn' for someone who until very recently affirmed that 'such an understanding of personhood as freedom *from* nature [author's italics] may be applied to the human condition in which nature is a "given" to the person: humans are born as a result of given natural laws'. For God, this freedom is established because of the divine Persons, and so, 'it is the Trinity that makes God free from the necessity of his essence'.[19] Let us now see what the author proposes instead.

2) The main subject of our discussion is St Maximus the Confessor's theology on nature and person. It is according to the Confessor's theology that nature is now defined as an *abstract universal,* while person is the only real being, as the *possessor* of this—non-existent in itself—nature.[20] By speaking of nature in this way, the Metropolitan seems to use some texts that were first used by Torstein Tollefsen.[21] Let us see those texts again.

These treatises belong to the *Opuscula*.[22] By reading the passage in 276A, Zizioulas correctly assumes that nature is defined by Maximus 'not in itself but in relation with *hypostasis*'. But he goes on to quote 264AB, asserting that this text

[17] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 87.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] See his 'Trinitarian Freedom: Is God Free in Trinitarian Life?, in *Rethinking Trinitarian Theology: Disputed Questions and Contemporary Issues in Trinitarian Theology,* eds. R. J. Wozniak and Giulio Maspero (London: T.& T. Clark, 2012), 197.

[20] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 89.

[21] See Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 128ff.

[22] *Opuscula theologica et polemica* (PG 91:9–286).

implies that 'there is nothing concrete about nature; the concrete and self-existing in being is the *hypostasis*, not nature'.[23] This nature 'is an *abstract universal*'.[24]

However, Maximus deals in this passage with the concept of '*enhypostaton*'. In order to defend it, he claims, first, against the Nestorians, that 'there is no nature without *hypostasis*; and thus anyone who thinks that this an-hypostatic nature constitutes a *hypostasis* is wrong'. Then, against the Monophysites, Maximus argues that nature 'is never without *hypostasis*, but this does not mean that nature is identical with *hypostasis*'. The doctrine of the '*enhypostaton*' does not only teach us that it is impossible to have nature without *hypostasis*, but also that it is impossible to have a *hypostasis* without essential qualities. Thus, it is also 'impossible to think of *hypostasis* without nature'.[25] A *hypostasis* without nature is, for Maximus, also an *abstract universal*. The Confessor affirms it explicitly when he asserts that *hypostasis* has to be considered as '*enousios*' (with and in the essence) otherwise it is only a ψιλὸν ἰδίωμα, an abstract property.[26] A new, much more 'holistic' and reciprocal relationship between *hypostasis* and nature would seem to be suggested.

That means, furthermore, that between *hypostasis*/person and nature there is no relationship based on *possession* of the latter by the former, *or vice versa*. What is implied by this concept of possession is that nature is simply *abstract sameness*, and, thus, what makes it exist is precisely the fact that it exists in a person, who lies above, by definition, the sameness of nature, who 'possesses' it, uses it, and, thus, gives it existence—as if person was another being living by itself, and deciding, in a detached manner, who is to possess and who is to be possessed. However, Maximus claims precisely the opposite, as can be seen in his *Epistles*.[27] In this text, which is a goldmine for his ontology, Maximus shows that in *speaking of created human beings*, nature is only personal and *hypostasis* is abstract and inexistent without it, and, thus, that *the ground of personal otherness is the natural otherness*, as he explicitly asserts. Indeed Maximus does not need to go beyond John Damascene's definition of *hypostasis* as 'nature with properties', a concept which also belongs to the Cappadocians.[28] On the contrary, he articulates his admirably holistic definition of person/*hypostasis* in exactly the same way. Thus, a human being 'by reason (*logos*) of the natural communality of the parts of his being, saves his consubstantiality with the other human beings, while *by reason (logos) of the particularity of those parts he saves the particularity of his hypostasis*'.[29] Hypostatic particularity then is bound with natural particularity, despite the parts of one's nature that it has in common

---

[23] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 89.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] (PG 91:264A).

[26] (PG 91:205B).

[27] (PG 91:552B–553C).

[28] Basil of Caesarea, *Letter* 236, in *Letters Volume III: Letters 196–248,* LCL, trans. Roy Deferarri, vol. 243 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), 401–402; *Letter* 38, in *Letters Volume I: Letters 1–58,* LCL, trans. Roy Deferarri, vol. 190 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), 197ff.

[29] (PG 91:553B).

with others, and is inconceivable without it; there exists a reason, a divine *logos* of natural particularity—otherwise the former is a fantasy, a *general abstraction.* Finally, 'if the attributes that distinguish one's body and soul from others' bodies and souls come together, they characterize him and make him a *hypostasis*, separate from others' hypostases',[30] precisely because a human being, while he unites with other human beings through their common nature, '*saves the natural otherness of the difference of his personal parts unconfused* [my italics]'.[31] With this ingenious phrase, the Confessor puts a full stop to any modern theological or philosophical attempt at a transcendental/detached construal of *hypostasis*/person. A supposedly transcendental personal otherness, according to Maximus, does not mean freedom from the supposedly abstract immanent natural sameness, and thus the Confessor seems to radically disagree with assertions that affirm that '*it is not nature that gives being or existence to hypostasis, but it is hypostasis that makes nature abandon its abstract character, which is void of ontological content and acquire being* [author's italics]'.[32] On the contrary, in the created order, it is also natural otherness that gives ontological content and being to hypostatic otherness, according to St Maximus as well as the Cappadocians and St John Damascene.

That means that *man is other principally through 'the personal dimension' of his nature.* That further means that any 'personal' otherness has to be built—through painstaking education, asceticism, prayer, *etc.—only upon this natural otherness.* Otherwise, we have an almost naturally unconditioned person who, as a free being, possesses at will an abstract and dead sameness, which is nature, giving it being, making it his own property, and 'harmonizing' it to himself.[33] There is no place in Maximus, however, for any transcendental 'possession' of this supposedly general abstract/nature by a person above it, who claims his otherness against it or without it. In Greek, if '*anhypostaton*' means something that does not exist, the same is meant also by the word '*anousion*'. Person is strictly conditioned by the particularity of its nature, which also gives it being. Otherwise, it is '*anousion*', *i.e.* inexistent, and this is something that the architects of modern phenomenology—Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for example—together with researchers in modern biology and psychology understand very well. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, knows very well this almost unconditioned and detached theological person/ego, which has been ingeniously described by Freud as an *imaginary* or *ideal ego.* But the person, if it is not conceived as totally detached from nature, which happens in the tradition of Western transcendental idealism and even, up to a point, in Husserlian phenomenology, does not simply give particularity to its nature, but, first and foremost, is given particularity by its nature, from the very moment of its conception.

[30] (PG 91:552CD.
[31] (PG 91:553BC).
[32] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 90.
[33] *Ibid.,* 111.

The difference between man and beast on this point is *freedom,* the image of God upon man's hypostatic nature: not a *freedom from* but a *freedom for* nature,[34] which gives him the possibility *to work with this nature, which is already a gift, in order to co-create a self in freedom and even to transform its mode of existence through dialogical synergy/participation in divinity*. But even during or after this *dialogical/ascetical* work, the natural characteristics of a human subject do not change; what changes is the way he uses them, *i.e.* not any longer *against nature*, dividing it through *philautia,* but *according to nature,* uniting it and all of the world in it consubstantially in Christ. Thus, natural otherness is not to be overcome, since it is already a gift according to God's benevolent *logos*/will/Providence, in order for man to build his personal otherness *through and upon it.*

The Tillichean/existentialist imprint upon Zizioulas's thought becomes obvious yet again. Tillich, mainly in the second volume of his *Systematic Theology*, explicitly calls existentialism 'a natural ally of Christianity' because existentialism describes humanity's natural predicament, irredeemable fall, and the human incapacity to stay above nothingness.[35] In so doing, he creates a matrix for a theological understanding of salvation as a transition from the perpetually fallen essence/nature to existence. Though Zizioulas now seeks to deny existentialism, the very core of his understanding of the human condition and nature still seems deeply Tillichean/existentialist, even if he now proposes the 'personal' domination/possession of nature instead of an ecstatic departure from it. However, contrary to any existentialist/ idealist devaluation of nature, where it either dictates its terrible laws, entangling the person, or is possessed and 'given being' by the person—the person drawing his being from what?—dominated and directed by him, personal otherness expresses natural otherness and *vice versa*, and each is simply ontologically abstract and inconceivable without the other. Any effort to ignore this, leads to an identification of personal otherness with only the passive exteriority of a relation with an 'other', the only source which can provide me with otherness.[36] But can we have otherness without selfhood? If a man is hated or ignored, or denying and denied any relationship, is he not unique and other? Nature, according to the Confessor, does not mean simply sameness, but personal otherness, open to constant dialogical transformation; between nature and person, no one is *ontologically* prior, above, or possessor of the other, precisely because neither really exists even for a moment without the other. Furthermore, any 'personal' relationship presupposes and manifests a natural otherness, which forms its existential bedrock of 'dialogality' or 'inter-hypostatic syn-energy', as I have called it elsewhere.[37] A man is free, not because he is a person

---

[34] See note 38 below.

[35] 27ff.

[36] See Zizioulas's *Communion and Otherness,* 69–70.

[37] See N. Loudovikos, *Orthodoxy and Modernization: Byzantine Individualization, State and History in the Perspective of the European Future,* in Greek as *Ορθοδοξία και Εκσυγχρονισμός: Βυζαντινή Εξατομίκευση, Κράτος και Ιστορία, στην Προοπτική του Ευρωπαϊκού Μέλλοντος* (Αθήνα: Αρμός, 2006), 81ff.

prior to or above his nature—since then freedom would be just an idealistic detach-ment from nature—but because he willingly follows, as we shall see below, the divine *logoi* of his nature as existential/dialogical ways back to his Creator. *Man is thus free only through and by nature.*

I would need another paper in order to show in detail how wise the above-men-tioned Maximian suggestions are, if we were to discuss them in light of modern psy-chology. As I have insisted in my article in *The Heythrop Journal*, the subject in this state of detachment is decisively pre-modern, since it does not have, for example, an unconscious. Where is it possible to find that sort of fully conscious self, which is able to be an absolutely 'free' person, possessing and dominating at will an 'abstract universal', *i.e.* its nature, without this 'domination' being affected by unconscious conflicts and desires? For a psychoanalyst, all this can be described perfectly as a 'defence mechanism', directed against some unsolved unconscious conflicts, *i.e.* slavery and *not* the triumph of freedom. This is why the Maximian advice to listen carefully to nature, and to work with it and through it, is so much wiser than the personalists' advice to dominate or possess it! However, the ascetic tradition of Christianity also knows well that one needs a deep ascetical experience in order to truly liberate the personal will in the Spirit—not from nature but from any sinful distortion of it. This is why the question *who* is the active agent in man, when it takes for granted the black-and-white detachment of person from nature, is totally misleading and pointless for St Maximus. If then we must use the term *priority* to describe the relation between the two, then we should rather speak of the *co-priority* of the two, on an ontological level. We shall return to this later.

Thus, the difficulty is not just to assert that person and nature are connected, but mainly to deny any Neoplatonizing 'spatial' ontological model, which uses the scheme 'above-under' in order to describe their relationship: *i.e.* person/above *versus* nature/under. This is a scheme that seems to have now replaced the scheme 'freedom *versus* necessity', though the core remains the same: the ontological degradation of nature. This can be theologically, spiritually, and even psychologically dangerous, as we are trying to show. Maximian nature is an *open nature,* since the divine wills/*logoi* lie behind it, making it an open field of divine-human dialogue leading to a perspective of an unending divinisation. Thus it is, once again, totally different from the Aristotelian self-existent nature, which remains closed to itself, even when it is fulfilled through the virtues. 'The philosophers' nature', according to Maximus, which can perhaps be taken as dead sameness. The Patristic concept of nature is an active, living, personal gift that exists as an *enhypostatic/enousios* otherness.[38] This is the Maximian holistic 'revolution' in ontology: nature only personally ('dialogical-ly') constituted, and/or person only naturally manifested. This, as we shall see again later on, opens new ways of discussion with philosophy and science today. Any insis-

---

[38] N. Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology,* chapters 5 and 6.

tence upon the ontological priority either of person or of nature would make them, respectively, either *anousion* or *anhypostaton, i.e.* inexistent for Maximus, and this is precisely his great contribution to the modern anthropological quest.

I hope that my suggestions in this paper will not be misunderstood and taken as a proposal for a sort of *natural ontology* instead of an ontology of personhood. My claim is, on the contrary, that this theological ontology of personhood will not be successfully established if we do not fathom the deep sense of this remarkable holism. We shall see next that this deep interconnection between nature and personal otherness is valid even for the Trinity.

Person and Homoousion

We have similar things to say about *homoousion* in Maximus. The personalists understand it, again, exclusively as sameness. Are three men waiting for the bus at a bus station *homoousioi* for Maximus? No, he would reply, they are the same in their ontological structure since they are endowed with natural/hypostatic otherness, but not necessarily *homoousioi* in the ontological and not simply the logical sense of this term. Because unless each one of them holds human essence in its fullness, they cannot be truly ontologically consubstantial. Human essence is in fragmentation after the Fall, following the gnomic/personal fragmentation of humanity, as the Confessor claims.[39] In order for this anthropological or, better, Christological *homoousion* to be achieved, we need to practice the ascetical *perichoresis* of the other, following Christ who gathered the broken parts of humanity through his Cross. Consequently, *homoousion* is now *to be attained*, since, after the Fall, the primordial unity was broken and hypostatic/natural otherness cannot safeguard the communion of beings without an ascetic struggle for love based upon grace.

Thus, I am afraid Maximus would once again disagree doubly with Zizioulas, who claims that 'the function, therefore, of nature is this and nothing else: *to relate the hypostases to each other, to make them relational* [author's italics]',[40] since it is, obviously, pure sameness. It is so, first, because, as we have seen, nature participates in the very definition of personal otherness and *vice versa*, and, second, because this relationality, in order to be achieved, needs also the ascetic struggle—otherwise we speak of sameness, and not consubstantiality. Sameness cannot be called relation, σχέσις, since it is only ὁμοείδεια (of the same genus). So, *homoousion* is an absolutely dynamic existential concept for Maximus, giving us the essential base for an ontology of personal communion; the logical oneness of humanity is not just given as essential sameness, but remains to be achieved as *perichoresis* of others in Christ, in the Spirit, and in the Church. *Homoousion* is the way of personal communion. To be in communion means to struggle to unite the fragmented human nature inside me, to

---

[39] *Ad Thalassium 40* (PG 90:397BCD, 401CD).
[40] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 90.

accept the Cross of the other's *real* otherness in selfless love; otherwise, communion will be an empty projection of narcissism, a dictating or dictated otherness between detached dominators of the bits and pieces of human nature. It is a pity that modern psychology knows these games of narcissism much better than theologians.

But what happens in the case of the Triune God? It is of course true, as Zizioulas claims, that we do not have natural otherness in the Trinitarian Persons. However, as I will argue below, personal otherness in the Trinity is also inconceivable without nature! However, it is a serious theological mistake to apply Trinitarian being directly to the human being as well as to the Church, turning her into a direct duplication of the Trinity and thereby underplaying both Christology and history, claiming that the very definition of man has nothing to do with natural, biological and psychological otherness. It is impossible to find such an idea in Greek Patristic literature, for obvious reasons. And, we might add, by connecting the human person with individuality and consciousness—instead of absolutely denying them, since this sort of natural otherness does not belong to the Trinity—Tillich is closer to Greek Patristic thought than his Greek Orthodox pupil. Such an approach totally ignores *natural otherness* and the need to work with and through it in a way that leads towards the consubstantial *perichoresis* of all creation, in likeness with eternal divine consubstantiality. Instead, it creates an independent metaphysics of the detached and, almost by definition, God-like person, the ultimate result of which is a subject who either ignores or possesses nature. It is obvious that this way of thinking—though it seems to reverse Tillich's views by projecting the Trinity upon the human person—does not really depart from its existentialist premises, since it perpetually maintains the Tillichean/existentialist scheme of the dialectical opposition between fallen nature and free existence.

Moreover, it is evident that in Patristic thought, and of course in Maximus, divine nature is, again, absolutely active, through *homoousion,* in the ontology of the Trinitarian Persons. As I have claimed elsewhere,[41] *homoousion* is precisely the difference between, say, the Plotinian triad of the three primordial *hypostases* (*Ēn, Nous, Psychē*) and the Christian Trinity. The Plotinian *hypostases* represent three non-consubstantial fragments and parts of *Being.* Consequently, *Being* is ultimately the addition of all these parts. It is then impossible for the communion of those three parts to be free precisely because *they must needs be added in order to constitute the wholeness of Being, i.e.* in order to make sense as representing Being *per se.* Each consubstantial person of the Divine Trinity, on the contrary, represents Divine Essence in its wholeness. This is precisely the basis of a personal dynamic communion of the Divine *Hypostases* that is absolutely free, since, as each *hypostasis* holds the whole of divine being in himself, each is in communion with the others exclusively out of love. The difference between the divine and the created or *Christological* consubstantiali-

---

[41] *Η Κλειστή Πνευματικότητα και το Νόημα του Εαυτού,* 258–300

ty mentioned above is that the former is pre-eternally and timelessly existing, while the latter represents Christ's 'proposal' to us, and remains to be achieved in time and in the Church.[42]

Since he construes homoousion merely as sameness, Zizioulas, in his article on Trinitarian freedom writes:

> Trinitarian freedom is, negatively speaking, freedom from the given and, positively, the capacity to be other while existing in relationship and in unity of nature. In as much, therefore, as unity of nature provides sameness and wholeness, Trinitarian freedom, as the capacity to be other, can be spoken of as freedom from sameness. And in as much as otherness provides particularity, Trinitarian freedom can be spoken of as freedom from selfhood and individuality.[43]

Though a Levinasian influence is also obvious, Tillich is again the real primordial source of Trinitarian wisdom for the Metropolitan John. As Tillich writes in the third volume of his *Systematic Theology* : 'In the terminology of Nicaea, the divine 'nature' (*ousia*) is *identical* in God and his Logos, in the Father and the Son. But the *hypostasis* is different. *Ousia* in this context means that which makes a thing what it is, its particular *physis*. *Hypostasis* in this context means *the power of standing upon itself, the independence of being which makes mutual love possible* [my italics]'.[44] It seems clear that here divine nature is, again, a burden of necessity from which the Divine Persons need to free themselves in order to be able truly and freely to love each other. When the Persons love each other, nature is left behind and love is achieved as a personal denial of natural sameness. However, this entails an even more decisive subjectivism, as it shows an initial will of self-enclosure and separation from the other (the 'moment' of *ecstasis* from sameness), in order for the other to be understood as radical exteriority/otherness (the 'moment' of 'freedom from selfhood and individuality'). Thus, for the Metropolitan, the Trinity is explained as a series of three successive 'personal' *ecstases/outlets* from the frozen divine natural sameness; the Father is the first who achieves his escape (this is obviously the principle of the *Monarchy* of the Father), and then he *causally* extracts the two other Persons, liberating them from this unpleasant sameness.

The Patristic notion of Trinitarian *homoousion* saves us precisely from this danger of an ecstatic and separated subjectivism-in-a-non-real-communion. This subjectivism shows a subject who never really meets the other, as he, first, avoids the other's existence (*ecstasis*/freedom above sameness), and then he avoids his own

---

[42] See generally N. Loudovikos, *Church in the Making*.
[43] 'Trinitarian Freedom', 206.
[44] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 289.

existence (denial of selfhood). In both cases, either the other is absent, or the self is missing. Let me substantiate this.

In my *Heythrop* article, I describe *homoousion* as 'the principle of the eternal personal dialogue within the Trinity, as an eternal circulation of substance that is always one but in a state of absolute inter-giveness'.[45] As we can see, Maximus as well as the Cappadocians speak of a sort of 'movement' of nature within the Trinity, which does not imply time. And this is precisely *homoousion*! This is also the way for divine nature to participate in the very definition of divine otherness.

Thus, concerning divine essence, the Confessor avers that 'though it stays in immovable rest, the divine essence seems to move, moving towards each other' ('ἐν τῇ ἐν ἀλλήλοις χωρήσει', where χωρῶ is a verb meaning both *move* and *contain*).[46] This 'movement' is called 'convergence (σύννευσις) to the one of those who originate from him' by Gregory Nazianzen.[47] So, this is what *homoousion* is: a timeless and pre-eternal intra-Trinitarian movement, as the affirmation by the Son of his nature as the Father's nature, and an affirmation by the Spirit of his nature as the Father's nature, and a reciprocal affirmation by the Son and the Spirit of their essence as that of the Father's, affirming timelessly the *causal* affirmation made by the Father of his nature as the Son's and the Spirit's nature through *generation* and *ekporeusis*. This reciprocal affirmation of nature as immovable movement, *i.e.* as χώρησις (movement towards and mutual containment) and σύννευσις/convergence to the One, is caused by the Father: this is the principle of the Monarchy of the Father, *i.e.* the Father's absolute *monocausality*,[48] which, at the same 'moment', timelessly, actively and not passively, is reciprocally affirmed by the two Others. This is the *free natural dialogical reciprocity* between the Three Persons, which can also perhaps be called *reciprocal inter-giveness,* in the sense that it is a timeless reciprocal essential love/dialogue on the ontological level, constituting the very mode of being of God. Thus, divine *homoousion* does not simply mean sameness. It means a pre-eternally achieved and timeless reciprocal, inter-personal, essential χώρησις/movement and containing, a σύννευσις/convergence or dialogical reciprocity, or, simply, inter-give-

---

[45] 'Person Instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness', 690.

[46] *Scholia in Dionysium Areopagitam* (PG 4:212B). The fact that these *Scholia* appear to belong to John of Skythopolis does not dramatically change the argument since John has profoundly inspired Maximus.

[47] *Λόγος Δογματικός* 3.2 (ΚΘ'), ΕΠΕ, Εκ. Π. Χρήστου και Ε. Μερετάκης, τόμος 25 (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πατερικαί Εκδόσεις «Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς», 1976).

[48] Here, I have to make a couple of corrections to my article in the *The Heythrop Journal,* which passed unnoticed by me and caused some misunderstandings. Both of these misprints are on page 692 in the second paragraph. First, in the phrase, 'If they cannot be conceived in a "successive" way, this means that "cause" and "causation" are ultimate and reciprocal presupposition of one another'. Instead of 'cause' and 'causation', one should read 'to cause' and 'to be caused'. Second, and more importantly, an editorial error appears in the phrase, 'By being "caused" willingly by the Father, the Son at the same "moment" offers to be his "cause" as well, and so with the Spirit'. This should read, 'By being "caused" willingly by the Father, the Son at the same "moment" offers to be his Father's "caused" as well, and so with the Spirit.' Thus, I accept the Patristic concept of the Monarchy of the Father and his *monocausality* in the Trinity, albeit without having this monocausality unilaterally imposed by the Father upon the others; their reception of it forms part of its mystery.

ness. This Trinitarian 'movement' allows divine nature to be affirmed, not as dead and necessary sameness but as the nature of each divine person, without of course being possible for us to arithmetically count them as we do with physical objects. Any discussion about Trinitarian personalism without the concept of *homoousion* leads unavoidably to the absurdity of a Trinitarian transcendental subjectivism, speaking of God's nature either as passive sameness, or as a burden of necessity.[49] Thus divine nature also plays a role in divine personal otherness. Furthermore, it is of course senseless to think that *homoousion*/consubstantiality, understood as it was understood above, occurs 'before' the communion of the persons, thus forming a sort of 'cause' of their communion. For, it is precisely this personal communion that occurs as consubstantiality.

Hypostasis/Person and Atomon.

It has been argued that the Patristic tradition affirms a fundamental ontological and existential difference between person and individual or *atomon*. I am not aware of any Patristic text explaining this difference in this way. The only reason the formula 'three atoma' with reference to the Holy Trinity is rarely used in the Patristic tradition—though theologians of the status of St John Damascene did not hesitate to use it[50]—is purely historical and has only to do with the fact that the Italian authors (and not the Greek Fathers!) identified the notion of with that of person, as Boethius explains, 'because of our lack of terminology'.[51] The same explanation is given by Gregory Nazianzen, who accepts the term person only because the Italians cannot make the distinction between and substance/nature, unless they call the former *person* 'due to the poverty of their language'.[52] Thus the term person

---

[49] I find Zizioulas's discussion of natural necessity in God's nature to be unfruitful ('Person Instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness', 106–7, note 56). In an attempt to answer his critics, he asserts that necessity is connected to divine persons only in a hypothetical sense. First of all, Zizioulas has never indicated in his past work that his discussion of the freedom of God's being is totally hypothetical. Second, what is the possible ontological meaning of declaring that by definition a non-personal *unmoving mover* constitutes necessity for itself, when, in order for this declaration to have possible legitimacy, the *unmoving mover* would have to possess a conscious self in relation to which he has a problem of freedom; a thunderbolt, or a river, or the hippopotamus inside the river, do they have problems of freedom? Third, and foremost, Maximus once again disagrees here, even if this discussion is, as Zizioulas wants it to be, 'hypothetical'. Arguing against Pyrrhus who claims that what is natural is always bound with necessity, Maximus insists (PG 91:293C), 'if, according to this view, anything natural is bound with necessity, then God who is God by nature, and good by nature, and creator by nature, he is God, good, and creator by necessity, which is the ultimate blasphemy if we even think about it [*i.e.* as Zizioulas wants it, *hypothetically*]'. Who is the one who brings necessity to God?' Can we thus say that God is God, or good, or creator *because* he is personal, even hypothetically? Do we not thus mean, more or less, that part of God's being is not free, and that there is a special part of it, called person, that liberates him from the rest of it? And what is the real aim of such discussion, which persistently projects some existentialistic/idealistic obsessions upon Trinitarian theology?

[50] See *De institutione elementari* (PG 95:105A–109A).

[51] *Liber de Persona et duabus naturis, contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 3, in *The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. H. F. Stewart (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1918),

[52] *Orationes* 21.35 (PG 35:1124C–1125A).

gradually became the most frequently and ecumenically used term concerning the Trinity, but this has nothing to do with any shift of meaning; this shift happened only in the modern era, after the great crisis of Western subjectivism.

Maximus follows this line, absolutely identifying person with *atomon* and both of them with throughout his work. Although, for the historical reasons mentioned above, he prefers the term or person when speaking of the Trinity or Christ. It is then fruitless to search for texts juxtaposing *atomon* and *hypostasis*/person in Maximus' *oeuvre*, simply because Maximus never wanted and was of course unable to think in such a modern—Tillichean or otherwise—way. Thus the only Maximian text that Zizioulas utilizes is misread. It is precisely in this text[53] where Maximus, on the contrary, *completely identifies the concept of synthetic person with that of synthetic atomon*, just a few lines above (201C: ἐν ἀτόμῳ δὲ καὶ προσώπῳ πάντῃ τε καὶ πάντως, εἴπερ σύνθετον…) the text the Metropolitan has chosen (201D). After this identifi-cation of person with *atomon* made by Maximus in 201C, let us read again the text 201D in the Metropolitan's translation (which is correct): 'we cannot call *atomon* the synthetic person of Christ. *Because it has no relation with the division of the most general genus through subsequent inferior genoi into the most particular genus* [translator's italics]'.[54] And Zizioulas concludes from this: '*Atomon* differs, therefore, fundamentally from *hypostasis* and *prosopon* (person), because it falls under the category of nature'.[55] However, Maximus does not contradict himself; what he says here is in fact totally different: he says that the *synthetic atomon* or, which is, as he explicitly asserts, the same thing, the *synthetic person* of Christ, cannot be called an *atomon* of a certain genus, *in the sense that Christ as existence is absolutely unique, i.e. it is impossible to find other persons/atoma of the genus 'Christ'*. Maximus by no means says that the person of Christ cannot be called *atomon*, as if *atomon* has sup-posedly to do with nature, while person lies above it.

Not only Maximus but also Boethius, in the second and third chapters of his aforementioned treatise,[56] put an end to this tiresome discussion, which resulted from a confusion of ancient terms with modern concepts. Boethius clearly asserts that the Greek *hypostasis* means the same thing as the Latin *substantia, i.e. 'essence/ nature with properties'*—as is also the case in Maximus, John Damascene, and the Cappadocians. The Latins had difficulty in making a distinction between *substan-tia* and *subsistentia*, *i.e. hypostasis* and *ousiosis,* which means 'clear essence without properties', since *hypostasis* also comprises properties. But, Boethius continues, the Greeks 'keep the term *hypostasis* only for higher forms of existence' such as God, the angels and the humans. The Latins use the term *person*— which precisely means 'an atomic [*i.e.* individual] essence of a logical nature'—for *hypostasis* in this sense,

---

53 *Opuscula* (PG 91:201C–204A).
54 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 91.
55 *Ibid.*
56 *Liber de Persona et duabus naturis, contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 3.

as Boethius admits, 'due to their lack of terms', rendering the meaning of *hypostasis* difficult to understand. Thus, as has been made clear, and regardless of the different perspectives created by Boethius with this famous definition,[57] both for the Latins and the Greeks *hypostasis* also means *atomon,* and, of course, person, as soon as the Greeks understood that it was impossible for the Italians not to use this dangerous term (since it had been used by Sabellius).

Thus, the identification of *hypostasis* with person *took place in the West and not in the East.* And, what is more important, no one, either in the East or in the West—although he would not perhaps prefer to call a mouse person—ever understood this identification as meaning any *ontological* differentiation between *hypostasis*, person and *atomon*, or any ontological exaltation of person over nature, or person/*hypostasis* over *atomon*/individual, implying either identification of the former with freedom and the latter with necessity, or possession of the former by the latter, or freedom of the former from the sameness which is the latter, or any other degradation of the one and priority of the other, *etc*. In this way, we simply lose sight of the real meaning of the Patristic holism, which is indispensable for today's anthropological quest.

Natures and Person in Christology

On the other hand, Metropolitan John is right to connect divinisation in Maximus with our adoption as sons in Christ (*huiothesia)*. However, it is difficult to agree with the claim that God the Logos 'contains the *logoi* of beings in his person (not in his nature, for it is only he, and no other Person of the Trinity that contains them)'.[58] Were this to be the case, then the *logoi* would be *hypostatic properties* of Logos, since the only thing that the three Persons do not have in common are their personal/hypostatic attributes: non-generation, generation and procession/*ekporeusis.* The divine will and energies and, consequently, the *logoi,* which are God's loving will, derive from divine essence, and they are *hypostatically* expressed by the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. The Son manifests the *logoi* in communion with the two other Persons, but he is not their exclusive hypostatic 'possessor'. There is an underlying problem regarding the function of the divine will here, as we shall see below.

Let us now switch to an analysis of Maximian Christology. Underplaying nature and prioritizing person is, once again, the main concern here. Thus, we read that 'it

---

[57] These different perspectives have to do with the identification of this 'logical' definition of person with its ontological/existential definition. Both definitions exist in the Patristic tradition both East and West. Relationship has gradually been understood as *exterior* to this self-enclosed individual, mainly by a considerable part of Western thought. However, this does not mean that there is no absolute continuity of individuality with *koinonetic* individuality in the Greek Patristic theology, as the Orthodox personalists struggle to convince us by dialectically opposing person to *atomon*. See N. Loudovikos, *Orthodoxy and Modernization,* 62–93.

[58] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 95.

is a Person that brings together into an unbreakable unity the natures, not the other way around. The person leads, the natures follow. A certain priority of the person over nature is an undeniable fact in Maximus' Christology'.[59] This assertion would be true only *if the reception of human nature by Christ's divine hypostasis, was prior to the communication of the natural properties, human and divine (communicatio idiomatum), through which, (and only through which) this reception* is *realised.* That is, it would be true if there were two successive 'moments' in divine Incarnation, that of the 'personal' activity of the Logos, and that of the two natures being put in communion by this 'prior' and superior being called 'person'. This, however, is unthinkable for Maximus.[60] Anyone who reads his texts, such as those included in his *Epistles,*[61] sees clearly that it is simply impossible to speak of Christ's identity without referring simultaneously to both the communion (*perichoresis)* of his natures according to their hypostatic union and to his acting through both natural parts of his existence, which is expressed through the mutual communication of natural will and energy between them. In his *Epistle to John Cubicularium on Love*, the Confessor directly connects the Incarnation—since it represents the utmost work of God's perfect love for humanity—with the communication of properties between the natures, the communication 'which makes man God and makes God appear as a man, because of the one and identical agreement of will and movement of the two'.[62]

The deeper meaning of this connection is, as explained by Maximus in his *Disputatio cum Pyrrho,*[63] that, through his hypostatic union with man, God really inserts his divine reality into human reality; this is why Maximus uses, for the divine Logos, the bold expression ἀνθρωπικῶς οὐσιωθείς (becoming human nature) concerning the ontological reality of the Incarnation, signifying that this is not a divine work external to him, as if he stands outside the two natures, ordering them to unite. In other words, the very agent of hypostatic union is not 'the Person of the Logos prior to the natures', but the *Logos' hypostatic nature*, *hypostatically assuming human nature through the communication of properties*. There can be no prior movement, or initiative, or *enhypostasis* of person before or without nature, since the divine Person does whatever he does, first, only in communion with the other two divine Persons, and, second, *only through divine nature.* Otherwise, I am afraid that we are not far enough from that 'Christology of escape', which I discuss in my *Heythrop* article, in the sense that there seems to be a 'superior' part of the saving agent, which stays above the salvation event and realises it without *at the very same moment* being fully, totally, and existentially/naturally involved, thus refusing to jeopardize, like the Plotinian *higher soul,* a part of his uncreated transcendence in this dangerous

---

[59] *Ibid.*
[60] See the following chapter.
[61] (PG 91:553C–557D).
[62] (PG 91:401B).
[63] (PG 91:297BC)

real mingling with the fallen immanence. He is not merely a 'Person', but rather the Logos as an *enousion* divine Person, who does not merely order the two natures to unite as if they were outside himself, but hypostatically unites them in himself, acting through his divine nature, *i.e. perichorizing* fallen human nature. Thus, in Maximus, there is no detached divine Person ordering two passive natures to unite, but, on the contrary, there is the Logos' active divine nature uniting an active human nature to him, within his unique *hypostasis*. We shall return to this below.

A Christology of the Will

Let us now discuss natural will in Christ. Larchet and others (including myself) are accused of using the expression, 'will belongs to nature, not to the person',[64] thus, supposedly ignoring the reality of the 'willing one', who is the person. However, this expression belongs to Maximus,[65] meaning that the ontological source of the will is nature, not person. Maximus is speaking here against Pyrrhus, who claimed the opposite, consequently, implying the existence of only one will in Christ. Neither Maximus, nor I by extension, mean by this that natural will acts automatically, by itself, without its hypostatic expression. However, there are some nuances which must be addressed here. It does not mean, for example, that, in Christ, the human will was deified because 'it was expressed and realized by a divine Person', which 'moved and inclined towards the fulfilment of the will of the Father',[66] as if Christ's divine will was not totally and forever identical with the Triune God's unique natural will. Does Christ have a personal/hypostatic will? The Patristic tradition's answer very clearly seems to be no. Let me make some points here:

1) As Zizioulas rightly claims,[67] following Sherwood, there is no *gnomic will* in Christ, since, obviously, according to Maximus, that would mean that Christ is merely a man, 'deliberating in a way proper to ourselves, having ignorance, doubt, and opposition, since one only deliberates about something which is doubtful, not concerning what is free of doubt'.[68] Subsequently, the Metropolitan claims that while Christ does not possess a gnomic will, he nonetheless possesses a personal/hypostatic will, as we saw above. However, according to Maximus, there is not a hypostatic will in Christ either, since

'…if his will is hypostatic, then he shall be of different will, in relation-ship with his Father. Because, what is called hypostatic characterises only a certain hypostasis…I would also ask them [the Monothelites] with pleasure,

---

[64] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 98.
[65] (PG 91:292B, 293A, 304BCD).
[66] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 100.
[67] *Ibid.,* 102.
[68] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:308D).

whether the God of all and Father wills as a Father, or as God. However, if he wills as a Father, then his will shall be different from that of the Son, because the Son is not a Father; if he wills as a God, then the Son also is God, as well as the Holy Spirit; and then they shall admit that the will belongs to nature, *i.e.* it is natural'.[69]

So, if we claim that in Christ it is the Logos who wills, we thereby introduce three personal/hypostatic wills in God, and consequently, three Gods.[70]
2) But who then wills in Christ? The Maximian answer is obvious: it is God himself in his entirety, *i.e.* the Son, who expresses the good will (εὐδοκία) of his Father, and realises it (αὐτουργία, *i.e.* he is the one who brings it forth) in the Holy Spirit, who co-operates (συνεργία).[71] All the above constitute the tri-hypostatic expression of the one divine natural will, which is one and unique through *homoousion*. But *God here wills as a man*. Thus, Christ, as the one who brings forth this tri-hypostatic divine will, assumes human nature, and, consequently, he also assumes human natural will, not 'in his Person' but in his *enousios hypostasis*. *And this assumption is only realised as a binding of the two natural wills together, in dialogical openness, without separation and without confusion*, in a manner that Maximus does not hesitate to call *natural,* in the sense that it is real and concrete. Thus, we see the Triune God, naturally willing in Christ, both as God and as man.
3) What is most important here? We cannot accept any sort of passivity of human natural will, which is implied by the above claim that human will's deification is due to its expression and realisation by a 'divine Person'. We cannot accept this, first, because through the *Theotokos the human natural will is also active* in the Christ-event, in the exclusive sense that human nature is not only assumed by the Logos but also *offered to him by humanity through and by the Mother of God*. Second, because, as F.-M. Léthel has pertinently shown, behind any opposition between human and divine will in Christ

---

[69] *Ibid.* (PG 91:313CD).
[70] Zizioulas also clearly attributes hypostatic will to the Son when he argues that it is his hypostasis only that possesses the divine *logoi*/wills, as opposed to the other persons of the Trinity. He, furthermore, attributes hypostatic wills to the Trinity ('Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 112, note 72) when, in responding to my initial objection to his substitution of grace with person, he claims that grace belongs not to divine nature, but to 'the Person of Christ' *par excellence*. As he argues, this 'would amount, once more, to a disjunction between nature and person and would contradict the principle that it is the person that moves and hypostasizes and moves the nature'. Additionally, he uses 2 Cor. 13:13, where Paul speaks of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the holy Spirit." However, for the totality of the Christian tradition East and West, *divine grace is one and derives from the divine nature*, being manifested as love of the Father and communion of the Holy Spirit *through the Son/Christ*. Otherwise, we would have to conclude there are three sorts of hypostatic manifestations of God *ad extra* (love, grace, communion), and, according to Maximus, three Gods.
[71] *Ad Marinum* (PG 91:237D, 240B).

solved by the 'person of Christ', who supposedly exercises his 'personal' will, *lies precisely the Monothelite temptation*.[72]

Metropolitan John seems to attribute to the person of Christ a sort of transcendental or ecstatic will, which 'brings the two natural wills in harmony in Gesthemane', the one desiring natural life, the other submission to the Father's will,[73] because, it could not be otherwise possible for Christ to bring these two wills 'in harmony', unless he uses a third, more powerful and detached 'personal' will! However, on the one hand, it is impossible to think that there exists a separate divine hypostatic will of the Son, trying to submit to the Father's separate divine will; this would result in a clear tritheism, according to the Patristic tradition. On the other hand, according to Léthel, who brings four Maximian texts in witness[74], Maximus saw in Gesthemane's condescension precisely 'the expression of Christ's *human* will'. If we see Christ's human will as somehow necessarily denying divine will, then this precisely results in the Monothelite position, which subsequently requires a hypostatic will in Christ to solve his problem. The union of the two wills is thus revealed in the relationship of the Son with his Father, as it is *humanly realised*, through a free human will, open—since it is Christ's will—to the natural tri-hypostatic will of God, manifested in the *hypostasis* of Christ, who wills naturally and freely both as man and as God. Christ's human hesitation, natural fear and repugnance of death, *etc.*, as described by the Patristic tradition, were not, according to the Confessor, 'against' his divine will, since they represent human 'blameless and natural passions', *which, as the sinful inclination is not present in Christ, they are not in natural opposition, but in a certain convergence (συμβαίνοντα) with him*.[75] Thus, these blameless passions do not represent any human volitional antithesis to the divine will, being also ultimately deified 'through the absolute union with divinity'.[76] Maximus' anti-Monothelite 'revolution' is precisely that Christ *wills only through, by, and according to nature(s), which cannot be conceived of by natures opposing each other*. Thus, the only possible reason for disharmony between the human and divine wills in Christ, for Maximus, would be *sin*. Since Christ is free of sin, it is impossible for him to have his two natural wills in disharmony,[77] needing, according to Zizioulas, some 'personal' harmonization, an assertion which would be practically identical with Monotheletism.

To conclude this consideration of natural will: Maximus' points with regards to Christ's will are summarized in his *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* as follows:

---

[72] See his 'La prière de Jésus a Gethsémani dans la controverse Monothélite', in *Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur,* eds. F. Heinzer and C. Shönborn (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Suisse, 1982), 207–14.

[73] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 100.

[74] 'La prière de Jésus a Gethsémani dans la controverse Monothélite', 212.

[75] *Ad Marinum* (PG 91:236).

[76] *Ibid.* (PG 91:237A).

[77] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:292AB).

1) There is no *gnomic will* in Christ because of the 'divine hypostatization'. Christ does not need to choose between good and bad through thought and choice because he possessed good by nature through his divine nature.[78] This hypostatic divine nature of the Logos along with his assumed human nature, and not simply his detached divine person, is the active agent of the Incarnation.[79]

2) Christ's human nature does not move passively, following an order given by a divine person (νεύματι, in Maximus' words); rather, it is the Logos himself who wills, but precisely *as man*: '*as man and not as God, Christ willed to accomplish his Father's will…because the Father's will also belongs to him, as he is God himself by nature*'.[80] Thus, Maximus cannot accept that Christ's 'divine will moved and inclined towards the fulfillment of the will of the Father', as Zizioulas asserts,[81] as if there were two separate divine wills struggling to unite. On the other hand, any sort of passivity or natural sinfulness of human natural will cannot be accepted here. Otherwise, we conclude with a type of Monotheletism. The problem of the Monothelites was precisely that

---

[78] *Ibid.* (PG 91:308D–309).

[79] A number of scholars claim that Maximus initially attributed a gnomic will to Christ, and he retracted this position during the Monothelitic quarrels, and this initially seems to be plausible. However, the passage *Orationis dominicae* (PG 90:880A), which is used as the main source for this position is, as I think, misread, since it does not refer to Christ, but to us. Thus the text reads 'He (*i.e.* Christ) made peace and reconciled us with the Father and each other through himself, we not having [in Greek, οὐκ ἔχοντας, *where the subject is us, and not* οὐκ ἔχοντα, *where the subject necessarily would be Christ*] any longer the *gnōmē* resisting the logos of nature, but as *we have* the nature, so *we have* the unvarying *gnōmē*'. On the other hand, it is true that the passage 877D that precedes the aforementioned passage seems to attribute a gnomic will to Christ, and perhaps it is not the only one. However, it is also true that there are a number of texts in the Confessor's corpus that point in the opposite direction, suggesting that the author's ultimate position is that it is impossible for Christ to have a gnomic will. But can we claim that Maximus would probably not deny gnomic will or *prohairesis* in Christ if we meant he chooses only among things that are good? Maximus seems not only to deny such a position but to even characterize it as 'impious' (*Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, PG 91: 288CD*)* : 'What is more impious than to claim that the same subject with the same will, on the one hand, before the Incarnation he created all beings out of nothing, and binds them together, and takes care of them, and saves them, and, on the other hand, after the Incarnation, he wants food and drink, and he goes from place to place, and does all the rest, *which are beyond any blame or accusation, all those things through which he proved that his economy was not imaginary*'. According to Maximus, even if all that Christ chooses is good, if this choice is made through a divine gnomic will, this implies weakness and imperfection. It is, consequently, 'impious' to attribute such a gnomic will to Christ. Christ wills all the above as man, in *antidosis* with his divine will (see below). For this reason, I would like to suggest another explanation in order to somehow bridge the gap between the two poles of this Maximian 'contradiction'. I think that we must focus upon the fact that the natural human will, according to Maximus, has its uncreated *logos* behind it, *i.e.* a divine call for this natural will to be fulfilled in the Logos. Consequently, though natural human will in a sense belongs to man, it is ultimately accomplished in and through the Logos' natural will, common to all three divine Persons, tri-hypostatic, but expressed through Christ. Yet again, the personal aspect is presupposed and included in the natural since the very existence of an uncreated *logos* behind natural human will indicates the necessity for a personal human response the divine *logos*/call, which constitutes the very fulfilment of natural human will. In Christ, the call and the response coincide: he calls as God and at the same time responds as man. Insofar as he is both call and response, Christ does not need a gnomic will *as man*.

[80] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:297AB, 324C),

[81] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 100.

they needed a 'personal', more or less 'synthetic' hypostatic will[82] in order to overcome the supposedly inherent antithesis between the two natural wills of Christ: the divine willing and the human unwilling, or less willing, to fulfill the Father's will. Maximus' proposal is that unless the two natural wills are actively and dialogically connected in *antidosis/mutual exchange* between them,[83] without violation and confusion, we do not have Christ really willing as the God-man. Thus, it is not the (ontologised *per se*) Person of the Logos that wills in Christ, as if simply carrying along the two natures (and I do not know how one can prevent this will from being a *synthetic* will). On the contrary, it is the human natural will that wills in *perichoresis* with the divine natural will and *vice versa;* in Christ, God wills as man and man wills as God, in *antidosis, within the one hypostasis/person of Logos, who manifests the one and common natural will of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit and accomplishes it actively as a man*. It is a pity that some modern theologians have lost sight of the unbridgeable gap between those two positions. If we *ex definitio* prioritize person over nature ('the person leads, the natures follow', according to Zizioulas,[84] concluding with the anti-Maximian assertion: 'In Christology, *it is the Person that has the first and last word—not the natures* [author's italics]'[85]), it is impossible to realize the perfect Maximian balance between the two, which is described above and abolishes Monotheletism.

3) There is no hypostatic will in Christ, but God's one and common natural will manifested through Christ,[86] who expresses the common natural will of the three Persons. Here also some seem to have serious reservations concerning the acceptance of Maximus' thought; perhaps they think that Maximus needs some theological correction. The personalists seem to ask: if we have not only nature, but also divine hypostases in God, how is it then possible not to have hypostatic will(s) in God, and, consequently, in Christ? However, the hypostatic will seems to be connected with *created* freedom in Maximus, where the hypostatic will cannot be practically detached from the gnomic will, (which, as we shall see, is also connected with the unfortunate possibility of tearing created nature into fragments through sin), and not with uncreated nature. It is nonetheless inaccurate, on the one hand, to connect human gnomic will only with the Fall, as some scholars tend to do, since it is precisely the existence of this sort of will which not only makes Fall to be a Fall indeed but also it makes the restoration possible. On the other hand, it is also unacceptable for Maximus to attach either hypostatic or gnomic

---

[82] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:296ABC).
[83] *Ibid.* (PG 91:296C–297A).
[84] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 97.
[85] *Ibid.,* 100.
[86] *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:313CD).

will to the uncreated Trinity or to Christ, *precisely because divine natural will cannot (or, better, does not need to) change.* Unless we properly understand consubstantiality, the above Maximian position will be totally unfathomable to us, whose minds have been so informed by idealism, personalism, and existentialism, and we will look for 'corrections' of Maximus on this point. The divine tri-hypostatic affirmation of the one divine nature in dialogical inter-giveness is sufficient in order for us to see that the one natural divine will does not need any hypostatic 'alteration' in order to be personal. It is personal since it is tri-personally affirmed as one and unique, through the *homoousion.* This personal affirmation does not constitute a 'hypostatic will', but a triune manifestation through Christ, whose will is totally and consubstantially one and identical with the Father's and the Spirit's will.

A Systematic Conclusion: The Anthropological Consequences

Now I will turn to the anthropological consequences of the above positions. The thorny problem here is still the relation between nature and freedom. Now, in contrast to Yannaras, Zizioulas no longer explicitly identifies nature with necessity *both before and after the Fall.* However, as before, he still holds that nature represents a burden of necessity for man; but according to his new reading of Maximus, he now insists that this happens only *after the Fall.*[87] Let us search again for the witness of the texts, reading closely and precisely the text that he uses, namely *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 61.[88]

---

[87] How can we reconcile the Zizioulas's claim in his Belgrade paper (111ff) that while in the fallen state the person is subjected to the necessity of nature, 'nature and person co-exist harmoniously' both protologically and eschatologically (note 70) with his view that 'such an understanding of personhood as freedom *from* nature [author's italics] may be applied to the human condition in which nature is a "given" to the person'? First, it should be noted, this protological and eschatological harmony of nature is an idea recently borrowed from Alexis Torrance's article, 'Personhood and Patristics in Orthodox Theology', *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011):700–707. It is important to note that although Torrance criticizes a couple of my readings of Zizioulas's texts, he agrees with me that the author generally underplays the significanc of nature, as well as *homoousion* and asceticism. Second, as I think we all agree, *nature was a 'given' not only after but also prior to the Fall.* Furthermore, is it not a contradiction to assert against Farrow (106, note 56), that the real threat for creation 'was not sin but mortality due to createdness'—a view that he attributes to Maximus—and to aver in the same paper that creation became necessity, mortality, and corruption, only after the Fall, *i.e.* after the sin, precisely as Farrow claims? However, first, as we shall see, nature has not become necessity for Maximus, even after the Fall; second, Maximus does not regard createdness as a source of mortality. Even in the very text that Zizioulas' essay proposes in footnote 56 (*Ambiguum* 41: PG 91:1308CD*),* the Confessor claims, following the Patristic line, on the contrary that the cause of mortality is not createdness but human sinful activity: 'since man did not move naturally, as he was created to do, towards the unmovable (and I mean God) as his own principle, but he submitted himself to those elements that had been given to him in order for him to govern them. He moved willingly and foolishly by misusing the natural power given to him when he was created in order for him to unite the divided things. [He used it] in order to divide, on the contrary, those that were united, and thus he piteously risked a return to non-being. For this reason…God becomes man to save lost man.' The text speaks for itself. Nature could have not known corruption if man had not sinned.

[88] (PG 90:628A–645C).

Speaking of this text, Zizioulas claims that 'speaking of necessity of nature in its present state in which nature exists under the yoke of death[89] is commonplace in Maximus'.[90] However, what seems commonplace in this text is to speak, on the contrary, of the submission under the necessity of death of, first, the person and, second, nature (γνώμῃ τε καὶ φύσει).[91] That is, Maximus considers nature here as a victim of the person, who, by *blamefully* choosing pleasure instead of God, carries along the *blameless* nature with him under the yoke of pain, corruption, and death.[92] What is commonplace in Maximus is to consider person (through the incorrect use of *gnōmē* and *prohairesis*) as precisely the real cause of the fall into the inescapable necessity of death. What, however, is of utmost importance, is that, though nature has blamelessly fallen, it never becomes sheer necessity, since it is always, in its very ontological core, the offspring of divine grace, through the uncreated *logoi*/ wills that always lie behind it. This is why, at the end of this text, Maximus suggests not the harmonization of nature with person as the only way of salvation but quite the opposite, *i.e.* the harmonization of person (as this is the one who sins, falls, and creates the necessity) with nature, since the latter is a personal dialogical divine proposal, asking for a personal/gnomic response of holiness. The following text is also revealing:

> Those who keep their *gnōmē* [personal choice and deliberation] by any means in agreement with nature, and they make it receptive to the energy of the *logoi* of nature, regarding the *logos* of ever well-being, they shall participate completely in goodness, according to divine life, which shines over humans or angels because of the sensitivity of their *gnōmē* to divine will. But those who kept their *gnōmē* in complete disagreement with nature and have damaged the *logoi* of nature through their *gnōmē's* activity regarding the *logos* of ever well-being, shall loose all goodness because of the antipathy of their *gnōmē* to divine will, due to the obvious kinship of their *gnōmē* with eternal ill-being.[93]

It seems that for Maximus, against our existentialist projections, which can destroy the very core of his thought, *nature does not totally ontologically fall since it is*

---

[89] *Ibid.* (PG 90:636ABC).

[90] 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 104.

[91] *Ad Thalassium* (PG 90:637C).

[92] *Ibid.* (PG 90:41C). Regarding this, it is precisely the *blameful* (διαβεβλημένη) fall of man's personal *gnōmē*/prohairesis that caused the *blameless (ἀδιάβλητον)* fall of nature into death and corruption (see also *Ad Thalassium* 42 (PG 90:405BC). Thus, it is nature that fell under the necessity of death and corruption created by the person, not the opposite. Note also that, for Maximus, the blameless fall of nature does not abolish the freedom of natural will to determine its own integrity, which is expressed for humans in a personal will/*prohairesis* through which nature's restoration is possible. Nature's restoration was precisely the work of Christ, through the dialectic of his two natural wills, whom we are invited to imitate (405C–409A).

[93] *Ad Thalassium* 61 (PG 90:645AB).

the totally concrete incarnation of divine will, and remains such, even after its blameless fall—which happens only through and after our personal misuse or παράχρησις—into corruption caused by the person, and it is precisely by listening to this divine call through the logoi of nature that the person can be restored.

It is thus impossible to fathom Maximus' Christocentric concept of nature by using any current philosophical metaphysics, whether drawn from Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Heidegger, or Tillich. Nature here is an open essential presence, *as it consists in a divine personal dialogical suggestion*; it is an existential personal way to God, *as it consists in an essential divine gift.* It is not a dead thing needing to be possessed and controlled by another *transcendental thing* called person, or even offered back to God either as a burden of necessity or abstract sameness, but a *concrete* Christological *and natural divine-human reciprocal personal openness.* Thus, indeed, only the person falls. This blameful fall causes—precisely because of the interruption of divino-human dialogical reciprocity that it induces—also nature's blameless fall, as we have already said, as παράχρησις (misuse), which tends to destroy not the divine *logoi* that always sustain it, but its κατὰ φύσιν (according to nature/*logoi*) mode of existence in our *gnōmē*, subsequently falsifying and distorting the natural beings of God, since we no longer see them according to their gracious divinity.

This is why, for Maximus, nature implies *freedom*, as I have already claimed. Nature is only constituted personally, just as person is only constituted naturally, without the need for relations of possession between them, precisely because they do not even really exist if we separate them. Now, freedom lies both behind nature—concerning the way of its very constitution as uncreated call, suggestion, and loving will, and not as a frozen 'given'—as well as after its constitution as reception, response, and dialogue, something that even the Fall cannot stop. Nature's very constitution is thus a matter of an exchange of freedom, as it is *dialogically* constituted, developed, changed, deified as an *open nature,* concerning its mode of dialogical existence. Finally, fully united with its divine source in Christ, it is eternally and always—according to Maximus' suggestion concerning *ever-moving rest*—transformed. It is misleading not to see that nature, in its very being, is *full of intentions* of personal divine suggestion, which call for dialogue and *point* towards its personal source. But if nature is such, the person then cannot be, even 'hypothetically', detached from nature precisely because its very realization unavoidably passes through its nature's *logoi*, which form the person's very mode of existence in God, since they can and must finally become *existential powers of the soul,* making it *divinely logical,* as I have argued elsewhere.[94] How then can one claim that a person simply 'saves nature'

---

[94] See N. Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology,* 101–105. Responding to my *Heythrop* article regarding his tendency to suggest an 'escape from nature', Zizioulas offers Maximus' *Epistle* 9 (PG 91:445C) as a paradigm 'which shows how wrong is to conceive of grace as an addition to or fulfilment of nature. What we have clearly in this letter of Maximus' is rather a *rupture* with nature, and an *ekstasis* from both world and nature, the latter occupying a middle position between God and the world' (104, n.52, author's italics, I omit the Greek terms). It is difficult to determine how the eschatological, harmonious, and gracious co-ex-

through his gnomic choice, when he has precisely to dialogically choose and follow his nature, in its divine existential intentionality, in order for him to realize his freedom from necessity, sin, and death? It is obvious that any idea of 'possession' or 'domination', or 'controlling', or even, more gently, 'harmonization' as a model of relationship between person and nature collapses here. The one conditions the other. Along these lines, it is perhaps imperative to note that when the ascetic authors, ancient or modern,—Elder Sophrony Sakharov, for example—speak of a human God-like person as revealed in contemplation or hesychastic experience, they never separate it from nature and never stop the physical ascetical struggles in order for this perpetually personal nature to be transformed. Divinization does not imply any sort of leaving behind of human nature, since this would result in a practical denial of the Incarnation.

This is also why Maximus does not hesitate to insert the reality of the two natures in his very definition of Christ's *hypostasis*. Christ in not only *of* two natures and *in* two natures, but he is also *these* two natures, as the Confessor claims in a whole series of texts.[95] That means that, as P. Piret puts it, 'the *ousia* is the *hypostasis*, the *hy-*

---

istence between nature and person-hypostasis (111) can be achieved if we believe that, for Maximus, we must be estranged from, or in ekstasis from nature in order to obtain grace. It is perhaps noteworthy that Zizioulas also uses the expression 'freedom not *from* but *for*' nature' (105), which constitutes another unfortunate contradiction: in what sense are we free *for* nature, if we need to create a 'rupture' with it in order to acquire grace? Does our physical existence participate in this struggle to obtain and keep the grace, or not? Let us now attempt to see what Maximus says indeed. Nature in this text is truly in the middle between God and the world, the latter of which represents the fall of nature if man turns towards it. What happens in relation to God? According to Maximus, if the natural man turns towards him, "*He keeps man a man as he is (τοῦθ'ὅπερ ἐστι διαφυλάττει τὸν ἄνθρωπον), and he makes him in condition of God (θέσει Θεόν), by offering him the divinization above nature, out of his goodness.*" If man's nature is kept 'as it is', no rupture with it seems necessary when man is divinized. This is because divinization has to do with the change of nature's *mode of existence*, and not with an alteration of nature itself. Man becomes a divinized man θέσει but not φύσει, i.e. full of grace *as man,* and not a god or an angel! Any rupture or ekstasis from nature would make divinization an empty word, as it is precisely nature that is divinized *through the hyper physin mode of existence given to it through the Incarnation.* There seems to exist, for the Confessor, a continuity of nature with grace, since the divine *logoi* of beings also form existential ways toward God, *i.e.* ways toward the 'accomplishment' of 'eternal well-being' in rational creatures (see the text *Ad Thalassium* 61 above and my *A Eucharistic Ontology,* 84–88). It is obvious that the 'fulfilment of nature' in a divine mode of existence constitutes the only reason for the Incarnation.

[95] The texts are given by Piret, below. In 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 112, note 72, Zizioulas tries to place his ideas of a rupture between nature and grace in a Christological perspective. This is precisely what I refer to in my *Heythrop* article as a *Christology of escape. Theosis* (divinization) is now *above nature* precisely because, according to the author, grace is identified with 'the Person of Logos', who helps beings to *ecstatically* escape their nature, as 'the concepts of ὑπέρ φύσιν and of χάρις coincide'. However, this unfortunately is also based on the misreading of a Maximian text (*Ad Thalassium,* PG 90: 324AB). In this difficulty, the Confessor simply says that the 'human being does not possess either the power of hyper-being or that of non-being,' *precisely because a human being is not by nature God*, and, second, *since man did not create himself ex nihilo, he is unable to return to nothingness.* Consequently, a human being 'does not have either the power to acquire *theosis* by nature' (*i.e.* without the assistance of grace), or prevent suffering 'the wickedness as a result of our choices against nature, since we do not either have the natural power to invent wickedness. In this life, we practice virtues, since we have by nature the power for virtuous practice, while we experience *theosis* in the future, by accepting it as a gift of the grace for our suffering'. This text does not suggest any allusion to a rupture between nature and grace, and Maximus does not exclusively identify grace with *theosis* in the eschatological future. It could not be so unless

postasis is the *ousia*',[96] in the sense that the two natures *are* Christ's unique hypostatic identity, or, better, according to Maximus, the two natures are 'the complements of one person',[97] and not 'possessed' by it, since person alone is just an *abstract property,* as we have seen above, inexistent without them.

The problem is, after all, that when we use this *spatial, vertical model* of understanding human being or Christ himself in terms of 'above' and 'below' (person above, nature below), a model that R.A. Markus calls Neoplatonic (spiritual above, carnal below), we tend to forget that 'the biblical opposition, on the other hand, depends on Christ's redemptive work:…The opposition is not between something cosmologically "higher" and something "lower." It is one best expressed in temporal rather than spatial terms, as "new" and "old"'.[98] The spatial model entails possession, which means controlling and domination by what lies above over the below, something that happened not only in Neoplatonism, introduced in Western theology through Augustine and in the Eastern theology through Origen, but also in the course of the Western Idealism of the *detached self*, to use Charles Taylor's terms, of which not only Kant but also Heidegger, Sartre, Levinas, and Tillich are some of the final upshots. If the 'above' being also possesses will, then we have the core of western metaphysics, as Heidegger describes it, as the metaphysics of the will to power.

Thus, it is not accidental that nature for Kant is *phenomenological,* as R. G. Collingwood claims,[99] or that being in Heidegger is ecstatically identified with its *mode of existence*,[100] while for Levinas real being exists as it existentially emerges out of the (*abstract universal?*) totality. In all cases, what is repressed, according to the Lacanian reading of Freudian tradition, is nature, since the 'I' of this sort of philosophical theory is already what Lacan terms *the social 'I',* emerging after the end of the *mirror stage, i.e.* after the end of *primary narcissism.* Lacan continues: 'It is this moment that decisively tips the whole of human knowledge into being mediated by the other's desire, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence due to competition from other people, and turns the I into an apparatus to which *any instinctual pressure constitutes a danger, even if it corresponds to a natural maturation*

---

we also assert that the practice of 'natural' virtues in this life can be accomplished without grace! After all, through the virtues we have the 'natural' power to accomplish something that is 'in the here and now' by grace, *i.e.* by divine *logoi*/wills. It is impossible—insofar as his theological metaphysics are concerned—to disconnect the concept of nature from that of grace in Maximus, and, if we were to do so, we would strip from Maximus what is precisely his most valuable contribution to the modern theological quest. When we detect some expressions where nature seems to need to be transcended, according to the inner logic of his thought, Maximus always refers not to nature itself but to its *mode of existence,* which can change and realize the *well-being* of nature in grace.

[96] P. Piret, 'Christologie et théologie trinitaire chez Maxime le Confesseur, d' après sa formule des natures "desquelles, en lesquelles et lesquelles est le Christ"', in *Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur,* eds. F. Heinzer and C. Shönborn (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Suisse, 1982.), 215–22.

[97] *Epistolae* (PG 91:552A).

[98] R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 79.

[99] *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 119.

[100] Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* III.iv.2 (Yale: Yale University Press, 2000).

process[my italics]'.[101] It is this *alienation,* articulated as a repression of the natural selfhood in favour of the imaginary development of the *social, detached I* from which Maximian theology saves us, accompanying the following neurotic aggressiveness that characterizes it, and the will to power, where it is metaphysically embedded. By indissolubly connecting will with nature, Maximus puts an end to any possessive, *i.e.* dominative and controlling detachment of person from nature, which makes his growth non-real, imaginative, or even neurotic. Lacan does not hesitate to use here even the term *paranoiac.* Personal growth now means, on the contrary, a loving response to the divine call that lies within our nature, which thus becomes not an abstract sameness, but a personal ascetic way of following God in Christ, in whose Incarnation the ultimate meaning of those loving *logoi*/calls leads. Maximus' answer to the question concerning human essence is different, as I try to show elsewhere.[102] For him, man is not his 'person', nor his 'nature', nor even a sort of an 'addition' of them, but '*his wholeness*', as he explicitly asserts, *i.e.* 'something beyond them, and around them, giving them coherence, but itself not bound with them'. With these mysterious claims, Maximus overcomes all the philosophical idealism and existentialism inherent in modern theology by inserting freedom and dialogical reciprocity *into the very constitution of human being,* which is absolutely psychosomatic but nonetheless in a state of a free dialogical becoming. This is *human wholeness*, and thus we have Maximus' *apophatic anthropology*, which, as I strive to show in my *A Eucharistic Ontology*, is decisively and simultaneously eschatological and historical. Unless this anthropology is properly understood, modern Orthodox theology will never *really* be able to go beyond modern western philosophical subjectivism, which seems to mark, totally or partially, at least two generations of Orthodox theologians.

It is true, conversely, that these theologians also try through the syntheses that they attempted at least to go beyond individualism, and this is precisely the value of their *oeuvre.* But since they more or less believe, consciously or unconsciously, that the way to overcome individualism has been somehow already paved with terms and concepts used by western detached subjectivism, whether existentialist or personalist, they never really allow Maximus disclose his ground-breaking thought. They ultimately transform it, in this or that way, into an avatar of a (now theological) ontology of detached subjectivism combined with a concept of unconvincingly real communion between unconvincingly real persons, and all the impasses that follow.

---

[101] Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the 'I' Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Ecrits,* trans. Bruce Fink (London: W.W. Norton, 2006), 79.
[102] See N. Loudovikos, *Closed Spirituality and the Meaning of the Self,* chapter 2.3.3β.

Wisdom as an Epistemological and Anthropological Concept in Byzantine Philosophy: Paradigms from Dionysius the Areopagite, Maximus the Confessor, and Photius the Great

SMILEN MARKOV

The St Cyril and St Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria

In the theology of the Eastern Church, wisdom is related to divine economy, which is why, apart from the epistemic and the ethical aspect, it is concerned with the hermeneutics of divine revelation. The goal of acquiring wisdom has anthropological dimensions, since divine revelation is addressed to man, and man is in the image of God. Therefore, the criteria for perfection in terms of practical reasoning are not merely cognitive, they are anthropological. For Origen, the ways of wisdom are transcendent to the plurality of the created world and man can achieve wisdom by following the epistemic structure of unification. In the understanding of Dionysius, the recognition of the harmony of the ontological hierarchy and volitional participation in this hierarchy is the road of wisdom. Maximus introduces the dynamism of Christology into the concept of wisdom: for him wisdom is not just following the natural hierarchy, but participating in the transformation of the latter through Christ. In this participative concept of acquiring wisdom, Photius introduces existential and epistemological uncertainty as an axiomatic starting-point, which enables man to accept wisdom as a divine gift and to take responsibility for the Christological transformation of creation.

Introduction

In the philosophical tradition, wisdom is normally associated with practical reasoning, *i.e.* with the intuitive perception of the first principles that regulate concrete human actions. It depends on the capability of man to attain knowledge of the world. In the theology of the Eastern Church, however, wisdom is related to divine economy, which is why, apart from the epistemic and the ethical aspect, it is related to the hermeneutics of divine revelation. A strong emphasis is put on the anthropological criteria of wisdom. Human powers, as well as the conditions of human existence in general, are not merely the launching pad for the search of wisdom. The goal of acquiring wisdom has anthropological dimensions, since divine revelation is addressed to man and man is in the image of God. Therefore, the criteria for perfection in terms of practical reasoning are not merely cognitive, they are anthropological.

As for the link between divine image in man and the concept of wisdom, here the ways of the different trends in Eastern theology part. For Origen, the entire human species is the bearer of the divine image.[1] The image is perfect when the individual, fragmentary, and dynamic existence of each man is transcended. Theologians such as Maximus and Photius claim that divine image was perfectly realized in history, when Christ became man. Maximus insists that, according to the *logos* of human nature, the divine image in man is manifested in the union of soul and body.[2] The Pauline motif of the last Adam[3] is used as proof that divine image is perfectly manifested in every single man, through the entirety of humanity's natural powers and within the process of history. As Photius puts it, man's task is to become a 'product' (ἔργον) and 'artifice' (φιλοτέχνημα) of the divine image.[4] Wisdom is the way to achieve this ontological goal.

In this paper, some stages of the development of the concept of wisdom in the period between Origen and Photius will be studied. It will be demonstrated that the speculation of Maximus the Confessor is the central focus in the Christocentric critique of the concept of wisdom. The modification of the concept is traced in terms of the positive metaphysical grounds of human knowledge. At the same time, attention is paid to the critique of rational epistemology from the perspective of charismatic participation in divine revelation.

Origen: Wisdom as a Name of Divine Unity

By virtue of a tradition founded in the Old Testament, Wisdom is one of the divine names.[5] Furthermore, as with all of the other names of God, Wisdom is accessible insofar as it has been revealed in creation. Origen is convinced that divine intellect contains the eternal archetypes of all creatures. The appearance of the latter as self-dependent essences in time is merely a manifestation of the archetypes.[6] Wisdom is interpreted from a pedagogical perspective: as a norm leading creatures to the ultimate return towards God.

---

[1] Origen, *Hexapla* 10, in *Origenis hexaplorum*, ed. F. Field, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1875). In his *Amphilochia* 36, Photius notes with a critical tone that for some text-critics of the biblical text—and he has Origin in mind—the proper formulation should be 'in the image of God' (ἐν εἰκόνι Θεοῦ) and not 'according to the image' (κατ᾽ εἰκόνα Θεοῦ). See Photius, *Epistulae et Amphilochia*, in *Photii patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia*, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, eds. B. Laourdas and L.G. Westerink eds., 6 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983–1988).
[2] Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula theologica et polemica* 1 (PG 91:37BC).
[3] 1 Cor. 15:45. This motif is found also in Origen. *Cf.* Origen, *Commentarii in Evangelium Joannnis* 1.31.225, in *Origène. Commentaire sur saint Jean,* ed. C. Blank, 5 vols. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1966–1992).
[4] Photius, *Amphilochia* 36.134.
[5] Prov 8:22ff.
[6] Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.2; 1.4.3–5, in *Origenes vier Bücher von den Prinzipien*, eds. H. Görgemanns and H. Karpp (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976). C*f.* Ch. Köckert, *Christliche Kosmologie und kaiserzeitliche Philosophie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 299–302.

Origen tries to integrate the neo-Platonic scheme '*exitus-reditus*' into the model of the Trinitarian revelation. In his *De principiis* he writes: 'God, therefore, is altogether one and simple. Our saviour, however, because of the many things, since God 'set' him 'forth as a propitiation' and first fruits of all creation, becomes many things, or perhaps even all these things, as the whole creation which can be made free needs him.'[7] It is through the multitude of the names of Christ that every single human being has the opportunity to know Christ in an individually-specified way. Origen insists that each of the different names has a full meaning, and that no name dominates over the other. However, the names 'Logos' and 'Wisdom' have priority, as they specifically point to the hypostatic status of the Son.[8] Whereas the name 'Logos' reveals that all the principles of the created things rest in the Son,[9] the name 'Wisdom' denotes the role of the Son in creation, as he is the absolute beginning of everything (cf. John 1:1).

'Wisdom' contains the blueprints for the entire divine plan for the world. This is why the metaphysical structure of being is first of all to be deciphered through divine Wisdom: it contains the beginnings, the causes, and the species of all things.[10] It precedes all other names, and in it every form and species that was to be subsists.[11] This divine name is an illustration of the metaphor of the road that marks the development of the changing cosmos. The beginning of the world implies a task and a direction towards its realization. The task set by the Logos for the world is the contemplation of God, whereas the road towards this state is 'doing justice'.[12]

Divine Wisdom unifies the plurality of created being and guarantees the return (*reditus*) towards unity. The ways of wisdom are transcendent to the plurality of the created world and this is why man can achieve wisdom by following the epistemic structure of unification. This is in line with the spiritualistic anthropology of Origen, in which the unity of the noetic substance is the leading principle. The substantial unity is manifested differently in the contingent world, and thus the plurality of species and categories occurs. This ontological model of substantial modalism is valid in anthropology too.[13]

---

[7] Origen, *Commentarii in Evangelium Joannnis* 1.119. The translation is from *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John,* Books 1–10, trans. Robert E. Heine (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989).

[8] Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.3. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John,* he notes that they are not identical.

[9] Origen, *Commentarii in Evangelium Joannnis* 1.125.

[10] Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.2.

[11] Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.2. *Cf.* Tom Greggs, 'The Many names of Christ in Wisdom: Reading Scripture with Origen for a Diverse World', *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 7, no. 1 (2008). http://jsr.shanti.virginia.edu/back-issues/vol-7-no-1-january-2008-spreading-rumours-of-wisdom/the-many-names-of-christ-in-wisdom/.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Robert Berchman, 'Origen and the categories', in *Origeniana Quinta*, ed. Robert Daly (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 231–52.

Divine Wisdom in Dionysius the Areopagite

Dionysius the Areopagite rejects Origen's concept of divine Wisdom in his work, *De divinis nominibus*. There, he states that all of the names of God pertain to the entire divinity: there is no distribution among the persons of the Trinity, or differentiation according to the created plurality.[14] In a polemical passage, Dionysius notes that the division of the divine names into names pertaining to the entire divinity and names referring to its manifestation is typical of a philosophy which is not 'our philosophy'. If one follows the scriptural revelation, it is clear that the division and unity of the divine names is a *theological articulation*, an alternate expression of the stages of the appropriation of the ineffable divine light.[15] In this context, Dionysios states that the first name of God is 'Good'. The other names, such as 'Wisdom', are derived from the experience of the *good* divine gifts. These names refer to the causal dependence of all goods on the first Good.

Dionysius points out that the principle of unity and equality of the divine names does not violate the hypostatic distinction of the persons of the Trinity. In a paragraph obviously addressing the theology of Origen, he shows that he is ready to accept that the man Jesus manifests divine characteristics in accordance with the capacities of his human nature and in correspondence with his divine economy.[16] Nevertheless, he is not willing to differentiate the divine names according to the degree of their participation in the multitudinous creation.

Whereas for Origen divine Wisdom traces the ways of God in creation, for Dionysius this is done by divine Goodness. Goodness enables participation in itself ($\mu\acute{\epsilon}\theta\epsilon\xi\iota\varsigma$), stimulated by love and beauty. Through this participation the divine providential ideas about the world ($\dot{\epsilon}\pi\acute{\iota}\nu o\iota\alpha\iota$) are expressed.[17]

Wisdom as Participation

Origen and Dionysius both expose cognitive models for acquiring divine Wisdom. In line with the ontological principle of substantial modalism, Origen conceptualizes wisdom as a guarantee for grasping the different modes of substantial being. Dionysius focuses especially on created being as a starting point for acquiring wisdom. He insists that the noetic transformation of contingent movement requires the participation of creatures in the illuminating divine energy through love and ecstasy. This change in metaphysical perspective has some consequences for the anthropological relevance of wisdom. Whereas for Origen human powers should be

[14] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 2.1.124.10–15, in *Corpus Dionysiacum I. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita. De divinis nominibus*, ed. Beate-Regina Suchla (Berlin and New York: De Guyter, 1990).
[15] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 2.2.151.1.
[16] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 2.3.126.1.
[17] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 4.11.159.1.

overcome in a movement towards unity, Dionysius speaks of the transformation of human passions through divine grace.

Dionysius demonstrates how love towards the divine Good guarantees participation in divine Wisdom and transcends the fragmentation of the created world (including the material relations, passions, etc.). God, explains Dionysius, perfectly knows the created being without adopting its ontological deficit. His Wisdom is not dependent on discursive reasoning: 'He does not take into consideration the single concepts but knows and encompasses everything in the unique and all-embracing content of the cause'.[18] Thus, knowing itself, divine Wisdom knows the truth of everything: the corporeal is known incorporeally; the fragmented, uniformly; the manifold, unitedly. God endows knowledge to things and to each single thing, that is, knowledge for other things.[19] The endowed knowledge is beyond the intellect (κατὰ τὴν ὑπὲρ νοῦν ἕνωσιν), but could be accessible to man, if the human being is freed from all created and from itself and is united with the unsearchable depth of wisdom (τῷ ἀνεξερευνήτῳ βάθει τῆς σοφίας).[20]

In any case, the starting point of this noetic journey is the created world. In an obvious allusion to the golden chain of Proclus, Dionysios explains that divine Wisdom connects the end of the supreme with the beginning of the lower beings in harmony (ἁρμονία).[21]

Participation and the Practical Sphere

The recognition of harmony is an important precondition for acquiring wisdom. Besides the metaphysical implications, this concept also has existential relevance. Dionysius' existential perspective is metaphysically grounded in the works *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesial Hierarchy* through the correspondence between 'participation' (μετουσία, μετοχή) in divine grace and 'self-governance' (αὐτεξουσιότης).[22] Each nature has a certain capacity for 'illumination' (ἔλλαμψις) by divine Goodness, depending on its position in the ontological hierarchy (ἱερὸς τάξις).[23] When 'wilful self-governance' (αὐθαίρετος αὐτεξουσιότης) violates the hierarchy, the intellect is deprived of the light of being.[24] This separation can take place in two different ways: 1) as a deliberate turning away from divine light due to self-inflicted shading of the ability for illumination; 2) as a transgression of the borders of the accessible good and trying to acquire illumination, which exceeds the ontological potential of the

---

[18] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 7.2.197.1.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 7.3.198.1.
[21] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 7.3.198.1.
[22] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De caelesti hierarchia* 3 (PG 3:268C–269C).
[23] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* 2, (PG 3:400C).
[24] *Ibid.*(PG 3:400A).

nature. The second option is described by Dionysius as follows: 'the self-governing will meets in an imperfect way the Perfect [light]'.[25]

The *scholion* to this text explains that the criterion for the disposition of the will is the *measure* (μέτρον), which regulates the desire to acquire more of the light.[26] Recognizing the measure in which one is able to participate in the illuminating light requires knowledge of the optimal predisposition of the will. This knowledge does not refer to the object of will; it falls within the domain of wisdom. The measure is practically achieved by entering the hierarchical structure of the church, seen as a new pattern of interpersonal relations (to the sponsor, to the priest, to the bishop, *etc.*).[27] Between the inclination towards the proper self and the ontological *prius* (*pimium per se*), Dionysius places the hierarchical structure of the church as a path for cultivating the virtue of rational will.[28] The first result ('sacred gift') of this virtue is that the proselyte gets to know 'his proper self' (ὅστις ἔστιν).[29] Achieving one's selfhood is realized through communion, based on the truthful and graceful contemplation of one's own human nature. The newly-initiated in the Church should be 'unattached and unbending to the separations from the Uniform',[30] and 'free of the last relations to his former life'.[31] In other words, the 'participation' (μετέχειν) in the extremes of created being is substituted with 'communion' (κοινωνία) with divine unity.[32]

The approaches of both Origen and Dionysius towards wisdom imply an epistemic methodology, based on giving priority to one particular element of divine being, as revealed in the creature. For Origen, Wisdom is the proper expression of the substantial unity of God, in which all causes and structures of created being abide uniformly. For Dionysius, the recognition of the harmony of the ontological hierarchy and the volitional participation in this hierarchy is the road of Wisdom. The new element in Dionysius' understanding of wisdom is that self-reflection is focused on all powers of man, and not only on the noetic ones.

---

[25] *Ibid.*(PG 3:400B).

[26] *Ibid.*(PG 3:400B).

[27] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* 2.4 (PG 3:409C).

[28] The Church is not a mere mediator facilitating the communion.

[29] *Ibid.* 4 (PG 3:409C). This is not the case for Proclus, from whom Dionysius borrowed the formal structure of his speculation. When describing the returning to the self, Proclus notes that introspective contemplation reveals the whole cosmic order, as well the divine. Cf. Proclus, *The Theology of Plato* 1.3, in *The Six Books of Proclus on the Theology of Plato*, trans. T. Taylor (Prometheus Trust), 50, https://archive.org/details/ProclusOnTheTheologyOfPlato-ElectronicEdition.

[30] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* 2, *Contemplation* (PG 3:401B).

[31] *Ibid.*, (PG 3:401B).

[32] *Ibid.*, (PG 3:401B).

St Maximus the Confessor on Wisdom

We will now focus on St Maximus' concept of wisdom, as developed in his *Ambiguum ad Ioannem* 7. The motto of the text is a song praising divine Wisdom from the sermon *De pauperum amore* by St Gregory the Theologian. The Bishop of Nazianzus expresses his wonder that man, being part of God, is able to contemplate Christ amidst the struggles with the body. Maximus' main thesis is that Gregory's argumentation does not imply that man should scorn and abandon the body as a transient and improper substrate of the pure intellectual soul.

The sermon *De pauperum amore*[33] is dedicated to love towards one's neighbour. For the bishop of Nazianzus, this love (ἀγάπη) is the highest manifestation of divine wisdom in human life. For Dionysius, love is an important guarantee on the road towards wisdom, whereby one form of love (ἀγάπη) is transcended by another form (ἔρως). The latter enables the movement up the ontological hierarchy. However, the overtones of Gregory's reasoning suggest that this perfect love is not merely a recognition of divine harmony: love has to do with disharmony and perishability, too. Gregory uses the example of the people ill with leprosy. One should love them, he claims, although their perishable bodies are in such an ineffable state, and what is still sound has yet to endure inexpressible suffering.

Maximus uses this speculation to formulate the main difficulty of his treatise: if Wisdom is God and the world is wisely created by him, how should man relate to the world, in order to acquire wisdom?[34] In order to give an answer, Maximus describes the ontological constitution of the created world, as well as the specific place of man in it. A key concept that guarantees the compatibility between the anthropological and the ontological perspectives is that of movement (κίνησις). The manifestation of divine Wisdom in the world and the acquiring of wisdom by man are both realized in movement.

The ontological completeness of God is characterized as immutability: God is present in all created things and there is no need for him to move.[35] Creation, on the contrary, is in constant movement towards perfection. Acquiring wisdom does not imply grasping the principles of creation in order to acquire a state of being, which is 'above' and 'before' creation. For Maximus, wisdom is the process of deepening the experience of divine Goodness in the world, along with the movement of contingent being. This movement has no compensative or restorative function; it is eschatological, *i.e.* achieving its goal is not merely a necessity but the ultimate goal of every desire (τοῦ ἐσχάτου τυχὸν).[36]

---

[33] Gregory Nazianzen, *De pauperum amore* (PG 35:857A–909C).

[34] Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus* 4.14.160.6.

[35] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.3.57, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua,* ed. and trans. N. Constas., 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[36] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.3.6.

For Origen, wisdom is not a transition towards the divine goodness, the latter remaining completely transcendent to the contingent being. It is only the Father who is good in the proper sense.[37] This means that the desire for Good through wisdom is instigated by an immanent ontological deficit. For Maximus, on the contrary, the growth of wisdom is instigated by its tasting. Thus, wisdom acquires the connotation of sharing, love, and participation.

St Maximus' Correction of Origen's Ontology

In his *Ambiguum ad Ioannem* 7, St Maximus the Confessor corrects Origenian ontology, developed in the work *De principiis*, by formulating the sequence of the three different modes of being: beginning (γένεσις), movement (κίνησις), and rest (στάσις). Rest is intrinsic only to divine being, since God is the only one who rested after creating the world on the seventh day.[38] Nothing created is in rest, or in a state free of passions (ἀπαθής) and relations (ἄσχετον).[39] All created being is *passionate* in the sense that it is not fixed in its existence, it is in movement. However, it is exactly through this movement that created being can have a share in divine rest.

The next important metaphysical correction of the Origenian model relates to the orientation of the ontological movement. This movement is not merely towards the beginning (ἀρχή), but also towards 'well-being' (εὖ εἶναι). Well-being is the perfect manifestation of love towards God, since God is good. But instead of reaching a limit, this love is constantly amplified—so much so, that in the end the lover is not determined (περιγραφή) any longer by his ontological boundaries, but by the beloved One. This existential state is called by Maximus 'ecstasy' (ἔκστασις). In the state of ecstasy the epistemic ground of self-knowledge changes. From knowledge based on self-reflection, the cognitive focus is transferred to being-known-by-the-beloved-One; at stake is knowledge-in-communion-with-the-other.

The beginning of being and the eschatological goal of well-being are synthesized in the Christological event, when Christ recapitulates all creatures.[40] Maximus offers an alternative to the models of Origen and Dionysius. They rely on logical structures that imply a one-way transition of the ontological mode of created being. According to Maximus, the ontological status realized in Christ is orientated to the first principles of being (λόγοι), which are manifested in the initial state of creation, but also to eternal well-being, the latter meaning a deified ecstatic being.

---

[37] Origen, *De Principiis* 1.2.12.
[38] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.9.17–19.
[39] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.7.7; 11.
[40] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.16.10–20.

The Epistemological Dimensions of Wisdom in Maximus

On the basis of these metaphysical prerequisites, Maximus develops a specific concept as to how man can acquire wisdom. To be sure, this concept is Christ-centred, hence its anthropological focus.

As Vladimir Cvetković observes, the movement towards the beginning and cause is performed by rational beings through their will and reason (λόγος).[41] This movement takes place for the purpose of gaining knowledge. There is, however, another vector of movement, movement towards God by nature. This movement is realized through the mind (νοῦς) out of love. The movement of reason is returning (ἐπιστρεπτική), whereas the movement of the mind is orientated towards the future.[42] The two types of movement are not opposed to one another; rather, they are complementary, because they both coincide in the Person of Jesus Christ. In Christ, God is the giver of both being and well-being, and this model can be labelled as 'metaphysical pan-Christism'.

According to this pan-Christism, wisdom is not merely the recognition of a norm or a movement towards an existential state; it is an ecstatic opening of the self for divine revelation. What drives human cognitive activity is not merely the natural intention of reason, but also the fact that man is lovingly known by God.[43] Within this dialogical process human intellect is brought to eternal rest. Only in this sense is it legitimate to claim that the intellect is driven towards its inherent ontological realm. Maximus clarifies that only in this sense are men part of God.

Ecstatic noetic knowledge is not contrary or parallel to discursive knowledge. What is known according to its natural ontological state through reason is now known in a 'godlike' (θεοειδῶς) manner, *i.e.* without any study.[44] Thus, the mistakes caused by the insufficiency of discursive knowledge are corrected. The result of this correction is not simply a deriving of a clearer concept of things. It is not the cognitive intention and its correction which are at stake, but the divine image: Now human existence stops circulating around things and immediately encounters them. Thus, the divine image in man is perfectly realized.

Pathos and Desire

As already demonstrated, for Maximus, wisdom does not consist only of rules and patterns for cognitive reasoning and self-reflection, or of pure noetic contemplation; it is *pathetic* too, *i.e.* it has to do with the transformation of the irrational powers of man. This reference towards humanity's irrational powers in the context

---

[41] Vladimir Cvetković, 'The Transformation of Neoplatonic Philosophical Notions of Procession (*proodos*) and Conversion (*epistrophe*) in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor' in *The Ways of Byzantine Philosophy*, ed. Mikonja Knežević (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2015), 176.

[42] Maximus the Confessor, *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:325A).

[43] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.24, 20–25.

[44] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.25, 16.

of wisdom is not a novelty: as was already mentioned, Dionysius also pleads for the transformation of all human powers and relations in accordance with the wise ecclesial hierarchy. The new element here is the specific account of the criteria according to which the rational will assesses and influences the irrational powers. This is done by the *gnōmē* (γνώμη), which is defined as the habitus of the will. Elsewhere Maximus analyses in detail the *gnōmē* as a structural element of human volitional act. Here we are interested only in the principles that regulate the *gnōmē* in terms of the concept of wisdom.

Gnōmē is a disposition of the two discursive powers of man: reason and will. It is the domain in which man takes the metaphysical risk of entering well-being or of falling into non-being.[45] Non-being is the immanent existential boundary of every material being. Rational beings are always on the edge of annihilation. Noetic beings, such as the angels, are stabilized in a certain mode of essential existence; for them the boundary of non-being is realized not as a possibility, but as a realized option. The moving agent of *gnōmē* is well-being. But the normative criterion for the optimal state of *gnōmē* is ontologically higher than well-being. In his seventh *Ambiguum,* Maximus claims that the ultimate goal of *gnōmē* (τέλος of γνώμη) is 'eternal well-being'. The latter aspect cannot be grasped at all, since it is inaccessible. It can be foretasted as a passion, as a drive towards the beloved God. Love is an agent supporting and supplementing human knowledge. Symptomatically, Maximus uses here the metaphor of the gift. Whereas God gives well-being (δοτήρ), he donates eternal well-being (χαριστικός).[46]

On the path of wisdom one has to purify his or her perception of the natural order. Then one should overcome the deficits of discursive knowledge. However, in order to participate in divine Wisdom, one is supposed to accept divine life as a gift.

St Photius' Concept of Wisdom

Like Maximus, Photius stresses that the Logos is the en-hypostasized Wisdom of God. This Wisdom is eternal (τοῦ αἰώνος) and it initiated everything (ἀρχώντων).[47] The economy of Christ is an essential manifestation of divine Wisdom, an authentic realization of divine energy in its revelatory mode, *i.e.* in its orientation towards the created world. For Photius, the Christological event has two basic determinants: a creationist and an anthropological one.

---

[45] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Thomam* 3, in *Maximi Confessoris Ambigua ad Thomam una cum Epistula secunda ad eundem* (CCSG 48), (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002).

[46] Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Ioannem* 7.10.6.

[47] Photius, *Epistula* 165.22.

1) The Creationist Determinant

Photius conceptualizes the economy of Christ as a specific mode of creation. By 'creation' (κτίσις) he understands not only the transition (παραγωγή) from non-being to being, but also the transition from being to well-being.[48] As in Maximus, 'well-being' means participation and delight in the eternal divine wisdom.[49] This transition corresponds to the plan of God for the created world and its ontological content is equal to that of the Christological event. Created being is not driven simply by necessity, or by teleology. In question here is a dialogical, transformative process. It is exactly in this perspective that creation participates in the divine Good, and itself becomes good.[50] This is, put briefly, the meaning of the power (κράτος) of divine energy over creation. This divine power is the paradigm for the power of man in the world.

2) The Anthropological Determinant

Man's power exemplifies the status of man being in the image of God. One should note that, unlike Nemesius, Maximus, or the Damascene, who place the divine image in the noetic powers of the human soul, Photius chooses the perspective of practical human actions. Although he also enumerates some noetic powers as being bearers of the divine image (like reason and volition),[51] his concepts of divine image cover a number of practical acts and virtues, such as: man's position of power in the world, wisdom, creativity, manliness, invulnerability towards passions, consubstantial word (meaning that human word is consubstantial to human nature, just as the Word of God is consubstantial to God), and in ascent towards divinity.[52] One could postulate that here there is a transition from the Platonic supremacy of the contemplative to the Aristotelian preference for the practical dimension in ethics. Divine image is not a goal reached through practical activity. If it were so, the optimization of the divine image in man could be conceptualized through the Aristotelian model of teleological causation. In fact, this is precisely the explanatory model of Origen. For Origen, the dynamics of the divine image in man can be explained through Aristotelian causation.[53] While Aristotelian, Photius choses here a different approach. God does not engrave (γράφω) the divine image in man as a noetic paradigm, neither does he

---

[48] Photius, *Amphilochia* 167.
[49] Photius, *Amphilochia* 13.6–8.
[50] Photius, *Amphilochia* 13.35–39.
[51] It is noteworthy here that Photius does not make will a separate agent of the divine image in man that parallels to reason. Reason and will are both elements of the cognitive act (*νοεῖν*). For a comparison with John Damascene's concept of divine image in man, see Smilen Markov, *Die metaphysische Synthese des Johannes Damascenus: historische Zusammenhänge und Strukturtransformationen* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), 179–202.
[52] Photius, *Amphilochia* 36.
[53] Photius, *Amphilochia* 36.

set it as a task to be fulfilled (*κελεύω*).[54] Every single human being is a perfect image of the three-hypostatic God.

The Wisdom of Christ

Human knowledge has two sources: cognition (*κατὰ ἐπιστήμην*) and experience (*κατὰ πείραν*). Photius poses the following questions: when Christ states that the Day of Judgement is known only to the Father, what kind of knowledge does he manifest? Is experience or discourse the source of Christ's ignorance?[55] Photius stipulates that he speaks of these two types of knowledge concerning God not in the proper sense, but analogically. So, the Father has knowledge about everything according to cognition, but, sending his Son to judge the world, the Father acquires also empirical knowledge of the Day of Judgment. Being the judge of the world, Christ eternally possesses empirical knowledge of it, but, when he obeys the Father's decision, he also obtains cognitive knowledge. Thus, the path of acquiring human wisdom, which is accompanied by ignorance and uncertainty, becomes immanent to the inter-hypostatic relations between the Father and the Son. In Christ, man acquires the ability to recognize the eschatological meaning of time, even if he does not know the future. In this context, Photius uses the concept for historic time: *καιρός*.[56]

The Road of Wisdom According to St Photius

The road of wisdom starts with realizing one's own ignorance (*ἄγνοια*). This is not an epistemic or ethical category, but a conclusion about one's own existential deficit.[57] The negation of this ignorance is a state of blindness and an insensibility to the divine salvific activity in creation. This is an active negation of participating in divine salvation, which is not only a subjective state, but an intersubjective dialogue in truth.[58] This is the way to sin.

In order to be ready to answer to divine invitation, one has to become worthy of divine benevolent providence (*τῆς φιλανθρώπου προνοίας καταξιοῦται*),[59] through which divine Wisdom is manifested in the world. Thanks to this providence, human

---

[54] Photius, *Amphilochia* 252.12.

[55] Photius, *Amphilochia* 228.

[56] Cf. Smilen Markov, 'The Byzantine Concept of Historic Time: Origin and Development' in *Proceedings of the International Conference 'Ontology and History'*, Delphi (Greece), 29–31 May 2015, ed. Andrew Kaethler (forthcoming); Georgi Kapriev, 'Der Zusammenhang, Geschichte-Metaphysik als Drehpunkt der byzantinischen Philosophie' in *Philosophia* 11 (2016), https://philosophia-bg.com/archive/philosophia-11-2016/der-zusammenhang-geschichte-metaphysik-als-drehpunkt-der-byzantinischen-philosophie/.

[57] Photius, *Amphilochia* 76.55.

[58] Photius, *Amphilochia* 76.60–65.

[59] *Ibid.* 57.

intellect is illuminated and is brought up to salvific contemplation (σωτήριος θεωρία).[60] Unlike in Maximus, noetic contemplation is not the concluding stage of the epistemic ascent to God, surpassing discursive knowledge.

Photius also speaks of another higher state of contemplation that is purely noetic and above the senses. This higher knowledge of the divine enables the introspection (κατανόησις) of divine guidance of nature (χειραγωγεῖν) towards well-being.[61] The preparatory human practice searching for this kind of contemplation encompasses different types of ascetic, ethical, and epistemic activities. One has to study non-Christian philosophy in order to sift what is useful in it. Photius pays special attention here to the acquaintance with its ethical aspect. The second level is the study of the tradition of natural and divine contemplation. This element obviously has to do with salvific contemplation as a fruit of μετάνοια, and should be seen as a deepening of this aspect of divine knowledge. Third, one has to acquire divine philosophy and to practice the ethics stemming from it. Here Photius appropriates the Aristotelian division of theoretical and practical philosophy in the sphere of divine contemplation.

The methodology in all these aspects of acquiring wisdom is a combination of epistemic procedures and holistic existential transformations. One has to scrutinize the cognitive content implanted in the propositions of each sphere of knowledge, *i.e.* the different sciences and practical skills. However, at the same time, one has to perceive the order and harmony (ἀκολουθία καὶ ἐναρμόνιον) which is engraved in nature.[62] Here we see again the two sources of knowledge: discursive methodology and experience. An important factor is the ability to perceive the risk of maltreatment and corruption (λύμη). The warning of the Ecclesiastes is quoted: 'He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them' (Eccl 10:9). The avoidance of this risk is possible through the correction of any superfluous action.

The Role of the Skill in Acquiring Wisdom

Photius is convinced that the discursive sciences, as well as the skills acquired through learning, are useful on the road of divine Wisdom. They contribute to the shaping of nature and make the speech more eloquent; for those serving the divine Logos, the skill of rhetorical is advantageous. To be sure, Christ also accepted the unskilled (ἰδιώτας), but it is precisely the fishermen, and not just any unskilled group of people, that are sent to catch human souls.[63] The uncertainty which accompanies

---

[60] *Ibid.* 60.
[61] Photius, *Amphilochia* 64.
[62] *Ibid.* 14.
[63] Photius, *Epistula* 165.49.

sophistication in any skill or sciences, is cured by divine Wisdom, as the latter fulfils and improves the existence of those who recognize divine presence in history.

Conclusion

Just as in classical Greek thought, all four authors consider wisdom in connection with the concept of the Good. Wisdom is the striving of man towards God, who is the ultimate Good. At the same time, the necessary precondition for practicing wisdom is the awareness of one's ignorance. Whereas for Aristotle, wisdom is specified according to the methodology of the theoretical and practical sciences, *i.e.* according to general epistemic criteria, the concepts of wisdom of all four authors depend on how they interpret the divine image in man. For Origen, the divine image is realized on purely epistemic grounds. Wisdom is the divine plan for a perfect and harmonious state of being, which precedes creation. The particularization of created being is an error, which can only be overcome beyond the creature's capacity. In that sense, wisdom in human existence is active as a pedagogical principle personified by Christ, the incarnated Wisdom, through which salvation from this state of created being can be acquired. The epistemic principle in the conceptualization of wisdom is valid also for Dionysius, in whose works this principle is exemplified by the order of the cosmological hierarchy. Here wisdom provides a transformative returning, whereby all human powers and relations, not only the cognitive ones, are restructured according to one's capacity for participation in divine Goodness. Thus, the ontological hierarchy is internalized as a hierarchy of human powers. For St Maximus, the Christ-centered transformative movement of creation has two vectors: progressive and retroactive. This is why the optimization of human powers is found not merely in an epistemological scheme, but is located in the dynamics of a Christ-centred history. The error has different cognitive and existential dimensions, whereby the most hazardous and irreversible error is refusing the divine gift of communion, denying eternal life and being afraid of love. St Photius interprets wisdom primarily as recognition of God's revelation in the different aspects of human existence. He does not use a general metaphysical principle, neither does he refer to a certain ascetic paradigm. He bases his analysis on the interconnection between truth and experience. Thus, all the cognitive elements of Wisdom, concerning the propensity to err, are reframed according to the eschatological state of being.

'Union without Confusion': Nemesius of Emesa and Maximus the Confessor on the Christological Implications of the Relationship between Soul and Body*

SEBASTIAN MATEIESCU

University of Lausanne, Switzerland

The relationship between soul and body has been a central topic to ancient philosophy and medicine. However, it is now a generally accepted thesis that several important Patristic authors in Byzantium used to talk about the union of the two natures in Christ, divine and human, in analogy with the union of soul and body in one single human person. The aim of this paper is to contribute to this topic by proposing an unexplored link between Nemesius of Emesa and Maximus the Confessor along the same lines of inquiry. In his third chapter of *On the Nature of Man*, Nemesius offers us an extended discussion on the relationship between soul and body. In this work, he also talks about the 'unconfused union' (ἀσύγχυτος ἕνωσις) between these two substances as a model for interpreting the union between the two natures in Christ. Yet he also mentions a limit to this analogy, and this paper suggests that this could have influenced Maximus the Confessor in shaping his final arguments for the restriction of the model of the soul/body relationship for Christology.

Introduction

The relationship between soul and body has always been a central topic for ancient philosophy and medicine. The Church Fathers made no exception to this trend, but what is equally interesting in their case is that they dealt with this issue not just in their anthropological reflections, but also in their Christological arguments. It is now a generally accepted thesis that several important theologians spoke about the union of the two natures in Christ, divine and human, in analogy with the union of soul and body in one single human person.[1] As Anastasius the Sinaite claimed in

[1] See, for details, A. Grillmeier and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, part 2 (London: Mowbray, 1995), 200–212, and Marie-Odile Boulnois, 'L'union de l'âme et du corps comme modèle christologique, de Némésius d'Émèse à la controverse nestoriene' in *Les Pères de l'église face à la science médicale de leur temps*, eds. V. Boudon-Millot and B. Pouderon (Paris: Beauchesne, 2005), 451–77.

the seventh century, the 'paradigm of the constitution of man' represents a crucial model for the interpretation of the union of the divine and human natures because it directly calls into question the logic of union under the aspect of identity and difference of the natures in Christ.[2] Yet, as Anastasius himself was careful to remark, the soul/body union can represent a paradigm for the union of Christ only if it is soundly interpreted.[3] Among the various interpretations produced by the Byzantine theologians, the one promulgated by Maximus the Confessor in seventh century Byzantium has distinguished itself as being the final expression of the Chalcedonian teaching on the 'unconfused union' in Christ. The peculiarity of Maximus' analysis is that it has imposed important limits for the soul/body relationship in analogy to the Christological union of the divine and human natures in Christ. Although recent commentators on Maximus have already well emphasized this aspect, not much has been said on the possible sources of Maximus' thoughts on these matters.[4] The aim of this paper is to consider Nemesius of Emesa as one possible neglected root of Maximus' reflections on the limit of the soul/body relationship in relation to Christology. Nemesius offers us an extended discussion on the relationship between soul and body in the third chapter of his *On the Nature of Man*. It is in this work where he talks about the 'unconfused union' between these two substances as a model for understanding the union between the two natures of Christ. Yet he also puts a restraint to this analogy, and the goal of this paper is to suggest that this might have influenced Maximus the Confessor in shaping his thought on the role of the soul/body analogy for Christology.

I shall first review Nemesius' arguments for the 'unconfused union' between soul and body. I will then mention the analogy with the anthropological model he makes in Christology. I will then move to Leontius of Byzantium who talked about the union in Christ in a similar manner to Nemesius, though using much elaborated philosophical and theological terminology. I will finally consider the idea that Maximus the Confessor, an inheritor of both Leontius and Nemesius, identifies a crucial dis-analogy between the 'unconfused union' specific to the human person and the one defining Christ. I claim the basis of his argument can be found lying hidden in Nemesius' work.

Nemesius on the Union between Soul and Body

In the second chapter of his work *On the Nature of Man*,[5] Nemesius aims to establish two important statements about the nature of the soul: that the soul is different from the body and that it is an essence in itself. After securing these propositions with several arguments, Nemesius goes on to discuss a much more complicated issue in chapter three, that is, the type of relationship that exists between soul and body. The Bishop of Emesa warns us from the outset that, 'It is a subject enveloped in uncertainties',[6] and then proceeds to explain the core of the difficulty: 'For all that comes together to make one single being…the constituents all undergo change, and no longer remain what each was in isolation…For things that have undergone union with other things become different'.[7]

Nemesius seems to take for granted the validity of this principle of coordinating the destruction of entities produced by a physical union. However, he postpones his treatment of this principle until chapter five, where he elaborates on the various unions between the elements that compose the physical realm. He insists, in this case, on the ontological difference between the elements and the compound formed by them 'because, by the coming together of the four there has been formed a particular unity differing from any one of the components…'[8]

The obvious question one would raise in following this line of thought, generally accepted in antiquity, is whether the same happens with the union of soul and body. Given his previously established position, according to which the soul is an incorporeal and self-subsistent entity, Nemesius suggests from the outset a negative answer to our question. He further supports his view by contrasting various Stoic models of physical union with that of the immaterial soul and the physical body: the first type of union mentioned by him is 'juxtaposition' ($\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}\theta\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$) as that of 'partners in a dance'. Nemesius dismisses the validity of this model for explaining the union of soul with body because it would amount to limiting the presence of the soul to a particular region in the body, whereas the soul, in his view, must penetrate the entire body.[9] 'Mixture' or 'union by contact' ($\kappa\rho\tilde{\alpha}\sigma\iota\varsigma$) is not a better candidate for Nemesius. He thinks this sort of union, as presented by bits of wood or iron placed in contact, is nothing but an aggregation in which separated elements are easily discernible. The total blending or confusion ($\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\gamma\chi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$) of wine and water might indeed be a good example of the interpenetration showed by soul and body. However, Nemesius limits its application because it is possible to separate the compounds in a perceptible manner, which is obviously not the case for soul and body.

---

[5] Ed. M. Morani, *Nemesius. De Natura hominis* (Leipzig: Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana, 1987). For the English translation, we will refer to *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa,* trans. W. Telfer (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 203–463.

[6] Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, 293.

[7] *Ibid.*, 293–94.

[8] *Ibid.*, 311.

[9] *Ibid.*, 294.

We are now in a position to infer the conditions for the formation of the union (ἔνωσις) sought by Nemesius to explain the relationship of the soul to the body: the necessary condition would be that the union formed must be different from its parts. And the requisite condition is that the parts united should not be separable in a perceptible manner. The Stoic examples of union do not comply with these conditions. Hence, Nemesius' firm conclusion: 'If, therefore we must rule out union, juxtaposition, or mixture, in what manner can we say that a living creature is a unity?'[10]

The Aristotelian solution is not attractive to Nemesius either, since the soul understood as the *entelechy* of the body conflicts with the self-subsistent character of the soul as established in chapter two of his work. Nor does the Platonic interpretation of the soul using its body as a tool make a valid case for Nemesius. The Bishop doubts the true character of union in this case. It is at this point that Nemesius proposes his own solution, which is actually a restatement of the one issued by the Neoplatonic philosopher, Ammonius:

> Ammonius, the master of Plotinus, solved the problem thus. He said that it is in the nature of intelligibles both to be capable of union with things adapted to receive them, and to remain, nevertheless, unconfused with them while in union, and imperishable, just as though they were merely juxtaposed…So the soul is united to the body, and, further, this union is without confusion (ἀσυγχύτως ἥνωται).[11]

It has been long accepted that the doctrine actually originates in Porphyry's treatise *Miscellaneous questions* (*Summeikta Zētēmata*).[12] It is in this work that Porphyry argues that the nature of intelligibles allow them to remain unconfused and uncorrupted (ἀσύγχυτα καὶ ἀδιάφθορα) when entering a union. The soul, being an incorporeal, penetrates the entire body in such a manner that they form together a perfect unity. Yet their differences remain unconfused.

Certainly, the similarity between Porphyry and Nemesius is incontestable. However, does this constitute the final word on the matter? John Rist has observed that Porphyry is not as explicit in talking about 'unconfused union' between soul and body as Nemesius himself is.[13] Rist has argued that Porphyry mainly referred to the union between the intelligibles themselves, and less to their relation with the bodies.[14] This, taken together with the fact that it is very difficult to document Porphyry's use of this expression in his other major works, has caused Rist to maintain that other sources for Nemesius than Porphyry might also be identified.

[10] *Ibid.*, 295.
[11] *Ibid.*, 295–6.
[12] See, for details, John M. Rist, 'Pseudo-Ammonius and the Soul/Body Problem in Some Platonic Texts of LateAntiquity' in *The American Journal of Philology* 109 (1988): 402–15.
[13] *Ibid.*, 403.
[14] *Ibid.*, 403.

Futhermore, he has found illustrations of this in Christian authors like Eusebius of Cesarea and Tertulian, who talked about the 'unconfused union' of the Logos to the flesh.[15] Let us now see how Nemesius elaborates upon the possibility that this model of 'unconfused union' can be used to describe the 'unconfused union' of the divine and human natures in Christ.

Nemesius on the 'Unconfused Union' of Christ's Two Natures

The Neoplatonic solution proposed by the Bishop of Nemesa relies, as he extensively explains, on the nature of intelligibles to preserve their state or remain unchanged by the unions which they undergo. The soul, being an intelligible, does not end in blending with the body, but rather saves its own identity in this composite being. Nemesius feels the need to exemplify the difference between the two substances with the example of the soul being 'separate' during sleep or when it is immersed in the process of reasoning.[16] However, the Christian writer, when coming to elaborate on the union of the soul and body, seems to slightly diminish the differences between the incorporeal and corporeal natures with respect to their receptive capacities. He thus suggests that the soul itself is somehow affected by the body. This, in Nemesius' opinion, must be an indissoluble proof of the reality of the union. Yet, in chapter two, Nemesius argues against Cleanthes' thesis that the soul suffers when the body suffers.[17] Therefore, he seems at times to vacillate between making the soul totally impassible or granting it some receptive capacity turned towards the content handed down to it by the bodily passions. When he goes on to discuss on Christological matters, he is certainly committed to the first position. Shall we now infer, in light of this, that his anthropology perhaps gets modified by his Christology? This is a legitimate question, especially given what follows in Nemesius' work. In the continuation of his analysis of the union of soul and body, the Bishop feels free to further contrast it with—in his own words—one other 'manner of mingling or union [that is] quite new'.[18] The terms of contrast become apparent from his subsequent phrasing: 'The above arguments [about unconfused union] would apply in a more absolute and pure manner to the union of the divine Word with his manhood. For he [the Logos] continued thus in union, without confusion, and without being circumscribed, in a different manner from the soul'.[19] This is obvious given the idea of reciprocal sympathy between soul and body presented before, whereas this cannot

---

[15] *Ibid.*, 412–15.

[16] Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, 297.

[17] *Ibid.*, 267: 'But if anyone were to accept as true the proposition that no incorporeal thing is affected by what happens to a body, he ought not, as the same time, to accept the second proposition of Cleanthes, that if the body is sick or hurt, the soul suffers with it. The question is whether the body is the sole sufferer, deriving perception from the soul while the soul remains itself impassible, or whether the soul suffers together with the body. Most learned authors take the first alternative.'

[18] *Ibid.*, 301.

[19] *Ibid.*, 300.

be true for God who is beyond passibility. Next, Nemesius elaborates on the details of the opinion that 'unconfused union' properly qualifies the Christological union:

> For the soul, being one of the things *in process of completion* (τῶν πεπληθυσμένων), because of its affinity (οἰκειότητα) with the body, seems even in some way to suffer with it, sometimes mastering it, and sometimes being mastered by it. But the divine Word suffers no alteration from the fellowship which he has with the body and the soul…he continues in that state in which he was, before his entry into that union [my emphasis].[20]

Let us first remark that from the results of this comparison the soul might undergo a 'change' when united to a body, though not one that would harm its substance and identity. However, to both type of unions Nemesius applies the adjective 'unconfused'. In a different study, Marie-Odile Boulnois counts 11 occurrences of this word in Nemesius, of which 6 denote the anthropological context, whereas 5 refer to the Christological one.[21] Prior to Nemesius, one could also find the term used in a Christological context by Tertullian, Apollinarius, and Didymus the Blind.[22] Theodoret of Cyrus, amongst the other Christian writers, is explicit in championing the passibility of the soul together with the body in contrast with the impassibility of the Logos united to the flesh.[23]

However, and I found this rather puzzling, beyond this basic difference Nemesius draws between the divine and human unions, he makes no effort to elaborate on what makes the former truly unique. Instead of, for example, trying to delineate the contrast he observes between the two sorts of union, anthropological and Christological, as later authors will do, Nemesius rather choses to praise Porphyry for having correctly understood that generally there are some unions in which beings complement each other without mutually annihilating each other.[24] Nemesius then holds that, if this is made possible by the incorporeality of the soul, then 'much more does it apply in the case of the divine Word, who is incomparably and truly

---

[20] *Ibid.*, 301. I have slightly altered Telfer's translation here in favour of the one in *Nemesius. On the Nature of Man*, trans. R.W. Sharples and P.J. Van Der Eijk (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 84: 'For the soul, being one of the things which are complex…'. The reason for this approach is that the former translation seems to me more satisfactory in representing the idea that soul and body come into existence together and form a whole, a composite being, and therefore one is in need of the other in order for the whole to be completed. On the other hand, 'complex' may easily suggest a combination or union valid for properties alone, which is not the case for the sort of union demonstrated by soul and body.

[21] Marie-Odile Boulnois, 'Némésius d'Emèse et la comparaison de l'union de l'âme et du corps en Christologie' in *Annuaire de l'Ecole practique des hautes études. Section des sciences religieuses,* EPHE 119 (2012), 168, https://asr.revues.org/1074?lang=en.

[22] *Ibid.*, 169, note 24–27.

[23] *Ibid.*, 170, note 28.

[24] Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, 301: 'any being is liable to be assumed as complement to another being. It can be part of a being, while preserving its own proper nature after it has afforded completion to other being.'

incorporeal'.[25] Now what should one infer from the foregoing? The above mentioned asymmetry between the anthropological and the Christological unions seems to be due only to the gradations of the incorporeal, everything taking from this point of view a subordinated position with respect to God. The same Neoplatonic picture of gradations of incorporeality appears to determining a sort of scale of impassibility: 'the more spiritual being is not impaired by the inferior being, but the later only is profited by the more spiritual…'[26]

Thus, it seems that for Nemesius, the difference between the two unconfused unions should be ascribed solely to the purity of the incorporeals involved in the unions. God is by definition the absolute pure being, and so this is why the 'unconfused union' properly applies to him and only improperly to souls.

Without questioning the virtues of this approach, it is interesting to see how the analogy evolved in later theological contexts. I shall first deal with Leontius of Byzantium, a 5–6th century Byzantine theologian, who himself was an heir of Nemesius of Emesa. We will see that the theological challenges with which Leontius will be faced will also highlight the need to elaborate more on the difference between the anthropological and Christological union.

The Soul/Body Analogy for the Christology of Leontius of Byzantium

Leontius of Byzantium was a remarkable supporter of the dyophisite or Chalcedonian teaching, who strived to argue for the preservation of the two natures united in Christ in an unconfused union. As observed by Grillmeier, Leontius first follows Nemesius by asking exactly the same question: what is 'the manner of union' (*ὁ τρόπος τῆς ἑνώσεως*)?[27] Leontius also discusses various forms of union and dismisses *σύγχυσις* as being unsuitable for the explanation of the relationship between the natures of Christ. The reason for this rejection is that it proposes an all-encompassing union: In the new body, new properties are generated which cannot be parted again in the initial elements.[28] However, following Nemesius, Leontius insist on the integrity of the substances involved in an 'unconfused union'. Furthermore, Leontius is explicit in saying that, in contradistinction with the Logos, who suffers nothing from his union with human nature, the soul suffers from its union with the body. The explanation he provides for this is that, being created, the soul is a dynamic substance. Since it has a beginning it should also have an end. It is only through God's power that the soul remains in existence, whereas God is *per se* stable.[29] And it is due to this same divine power that the soul can be united with the body, for otherwise

---

[25] *Ibid.*, 301.
[26] *Ibid.*, 302.
[27] Grillmeier and Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 205.
[28] *Ibid.*, 205.
[29] Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* (PG 86:1284A–1285A).

there could not be a union of the two, given their difference in nature. What is crucial in these thoughts is that these differences do not affect the nature of the union: each of the two remains what it was before union, that is, the soul, incorporeal and immortal, and the body a corporeal entity and mortal. Similarly, divinity and human nature remain unmingled in their union in Christ, for divinity is not affected at all by the union with the flesh. In both cases, and this is a remarkable contribution by Leontius, the union is hypostatic, that is, the natures united do not compose a third, perhaps mixed nature, like some monophysites would posit, but a person, an individual or hypostasis. Thus, Leontius is able to circumvent the problems raised by his monophysite adversaries by working out the difference between nature and hypostasis, or individual, in a manner that surpasses the Christology of Nemesius. But however smart and crystalline Leontius' arguments were, he had to face a much subtler argument by the monophysites. Let me summarize it as follows: if soul and body are two complete natures, then one must actually count in Christ three natures: the divine, the soul, and the body, all partaking in Jesus.[30] To this penetrating argument Leontius replied as follows: considered in itself, one man has two natures, soul and body. But taken together with other human beings, he has exactly the same nature with them, made of soul and body. As Venance Grumel expertly observes in his classical article on Leontius, 'nature' has for Leontius two senses: one, physical, denoting its constitutive elements, *i.e.* soul and body, and another logical, denoting the universal, that is, the common elements of all the members of a species (*i.e.* rationality for the species of man).[31]

The question is to see what sort of relationship these two aspects of 'nature' have to one another? In the absence of a clearer demarcation between them, one could be easily drawn to the conclusion that it is the physical constitution of man which is responsible for determining what is common to all human beings. Supposing that this might indeed be true for human beings, it fails to hold true for the human nature of Christ, for it is precisely the physical constitution of Christ which is foreign to the laws of the production of human beings. It is only with Maximus the Confessor that this difference between the physical and the logical constitution of the universality of man has become apparent and, through this, the limit of the analogy between the anthropological and the Christological unions has been unveiled.

St Maximus the Confessor on the Limits of Soul/Body Analogy in Christology

In seventh century Byzantium, the theological issue evolved slightly from the problematic of the natures' 'union without confusion' to the relationship between Christ's wills and energies. The details of this new dispute do not concern us here.

---

[30] See, for details, V. Grumel, 'L'union hypostatique et la comparison de l'âme et du corps chez Léonce de Byzance et saint Maxime le confesseur',*Echos d'Orient* 25, no. 144 (1926): 396.
    [31] *Ibid.*, 397.

It suffices to mention that they considered the same very pressing question of the nature of the union: how are the wills and energies of Christ united? Do they form one will and one energy, corresponding to the one hypostasis of Christ, or do they rather remain two, unconfused, though used unitarily by the individual Christ?[32]

A subtle theological mind and well-versed in philosophy, Maximus the Confessor entered this dispute and provided the most forceful arguments for the union without confusion of the wills and energies of Christ. In his arguments, and generally in his theological approach, he relies extensively on Nemesius and Leontius. As is well known, his anthropology is deeply influenced by Nemesius' description of the faculties of the soul and their correspondence in the bodily senses.[33] Moreover, one of the most important definitions of the will by Maximus seems to be borrowed directly from Nemesius' description of will as a free self-determinative power of the soul.[34] I would like to suggest that—with regards to the problem of the soul/body analogy in relation to Christological union—the Confessor seems to be close to Nemesius' thoughts in explaining the difference between the two.

Maximus talks in a similar manner to the two previous authors about the relevance of the comparison between the two unions, and seems to rely on the Leontian language of hypostasis and nature in his way of describing the analogy. However, Maximus is also keen to qualify the analogy. He identifies three important differences between the anthropological and the Christological unions:[35]

The first difference refers to the moment in which the parts come into existence. According to the Christian teaching proposed by Maximus, neither soul not body preexist each other. Rather they come into existence at the same time and are thus simultaneous in time.[36] Christ, however, being God, is beyond time and so pre-exists his human nature. The second difference is directly following from the former: it plainly says that the anthropological union has no ratio in any of its parts: neither soul nor body has the power in itself to unite with the other.[37] They are, to use Maximus' words, united 'by necessity' (ἐξ ἀνάγκης).[38] In contrast to this, Christ willingly unites himself with the human nature. The third difference combines the previous ones as follows: the simultaneity of coming into existence of soul and body imposes an ontological relation upon them. This is why, Maximus says, the soul of a

---

[32] For details, see, C. Hovorun, *Will, Action and Freedom. Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

[33] For details, see L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor*, 2nd edition (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1995).

[34] Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula Polemica et Theologica* (PG 91:277A).

[35] We follow here the comprehensive account of N. Madden, 'Composite *Hypostasis* in Maximus the Confessor', 175–97.

[36] Maximus the Confessor, *Ep.* 13.3–6 (PG 91:517A):Ἔπειτα δὲ ἀλλήλοις ὁμόχρονα τὰ μέρη, καὶ ἑαυτῇ κέκτηται, κατὰ τὴν εἰς τὸ εἶναι γένεσιν συνυπάρχοντα, μηδετέρου μέρους θατέρου χρονικῶς προϋπάρχοντος.

[37] *Epistula* 13 (PG 91:516D–517D): Πᾶσα γὰρ σύνθετος φύσις, πρῶτον μὲν ἀπροαίρετον ἔχει τὴν πρὸς ἄλληλα τῶν μερῶν κατὰ τὴν σύνθεσιν σύνοδον.

[38] *Epistula*. 12 (PG 91:488D), also cited in N. Madden, 'Composite *Hypostasis* in Maximus the Confessor', 176.

man will be always related to a body and vice versa, even after death sets in.[39] Thus, the relationship of soul to body becomes constitutive for what man is, and hence defines what the nature of man is made of: a whole containing an unconfused relationship between two parts, soul and body.

Hence the parts get united in this special manner in order to compose a nature, the human nature or the human species. In Maximus' words, they contribute to the unfolding of the harmony of the universe by producing one of the many species that compose the universe.[40] Obviously, and this is actually the difference, the union in Christ cannot produce a species that helps to diversify the universe. Why not? Because, Maximus explains, God does not become incarnate for the completion of the species and, through this, of the universe itself. Rather, he did so to renew the laws of the universe in a mode foreign to the laws of the universe.[41] Without the necessary distillation of this difference, Maximus warns us some absurd consequences would be forced upon us. They are best visible if placed in Maximus' ontology of universals and particulars, according to which the existence of an intermediary category of being is forbidden: 'If, according to them…[to Severus of Antioch] Christ is a synthetic nature, it is surely either general of singular…'[42] Maximus further clarifies that, since by its definition and *logos* every general being exists only as instantiated in several individuals,[43] applied to Christ this amounts to stating the absurd possibility of many Christs instead of one.[44] Thus, Incarnation would be compatible with the producing of a Christological general nature or species which is comparable with all created species in that it may contain several members. If this disagrees with the orthodox teaching, what about the other possibility, that is the generation of a unique Christological species made of a single member that is Christ? Maximus rejects this option as interfering with the Biblical picture of the intra-specific succession of embodied beings from embodied parents, and also denies the occurrence of

---

[39] 'For after the death of the body, the soul is not called "soul" in an unqualified way, but the soul of a man, indeed the soul of a particular human being, for even after the body, it possesses, as its own species [εἶδος], the whole human being, which is predicated of it by virtue of its relation as a part to the whole', in Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* (PG 91:1101A). The translations of the *Ambigua* (here slightly altered) are those of Nicholas Constas, *Maximos the Confessor. On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, 2 vols.(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

[40] *Epistula* 13 (PG 91:517A): Πρὸς ἔτι γε μὴν καὶ εἰς συμπλήρωσιν τῆς τὸ πᾶν μεγαλοφυῶς ὑπογραφούσης ὁλότητος γινώσκεται πεποιμένη· also cited in N. Madden, 'Composite *Hypostasis* in Maximus the Confessor', 177.

[41] *Ibid.* (PG 91:517BC): Καὶ εἰς διόρθωσιν καὶ ἀνακαινισμὸν, ἀλλ' οὐκ εἰς συμπλήρωσιν τοῦ παντὸς, ἐνανθρωπήσαντος. Τρόπῳ γὰρ οἰκονομίας, ἀλλ' οὐ νόμῳ φύσεως, ἀρρήτως ὁ τοῦ Θεοῦ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους διὰ σαρκὸς ἐπεδήμης Λόγος. Οὐκοῦν οὐκ ἔστι σύνθετος φύσις ὁ Χριστός, κατὰ τὴν καινοτομίαν τῶν κενούντων τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον· τῷ νόμῳ τῆς συνθέτου φύσεως, κατὰ τὸν εἰς τὸ εἶναι τρόπον, παντάπασιν οἰανοῦν κατ' εἶδος σύνθετον φύσιν αὐτῆς κατηγορουμένην οὐκ ἔχουσα·

[42] *Ibid.*, (PG 91:517C): Εἰ δὲ κατ' αὐτοὺς ἐκείνους ὁ Χριστὸς σύνθετις ἐστι φύσις…ἢ γενικὴ πάντως ἐστὶ, ἢ μοναδική.

[43] *Ibid.* (PG 91:517D): Τοιοῦτος γὰρ ὁ πάσης γενικῆς φύσεως ὅρος τε καὶ λόγος·

[44] *Ibid.* (PG 91:517D): Πλῆθος ἡμῖν Χριστῶν ἀνθ' ἑνός.

any singular being in concrete existence.[45] Inspired by the classical counterexample of the phoenix as a singular being[46]—a common topic in antiquity[47]—the Confessor argues that since the phoenix is a sensitive animal, its existence is bound by the law of intra-specific reproduction of a body from another body. So, the phoenix cannot be alone, but must have some 'parents'. Maximus thus insists that, for every species, including humans, the chain of procreation must be valid, and hence there is no unique hypostatic being in the world, except Christ.[48]

Leontius also insists upon the unicity of Christ against, for instance, the supposed unicity of the sun, which he rather called a star among others.[49] But he did not adequately realise that the unity in Christ as compared that of men, despite their formal similarities, still retain a crucial difference. Maximus' arguments show that this has to do with the results of the union: in the case of man, nature is essentially synthetic or composite, whereas Christ's nature is only a composite individual or hypostasis. The difficulty in differentiating between the two is mainly determined by the fact that man is also a composite hypostasis. However, the crucial question which Maximus invites us to ask here is, what is the cause of the composition? As mentioned already, man is composite because his nature is composite, that is, his composition is solely determined by his nature. Christ, on the other hand, is composite not because of his nature, but only because of his will. And this is why he is only a composite individual, truly one composite in an absolutely unique way, but not also a composite nature.

A short digression on the corollaries of this view may be in order here. One can easily infer from the presentation above that the story of the virginal birth of Christ was certainly more than just a science-fiction story for the aforementioned Byzantine thinkers. It has some logical consequences that need not be underestimated. In the case of men, sexual reproduction assures the conservation of the species and hence shows how its members are bound together by the biological law of reproduction. In light of this, it should be no surprise that Christ breaks with this law when he incarnates himself.[50] Had he been produced through sexual intercourse,

[45] *Ibid.* (PG 91:517D–518B).

[46] *Ibid.* (PG 91:520AB).

[47] See, for details, the discussion about the phoenix and its sexual implications for antiquity and Byzantium in Susan R. Holman, 'On Phoenix and Eunuchs: Sources for Meletius the Monk's Anatomy of Gender' in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, no. 1 (2008): 79–101.

[48] *Epistula* 13 (PG 91:520A): *Αὐτοὺς ἐρωτήσωμεν τοὺς σοφοὺς τῶν ὄντων θεάμονας, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστί τι τῶν ὑπὸ γένεσιν καὶ φθορὰν ἐμψύχων καὶ αἰσθητικῶν σωμάτων, μοναδικῆς ὑπάρχειν καθ' ὑπόστασιν φύσεως· ὧν ἡ ἐξ ἀλλήλων κατ' εἶδος διαδοχή, ἀρίδηλος χαρακτὴρ τοῦ εἶναι καὶ ὅρος ἐστί.*

[49] See, for details, D. Krausmuller, 'A Chalcedonian Conundrum: The Singularity of the *Hypostasis* of Christ', *Scrinium* 10 (2014): 361–382.

[50] As suggested by the anonymous peer review comments to this paper, one could, at least based on *Ambiguum* 31 better assert that Christ does not break with the biological law of reproduction but rather 'renews' all the laws of the universe and creation. Yet, despite this being a justified observation which could also help us represent the future eschatological state of the universe, it should be clear so far that Maximus' position is that the Incarnation of Christ is an absolute *exception* to any law-like description of the universe. Otherwise, the possibility of many Christs based on the *new* law-like structure of the species would again be forced upon us. To put it differently, the unicity of the Incarnation of Christ lies in the unique

he would have been determined by the conservatory force of the species. In other words, the unconfused union instantiated by him would have been produced by the very structure of the species and would have not been caused by Christ's will.

Returning now to Maximus' entire argument for the difference of the two unconfused unions, it could be summarized as follows: the unity of soul and body produces a composite nature and a composite individual or hypostasis—me or another particular person. The unity of the divine and human in Christ results solely in a composite individual or hypostasis, that is, Jesus Christ and not in a composite nature. The similarity of the two resides in the formal aspect of the union; it is an unconfused union, in which the parts united remain unimpaired and preserve their differences intact. The difference, however, is discernible from scrutinizing the results of the unions. In contrast with Christ, in the case of man, the union also produces a synthetic nature, human nature itself, which is nothing other than the whole composed of soul and body. Hence, the union of a soul and body in a human person or individual is but the union presented by the human nature alone. And since it is the same union present in all human individuals, the conclusion must be that it is a mechanism by which nature itself determines this union, which is secured by the biological law of reproduction.

Maximus' Debt to Nemesius

Maximus' argument for the limits of the anthropological model of union for Christology relies heavily on the idea that, in contradistinction to the divine nature, the soul enters into the union in order to create a whole, *e.g.* the human species. The argument that there is a sort of correspondence between soul and body, and that the two share in some powers which make possible their reciprocal accommodation and joint work, was certainly a well-known idea by the times of Nemesius and Maximus. What is striking, however, is that Nemesius does not just refer to the necessary completion of the two entities, but also makes apparent the asymmetry between the dominant natures in every union, *e.g.* the soul and the divine nature respectively: the former is in need of completion, whereas the latter is beyond this need. Maximus does not properly use Nemesius' phrase for describing that the soul is among those things which require completion (τῶν πεπληθυσμένων), yet it is likely that he knew about the strict delineation between the sort of 'unconfused unions' utilized by Nemesius. The reason for this could come from observing that Maximus seems to follow a rationale already present in Nemesius which points in the same direction

coupling of a *logos* of nature with a supernatural *tropos* of existence, a joining which is foreign to any law-like description. Seen from the perspective of the *logos-tropos* distinction, which is one of Maximus' crucial distinctions that can be applied here, I think the coherent manner of reading Maximus is to ascribe the law of reproduction to the *tropos*, which shows the mode every being enters existence and not to the *logos*. Yet, I would say that for Maximus the *tropos* shown by the Incarnation of Christ is truly unique and will not be available to anyone even in the eschaton.

as one of the Confessor's arguments for the contrast of the two 'unconfused unions'. As noticed already, Maximus considers the coming into existence of individuals as being the fulfilment of the species which contain them, and without which the species that form the beauty of the universe cannot exist. The following passage is an elaborate description of the whole process of mutual interaction and sustainment between universals and particulars:

> And, again, universals are contained by particulars through alteration, whereas particulars mutate into universals when they are destroyed by dissolution. And the coming into being of the former is inaugurated by the destruction of the latter, while the destruction of the latter comes about through the generation of the former, for the combination of one universal with another, which brings more particulars into being, is a process of alteration that results in the destruction of the universal, whereas the reduction of particulars to universals, through the dissolution of their composition, is at once the cause of their destruction and the ongoing existence and creation of universals.[51]

It is well-known that Nemesius formed the basis of Maximus' reflections on providence over universals and particulars, as the following text-comparison should make plain.[52]

> Nemesius: And how could that be hid from God which no right-minded man could fail to see, namely that the total destruction of particulars would also imply the destruction of universals? For the universals are the sum-total of particulars.[53]

> Maximus: Knowing that without the care and protection of providence all the particulars would be destroyed, and that together with them the universals [species] would also be destroyed (since universals naturally consist of particulars)…[54]

I would now like to suggest that Maximus is appropriating something more from Nemesius' excursus on providence over particulars. The next argument by Nemesius brings about a conception about species as a universal made of the totality of the

---

[51] *Ambiguum* 10 (PG 91:1169CD).
[52] See, for details, G. Benevich, 'Maximus Confessor's teaching on God's Providence', in *The Architecture of the Cosmos. St Maximus the Confessor. New Perspectives*, eds. A. Lévy, P. Annala, O. Hallamaa, and T. Lankila (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 2016), 123–41.
[53] Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, 442.
[54] *Ambiguum* 10 (PG 91:1189CD).

particulars, which is the same as that invoked by Maximus in the picture of mutual conservation of particulars and universals:

> For surely, the species are the particulars taken together. They are convertible, perish and remain conserved together. And there is nothing to prevent from perishing every particular that goes to make the world, if so be that no care is being taken for them from above. Then when the particulars perish, the universals will perish too. Should they answer that God has a providence to this end only, that by keeping all particulars from perishing, he may preserve the species, they are caught admitting that some kind of providence over particulars exists. For it is by such providence over particulars that God, on their own showing, preserves the species and the genera of things.[55]

The totality of particulars invoked here for the conservation of species is nothing but an alternative way of phrasing the same thing Maximus' wants to convey by the idea that individuals come into existence in order to fulfill the species, and thereby complete the harmony of the universe. In other words, by producing a synthetic nature in their union, soul and body bring about a composite hypostasis whose existence is simultaneous with composite nature. Yet, the hypostasis as a particular being fills in the chain of hypostases contained in the human species, and so contributes to the formation of the species itself. In other words—which holds for Nemesius as well—the soul's feature of being in need of completion appears interconnected not with the property of composition manifested by the hypostasis. Rather, it is interconntected with the property of being determined by the species itself, because the latter has no existence except as a plurality of individuals which fall within its extension. In conclusion, Maximus appears to have developed one implicit but important idea present in Nemesius: the completion of soul and body into a whole is driven by the nature of the universals, more exactly by the species' mode of existence as a totality of individuals, and not by the composite structure of the hypostasis. Yet, in contradistinction to Nemesius, who is favourable to the Neoplatonic model of union without confusion, Maximus succeeds in highlighting one crucial feature of Christian thought about the coming into existence visible in the Incarnation: the entering into embodied existence is solely based on a person's willing—God's will—and not just on the powers and mechanisms of nature. This should lead us to conclude that, in a world in which the idea of general divine providence over nature was not foreign to the pagan spirit, the Incarnation as a special act by God should have indeed appeared either impossible or an absolute novelty.

---

[55] Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, 442.

Rethinking the Problem of Sexual Difference in *Ambiguum* 41

SOTIRIS MITRALEXIS

University of Cambridge, UK; City University of Istanbul, Turkey

Maximus the Confessor's *Ambiguum* 41 contains some rather untypical observations concerning the distinction of sexes in the human person: there is a certain ambiguity as to whether the distinction of the sexes was intended by God and is 'by nature' (as the Book of Genesis and most Church Fathers assert) or whether it is a product of the Fall, while Christ is described thrice as 'shaking out of nature the distinctive characteristics of male and female', 'driving out of nature the difference and division of male and female', and 'removing the difference between male and female'. Different readings of these passages engender important implications that can be drawn out from the Confessor's thought, both eschatological implications and otherwise. The subject has been picked up by Cameron Partridge, Doru Costache and Karolina Kochanczyk–Boninska, amongst others, but is by no means settled, as quite different conclusions have been formulated. The noteworthy and far-reaching implications of Maximus' theological stance, as well as its problems, are not the object of this paper. Here, I am merely trying to demonstrate what exactly Maximus says in these peculiar and much discussed passages through a close reading, in order to avoid a double-edged Maximian misunderstanding—which would either draw overly radical implications from those passages, projecting definitely non-Maximian visions on to the historical Maximus, or none at all, as if those passages represented standard Patristic positions.

Maximus the Confessor's *Ambiguum ad Ioannem* 41[1] is mainly concerned with Maximus' fivefold cosmological division to be overcome by humanity through Christ, and contains a number of quite uncommon assertions concerning sexual difference, which may not seem to be in complete harmony with other passages in the *Ambigua*; for example, the assertion that the human person, following Christ, 'shakes out of nature the distinctive characteristics of male and female',[2] 'drives out of nature the difference and division of male and female',[3] and 'removes the differ-

---

[1] Maximos the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers. The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 102–12. 'The natures are innovated, and God becomes man.'

[2] (PG 91:1305C).

[3] (PG 91:1309A).

ence between male and female'.[4] Apart from the treatments of gender, marriage, and cognate themes by classic Maximian scholars such as Hans Urs von Balthasar and Lars Thunberg, and apart from Adam Cooper's study[5] dedicated to the Maximian concept of the body, three scholars have explicitly engaged this particular question, *i.e.* the challenge posed by the peculiarity of the passages in *Ambiguum ad Ioannem* 41: Cameron Partridge, in his dissertation 'Transfiguring Sexual Difference in Maximus the Confessor',[6] Doru Costache in two articles,[7] and Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska in a forthcoming book chapter.[8] However, interpretations of what the Confessor exactly means in these passages differ considerably—and different interpretations entail different *implications*, some of which could be quite striking and of interest not only to Maximian and Patristic philosophical anthropology, but also to fields such as gender studies, as Partridge has demonstrated. In this short paper, I will simply attempt a close reading of these particular passages, without comparing them with other Maximian passages concerning gender and sexual difference.[9]

The big question is whether, in the context of Maximus' vision, sexual difference will be eschatologically retained (albeit transformed) or abolished—this is a debatable question despite the clarity of Gal 3:28, which enumerates sexual difference among other social, not natural or ontological, differences (like slave and free, Jew and Gentile) which are not present in Christ. Another question is whether sexual difference is prelapsarian or lapsarian, *i.e.* natural or a corruption-related effect of the Fall; while Genesis 1:27 and 5:2 are quite clear on this, advocating the former, it is quite startling that this can be seen as a debatable question in Maximus.[10]

Concerning the context: *Ambiguum* 41 focuses mainly on cosmological and ontological themes. The following passage elucidates these:

---

[4] (PG 91:1309D).

[5] Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[6] Cameron Elliot Partridge, 'Transfiguring Sexual Difference in Maximus the Confessor' (PhD diss., Harvard Divinity School, 2008).

[7] Doru Costache, 'Living above Gender: Insights from Saint Maximus the Confessor', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 21, no. 2 (2013): 261–90 ; 'Gender, Marriage, and Holiness in Amb. Io. 10 and 41', in *Men and Women in the Early Christian Centuries*, Early Christian Studies 18, ed. Wendy Mayer and Ian J. Elmer, (Strathfield: St Paul's Publications, 2014), 351–71.

[8] Karolina Kochańczyk-Bonińska, 'The Philosophical Basis of Maximus' Concept of Sexes: The Reasons and Purposes of the Distinction Between Man and Woman', in *Maximus the Confessor as a European Philosopher*, ed. Sotiris Mitralexis *et al.* (Eugene, OR: Cascade/Wipf & Stock, 2017).

[9] In this close reading, much is owed to Prof. Torstein Tollefsen (University of Oslo), Dr Sebastian Mateiescu (University of Bucharest), Dr Vladimir Cvetkovic (University of Belgrade), Prof. Christophe Erismann (Universität Wien/University of Lausanne), and Prof. Susumu Tanabe (Galatasaray University), with whom these passages were discussed in a recent Maximian workshop at the Halki Seminary on the island of Halki/Heybeliada (May 2016).

[10] Cameron Partridge traces Gregory of Nyssa's influence on Maximus insofar as this issue is concerned in the second chapter of his thesis. Cf. Partridge, 'Transfiguring Sexual Difference in Maximus the Confessor', 23–72.

The argument of *Amb.Io.* 41 develops in roughly five parts, namely, the prologue and the list of five divisions, which describe the whole of reality from the horizon of the created and the uncreated down to the human being (1304D–1305A); the project of the five unions, beginning from the narrowest point represented by humankind to end with the culminating synthesis of the created and the uncreated (1305A–1308C); the fall, its divisive nature, and the five syntheses accomplished by Christ (1308C–1312B)'; the factors that make unification possible (PG 91:1312B–1313B); and the interpretation of the initial Gregorian saying that serves as a pretext for the chapter (1313C–1316A).[11]

The five cosmological divisions are: (a) the created-uncreated distinction, (b) the distinction between the intelligible and the sensible, (c) between heaven and earth, (d) between paradise and the inhabited world, and finally (e) the division into male and female.[12] These divisions are to be bridged by humanity after Christ in reverse order, so that the divine economy can be fulfilled.

In order for the proposed reading to take place, working definitions (not devoid of oversimplification) of key terms are in order:

1) For Maximus, the *logoi of natures* are the uncreated *wills, intentions, and utterances* of God for created beings.

2) *Substances* and *natures* are, of course, created, meaning that they belong to the second part of the first cosmological and ontological division.

3) *Nature* and *according to nature* mainly and usually refer to a creature's *prelapsarian* state. (The Fall, a basic ontological term for Maximian ontology, need not be historically understood here for Maximus' *Weltanschauung* to be coherent; after all, the Confessor comments that the Fall takes place *simultaneously* with the creation of the human being [ἅμα τῷ γενέσθαι][13]).

The brevity of this paper dictates that only the crucial passages themselves be studied here: sexual difference is the *first* division to be transcended by the human person (it being the *last* cosmological division) after Christ who has first achieved this. In a tribute to the *Ambiguum*'s own logic, let us start from the last passage:

1) Thus He [Christ] united, first of all, ourselves in Himself through removal of the difference between male and female [διὰ τῆς ἀφαιρέσεως τῆς κατὰ τὸ ἄρρεν καὶ τὸ θῆλυ διαφορᾶς], and instead of men and women, in whom this mode of division is especially evident, He showed us as properly and truly to be simply human beings, thoroughly formed according to Him, bearing His image intact and completely unadulterated, touched in no way by any marks

---

[11] Doru Costache, 'Gender, Marriage, and Holiness in Amb. Io. 10 and 41', 360–61.
[12] *Ambiguum ad Ioannem* 41.1–2.
[13] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 61 (PG 90:628AB).

of corruption [ἀνθρώπους μόνον κυρίως τε καί ἀληθῶς ἀποδείξας, κατ᾽ αὐτόν δι᾽ ὅλου μεμορφωμένους καί σῶαν αὐτοῦ καί παντελῶς ἀκίβδηλον τήν εἰκόναν φέροντας, ἧς κατ᾽ οὐδένα τρόπον οὐδέν τῶν φθορᾶς γνωρισμάτων ἅπτεται].[14]

There is a distinction in Maximian thought between *difference* and *division*, in which certain differences will be eschatologically retained, but *not* as divisions. It is crucial to see that this is *not* what Maximus proposes here concerning the transcendence of sexual difference in Christ and, by extension, the eschatological state of humanity: it is the *difference, διαφορά*, itself that is removed, not merely the division. The second passage:

2) In this way [*i.e.* by becoming man by virgin birth], He [Christ] showed, I think, that there was perhaps another mode, foreknown by God, for the multiplication of human beings, had the first human being kept the commandment and not *cast* himself down to the level of irrational animals by misusing the mode of his proper powers—and so He drove out from nature the difference and division into male and female, a difference, as I have said, which He in no way needed in order to become man, and without which existence would perhaps have been possible. There is no need for this division to last *perpetually, for in Christ Jesus,* says the divine apostle*, there is neither male nor female* [Gal 3:28].[15]

Sexual difference, 'the difference and division into male and female' (τὴν κατὰ τὸ ἄῤῥεν καὶ θῆλυ διαφοράν τε καὶ διαίρεσιν—note the use of both 'difference' and 'division' together) *and not only* a misuse of that difference for post-lapsarian sexual reproduction, was 'driven out from nature' by Christ [τῆς φύσεως ἐξωθούμενος].

While this difference and division does not need to last perpetually, it *is/was* part of humanity's *nature,* and not simply a post-lapsarian consequence.

3) This is why man was introduced last among beings—like a kind of natural bond mediating between the universal extremes through his parts, and unifying through himself things that by nature are separated from each other by a great distance—so that, by making of his own division a beginning of the unity which gathers up all things to God their Author, and proceeding by order and rank through the mean terms, he might reach the limit of the sublime ascent that comes about through the union of all things in God, in whom there is no division, completely shaking off from nature, by means of a supremely dispassionate condition of divine virtue, the property of male and female, which in no way was linked to the original principle of the divine plan concerning human generation, so that he might be shown forth as, and become solely a human being according to the divine plan, not divided by

[14] *Ambiguum ad Ioannem* 41.9.
[15] *Ambiguum ad Ioannem* 41.7.

the designation of male and male (according to the principle by which he formerly came into being), nor divided into the parts that now appear around him, thanks to the perfect union, as I said, with his own principle, according to which he exists.[16]

Now the reference is to humanity and the human person, after Christ—not Christ himself. Let us try to 'unlock' this:
1) Man [is to] *completely* shake off from nature…the property of male and female[17] (the property, *not only* the *division* retaining a *difference*),
2) which in no way was linked to the original principle of the divine plan concerning human generation,[18]
3) so that he might be shown forth as and become solely a human being according to the divine plan,[19]
4) not divided by the designation of male and male,[20]
5) according to the principle by which he formerly came into being.[21]

The property of male and female *is* a part of nature, which is to be 'shaken off' by mankind following Christ. By 'nature' Maximus usually refers to the pre-lapsarian state as well.

This part of nature was (2) not foreseen (a) in the *logos* of humanity's nature/substance—meaning that God did *not* intend for sexual difference to exist *at all* and this would be a product of the Fall (contrary to Genesis, that is)—OR (b) *was* foreseen, but *not* in the *logos* of human *generation*. Could this mean that only human *generation, i.e.* sexual reproduction, is post-lapsarian, sexual difference itself being pre-lapsarian? The phrasing in (2) suggests the latter, which would be much more mild, scriptural and 'mainstream' than the former. *However, this changes in (3):* here, divine intention (θεία πρόθεσις for humanity, practically synonymous with the humanity's *logos*) determines human persons *without the very property of male and female,* not only without their sexual reproduction. One objection could be that θεία πρόθεσις in (3) refers to God's providence and economy and *not* to humanity's *logos*. But this is not the case, as is made apparent in the phrasing of (5): there, the extinction ('completely shaking off/πάντη ἐκτιναξάμενος') or rather non-existence of sexual *difference* (as we end up with ἄνθρωπον μόνον), and not only of sexual reproduction at the level of the *logos* of humanity, καθ᾽ ὃν καὶ προηγουμένως γεγένηται—i.e., not only in an eschatological perspective, but a past reality pertain-

---

[16] *Ambiguum ad Ioannem* 41.3.
[17] *Κατὰ τὸ θῆλυ καὶ τὸ ἄρσεν ἰδιότητα πάντη τῆς φύσεως ἐκτιναξάμενος.*
[18] *Τὴν μηδαμῶς ἠρτημένην δηλαδὴ κατὰ τὸν προηγούμενον λόγον τῆς περὶ τὴν γένεσιν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου θείας προθέσεως.*
[19] *ὥστε δειχθῆναί τε καὶ γενέσθαι κατὰ τήν θείαν πρόθεσιν ἄνθρωπον μόνον.*
[20] *τῇ κατὰ τὸ ἄρσεν καὶ τὸ θῆλυ προσηγορίᾳ μὴ διαιρούμενον.*
[21] *καθ᾽ ὃν καὶ προηγουμένως γεγένηται λόγον.*

ing to humanity's coming into being. Does the property of sexual difference exist at the level of *nature* (as (1) and the other passages would indicate), but not at the level of *logos of nature*, and if yes, how?

Conclusion

As we can see, the problem here is that Maximus, an indispensable Confessor for the Christian Churches, "'not only asserts that sexual difference itself (and not only sexual division or reproduction) will not endure the eschata,'" thus going beyond standard interpretations of Gal 3:28, but he also goes on to assert that the differentiation between male and female is not even part of humanity's *logos* of nature, of God's prelapsarian (or rather a-lapsarian) will and intention for humankind—quite contrary to Genesis.

The most noteworthy implications of this theological stance (and, apart from Patristic and philosophical anthropology, I name gender studies as an example), as well as its problems, are not the object of this paper. Here I am simply trying to demonstrate *what does Maximus exactly say* in these peculiar and oft-discussed passages, in order to avoid a two-edged Maximian misunderstanding—which would either draw overly radical implications from those passages, projecting definitely non-Maximian visions on the historical Maximus, or none at all, as if those passages represented standard Patristic positions.

From Domination to Impassibility: Overcoming the Dialectic between Dominator and Dominated according to the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662)

DIONYSIOS SKLIRIS

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

This study attempts to examine how Saint Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662) uses terms related to the notion of *κράτος* (power), such as *ἐπικράτεια* (domination, prevalence) and *ἐγκράτεια* (continence), in order to denote a domination which is not free from passion. Even though terms like *ἐγκράτεια* might have a positive meaning, signifying for example the mastery over one's impulses, they are inferior to *ἀπάθεια*, to which they might be contrasted. According to Maximus, domination (*ἐπικράτεια*) might also be viewed as a form of weakness, since the one who exercises domination is in turn affected by the one dominated. Conversely, true love is linked only to *ἀπάθεια* (impassibility), which signifies a deeper overcoming of the dominated passion. Maximus' thought thus presents some dialectical insights, since it highlights the influence of the dominated upon the dominator and a possible shifting of roles in a vicious circle. But in its ontological and eschatological depth, it is non-dialectical since the goal is absolute freedom from the dialectic of domination (*ἐπικράτεια*). The study will focus particularly on the vicious circle of pleasure and pain (*ἡδονή/ὀδύνη*) and one significant use of the term *ἐπικράτεια* in this context. It will be founded on Saint Maximus' Christology, according to which the 7th century Father emphatically rejects the notion of a Monoenergism, in which Christ would have a unique operation through the domination of his divine operation over his human one.

The thought of Saint Maximus the Confessor (c.580–662) on power might be best understood if we examine the revealing semantic nuances of terms that have *κράτος* (power) as their constituent. Two such significant terms are *ἐπικράτεια* (domination, prevalence) and *ἐγκράτεια* (continence). One reason to choose these two terms in order to understand the thought of Maximus on this topic is precisely because they are two rather positive terms. Ἐγκράτεια is one of the fundamental virtues of the desiring part of the soul (*ἐπιθυμία*). Ἐπικράτεια denotes the prevailing part in a relation or union. As they have a positive or, at least, a neutral value, it is crucial to examine the ways in which they enter paradigmatic relations with other terms in subjects pertaining to power, potency, and domination. I shall discuss these terms

on a Christological, anthropological, and psychological level, as these three levels are interconnected but also distinguished.

Beyond the Dominator/Dominated Dialectic

Since the anthropological contemplation in Saint Maximus the Confessor (among other Fathers) is founded on Christology, it is better to start from the latter and observe the way in which the question of domination (ἐπικράτεια) is treated on the Christological level. The decisive passage is found in the *Opusculum* 5.[1] This *Opusculum* refutes some subtle forms of Monoenergism, *i.e.* the doctrine which claims that Christ has one unique energy/operation. Since the forms of Monoenergism that Maximus discusses in this text are quite elaborate, it seems to present us with an advanced stage of the conflict about the energies of Christ. Therefore, Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth's decision to date the *Opusculum* 5 to a later period of Maximus' thought, after 645, seems reasonable, even though we will have to wait for the complete critical edition of the *Opuscula* in order to acquire a greater degree of certainty about their chronology.[2] For the needs of this paper, one could stress that the *Opusculum* 5 represents a mature stage of Maximus' thought, since he is able to refute even the most subtle forms of Monoenergism in a very elaborate manner. In doing this, he is equally aware of a deep anthropological and at times even ontological reflection, which accompanies his Christological and soteriological vision.

In the first part of the *Opusculum*,[3] which I will discuss at length, Maximus reacts to a specific version of Monoenergism, namely the position that Christ's operation is unique due to the fact that the most dominant operation necessarily prevails over

---

[1] (PG 91:64A–65A).

[2] Polycarp Sherwood dates the *Opusculum* 5 to the beginning of the Monoenergistic controversy 'by 633', see Polycarp Sherwood, *An Annotated Date- List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi 'Orbis Catholicus', 1952), 37. He is followed by Jean-Claude Larchet, see 'Introduction' in *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Opuscules Théologiques et Polémiques* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 24. Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth's decision to date the *Opusculum* 5 to after 645 is based on the following considerations: i) Maximus' adversaries seem to seek to accommodate their critics 'by acknowledging not "one" but "one and two" operations'. Such an effort of 'accommodation' seems to imply a later stage of the conflict. ii) A position similar to the one refuted here by Maximus is found in some later texts from 656–58 (*Disputatio Bizyae*, *Epistula ad Anastasium*). iii) This position is also demonstrated in the *Opusculum* 9, which is dated to 645–646 and where Maximus refutes a patristic passage from Heraclianus of Chalcedon which was supposed to corroborate it. iv) Similar Monoenergistic positions are implied in the *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:296A-C; 333B–344A), which is composed in a period surely later than 645. v) The notion of the 'composite energy' was condemned at the Lateran Council of 649 with a connected although different rationale, namely that if the Son had a composite nature and energy, he would be alien to the Father who has a simple nature and energy. vi) Lastly, supporters of an earlier date could appeal to a possible *argumentum ex silentio*, namely that Maximus does not refer in the *Opusculum* 5 to the (chronologically posterior) question of the wills of Christ. But this 'argument from silence' is not considered as conclusive, since Maximus may very well have omitted this issue in his rather short treatise in order to focus on the problem of the energies. See Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth, 'A New Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor' in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, eds. Pauline Allen and Neil Bronwen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 64.

[3] (PG 91:64AB).

the weaker one. This version of Monoenergism is a moderate one, since it does not altogether exclude *a priori* the possibility of a human operation of Christ, but it stresses that eventually the two operations cannot coexist, since the human energy will give way to the divine one. In the next two parts of the *Opusculum*, Maximus reacts to two other elaborate versions of Monoenergism, namely to the view that the human operation was only an instrument of the divine one and to the position that there is a sole *composite* operation in Christ. Such versions of Monoenergism are reminiscent of certain 'moderate' forms of Monophysitism. The logic that is common to these two views is that it is not impossible *a priori* to have human alterity in Christ, but that the human element will eventually be absorbed into a composite whole in which the dominant nature and operation of Christ, namely the divine one, shall prevail.[4] Against these 'moderate' forms of Monoenergism, Maximus is able to develop a series of arguments, some of which could equally be employed against the 'moderate' forms of Monophysitism. He thus shows what is really at stake through a genealogy of Monoenergism, which is implicitly traced back to Monophysitism, and explicitly to Nestorianism and Apollinarianism.[5] Monoenergism is thus regarded as the vicious conclusion of differing or even opposite heresies, as we shall observe. But Maximus equally proceeds to some very deep anthropological remarks about the vitality of Christ's human operation, which cannot be regarded as a dead 'technological' instrument or object. He is equally pointing out the fact that a 'natural composition' of operations, *i.e.* not a personal/hypostatical one, would imply a lack of freedom in Christ's humanity.

In his refutation of the first form of 'moderate' Monoenergism, namely 'Monoenergism according to prevalence', Maximus proceeds to some general philosophical remarks about the nature of domination. I will quote this part of the *Opusculum* at length in both the original and a possible translation, as it is very crucial for our subject:

Πρὸς τοὺς λέγοντας ὅτι μίαν Χριστοῦ χρὴ λέγειν ἐνέργειαν κατ' ἐπικράτειαν· διὰ τὸ ὡς δραστικωτέραν τὴν θείαν αὐτοῦ κατεπικρατεῖν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης, οὕτω χρὴ ἀπολογεῖσθαι. Πρῶτον μὲν δύο ἐνεργείας καὶ ὑμεῖς ὁμολογεῖτε· μίαν ἐπικρατοῦσαν· τὴν θείαν φημί· καὶ μίαν κρατουμένην· τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην δηλονότι· ὅπερ ἐστὶ τῶν Πρός τι. Τὰ δὲ Πρός τι πάντως συνεισάγουσιν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ τὰ ἀντιδιαιρούμενα. Ἔπειτα δέ, ὅτι εἰ κατ' ἐπικράτειαν λέγετε τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ὡς τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης διὰ τὸ ἐπικρατηθῆναι ἀναιρουμένης, μείωσιν αὐταῖς εἰσάγετε. Τὸ γὰρ ἐπικρατοῦν, πάντως καὶ αὐτὸ τῶν πασχόντων ἐστί· καὶ αὐτὸ γὰρ κρατεῖται ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐπικρατουμένου. Εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἔλασσον, ὅμως δὲ κρατεῖται πάντως· ὥσπερ χρυσὸς ἐπικρατῶν μὲν τοῦ καταμιγνυμένου αὐτῷ

---

[4] I am using the terms '*a priori*' and 'eventually' in a rather logical/ontological sense and not in a temporal one.

[5] (PG 91:64C).

ἀργυρίου, φέρε εἰπεῖν, ἢ χαλκοῦ· κρατούμενος δὲ καὶ αὐτός, εἰ καὶ ἧττον, δῆλον δὲ ὅτι κατὰ τὴν ποσότητα τὴν προσμιγεῖσαν.

To those who say that we should speak of one sole operation of Christ according to domination, because his divine operation supposedly prevails over the human one due to its being more efficacious, one should reply thus: Firstly, you do admit yourselves two operations: One dominating, that is the divine one; and one which is dominated, namely the human one. But this belongs to the category of *relation (Πρός τι)*. And those who belong to the category of relation introduce their opposites with them. Secondly, if you say that the operation [of Christ] is according to prevalence, because the human operation is removed due to its being dominated, then you imply a diminution to them. Because whatever dominates belongs in any case to those realities which undergo passion, since it is dominated itself by the thing that is dominated. Even if [it is comparatively dominated] to a lesser degree, it is in any case dominated. Just as when, for example, the gold prevails over the silver or the copper that is mixed with it, it is itself affected, even if to a lesser extent, obviously according to the quantity that is mixed with it.

Maximus' reaction to the 'Monoenergism by prevalence' thus comprises two stages. Firstly, he remarks that domination (ἐπικράτεια) is a sort of relation (πρός τι). As such it necessarily comprises two terms. Of course, Maximus' opponents would not have a problem with admitting two *initial* terms, which eventually give way to one sole reality, as the weak element concedes to the stronger and thus vanishes. But this is not the way in which Maximus understands dominance (κράτος). For him, in cases of domination, the second term is preserved and continues to exist after the attainment of domination, even if it is not apparent but only subjacent. In this case, Monoenergists in fact admit two operations *malgré eux*, that is, without realizing it. It is myopic to speak of an operation which is dominated and think that this operation somehow vanishes and ceases to exist. Only a person with a very short sight, or, if I might put it in a Maximian idiom, with a very fragmented 'gnomic opinion' (γνώμη), would not observe that the dominated operation is still there and continues to exert influence. It is noteworthy that what we say about these operations could also generally be applied to the wills of Christ, even though the latter is a more complex subject and Maximus does not touch upon it in this specific passage about ἐπικράτεια.

The main question, however, lies elsewhere. The crucial problem is that domination (ἐπικράτεια) means a weakness also on the part of the dominator. Maximus asserts that domination introduces a double diminution (μείωσις), that is applicable to both the dominator and the dominated. The latter is more obvious but nevertheless entails some important soteriological consequences. Asserting that the human

operation of Christ is dominated by the divine one presents some serious flaws. It means that there exists by nature something in the human operation which has to be tamed and subjugated. This could lead to an Apollinaristic mode of thought, where the human intellect cannot coexist with the divine one, but must vanish in order for the latter to manifest itself.[6] It also leads to a notion of 'confusion' (σύγχυσις), where the dominated element is lost in its merging with the dominant one, a Christological vision that smacks of Monophysitism. Maximus would propose another vision in which the human energy is distinct from the divine one, but it is in accordance and cooperation with it.

There is, nevertheless, one even more interesting feature of Maximus' reasoning. Maximus alludes to the notion that ἐπικράτεια also debases the dominator: domination is a sign of weakness; it is a passion. Even if the passion is undergone mainly by the dominated aspect, for Maximus the mere act of dominance entails the transmission of the passion to the dominator. It is in this sense that one could say that the dominator ultimately is dominated by the dominated aspect. To illustrate his point, Maximus uses the example of metal mixtures. It is notable that such examples concern types of union which are considered as 'Monophysitic', including not only the mixture of metals but also the blend of liquids, *etc.* Maximus' anti-Monophysite bent provokes his reaction against such imagery. For example, when one mixes gold with silver or copper, the gold prevails, but to a certain extent it loses its integrity during the mixing process. The same is true for prevailing liquids which lose their purity when mixed.

In order to understand Maximus' reasoning, one should first consider *Opusculum* 18,[7] which comprises definitions of different types of union. This *Opusculum*, which is edited by Peter Van Deun,[8] is traditionally attributed to Saint Maximus the Confessor, and there does not seem to be a serious reason for rejecting this traditional attribution.[9] If the *Opusculum* 18 is written by Maximus, it probably belongs to an early stage of his engagement against the Monophysite, Monoenergistic, and Monothelite heresies, possibly around 634–635, although this date is not certain.[10] In

---

[6] Maximus does refer to Apollinarius later on in the second part of the *Opusculum* 5 (PG 91:64C) in a different context. He argues that, if the human operation of Christ is considered as an 'instrument' in a 'technological' sense (τεχνικὸν ὄργανον), then it will be without life and, more importantly, without intellectual life, just as the followers of Apollinarius claimed that the body of Christ is 'ἄψυχον καὶ ἄνουν'. Even though the context in the second part is slightly different, I believe that the demonstration of the Apollinarian roots of Monoenergism is a constant preoccupation of Maximus throughout the particular *Opusculum*.

[7] (PG 91:213A–216A).

[8] Peter Van Deun, 'L'*Unionum Definitiones* (CPG 7697:18) attribué à Maxime le Confesseur: Étude et édition', *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 58 (2000): 123–147.

[9] Its editor, Peter van Deun, remarks that there is no obstacle for attributing it to Saint Maximus the Confessor, even though there cannot be absolute certainty. Among the reasons for accepting this attribution one can refer to the following: i) It is found in the oldest manuscripts and it is generally supported by the tradition of the manuscripts. ii) Some of the definitions are equally found in the *Ambigua* and in the *Letters*. iii) Maximus did indulge in the genre of 'definitions', *ibid.*, 126–127.

[10] Polycarp Sherwood dates it to 626–633, see Polycarp Sherwood, *An Annotated Date-List*, 30. Its editor, Peter van Deun, considers it as posterior to Maximus' engagement in the Monoenergistic controversy,

such a case, one could consider the definitions of *Opusculum* 18 as a possible presupposition of Maximus' reasoning in the *Opusculum* 5, given also that their content is quite traditional and not particularly original. The definitions seem to be influenced by conciliar decisions, by the theology of Cyril of Alexandria, by the treatises of Leontius of Byzantium[11] against the Monophysites and the Nestorians, as well as by the Christian philosopher Nemesius of Emesa.[12] Some of the types of union referred to by Saint Maximus seem to react to Monophysite Christology. Maximus uses five different terms, namely κρᾶσις, φύρσις, σύγχυσις, σωρεία, and συναλοιφή[13] in order to denote different types of union by confusion: *Κρᾶσις* denotes the confusion of liquids; *φύρσις* means the union between dry and liquid elements like, for example, between flour and water; *σύγχυσις* is the confusion between elements which undergo melting, such as wax and tar; *σωρεία* is the mixing between dry elements, such as wheat and barley; *συναλοιφή* is referring to 'entities' which can be extracted and then completely reunited with their source, as is the case in the diffusion of fire in different candles or torches. If the general framework of the *Unionum Definitiones* is the presupposition of the *Opusculum* 5,[14] then when Maximus speaks of ἐπικράτεια referring to the example of the mixture of metals, what he has in mind could be the *σύγχυσις*, *i.e.* the confusion between elements which can undergo melting, or the *κρᾶσις*, *i.e.* the confusion of elements which can be put in a liquid state and thus unite by losing their alterity inside a new mixture. But unions according to *φύρσις*, *σωρεία,* and *συναλοιφή* are equally types of union which entail a sort of prevalence (ἐπικράτεια) to the detriment of the alterity inside the new union. For this reason, Saint Maximus is possibly denouncing the notion of ἐπικράτεια because he considers it as specific to Monophysite types of 'union by confusion'.

---

i.e. posterior to 633–634, since the third of the definitions concern the question of *gnome* and will. See Peter van Deun, 'L'*Unionum Definitiones*', 127. More recently, Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth have suggested an early possible date around 634–635. The reason they give is that this same third definition about the 'union in respect of relation, [which] concerns the *gnōmai* [and results] in one will' is similar to an expression found in the *Synodical Letter*, which was circulated by Sophronius of Jerusalem to fellow bishops after his ascension as Patriarch of Jerusalem in 634–635. Besides, similar language concerning the 'one will' is used in *Letter* 2, in the *Exposition on the Lord's Prayer* and in the *Opusculum* 14. This language suggests a date before the *Ekthesis* composed by Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople in 636, which admitted one will in Christ. See Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth, 'A New Date-List', 34–35. In any case, this dating is only a hypothesis, since even the Maximian paternity of the *Opusculum* is not absolutely certain.

[11] The crucial influence of Leontius of Byzantium is stressed by Jean-Claude Larchet, see 'Introduction' in *Opuscules Théologiques*, 21. It is also developed in Peter van Deun, 'L'*Unionum Definitiones*', 128. For the general influence of Leontius on Maximus on the question of the hypostatic union see Venance Grumel, 'L'union hypostatique et la comparaison de l'âme et du corps chez Léonce de Byzance et saint Maxime le Confesseur', *Echos d'Orient* 25 (1926): 397–406.

[12] For possible sources of the *Opusculum* 18, see Peter van Deun, 'L'*Unionum Definitiones*', 127–128.

[13] Ibid., 145.

[14] What I mean is that even if the actual *Unionum Definitiones* was not written by Maximus before the *Opusculum* 5, one can still claim that its content is indeed a presupposition of the latter, since it reflects a traditional framework formed by the conciliar tradition, Saint Cyril, Leontius *e.a.* Maximus was up to a certain extent original when systematizing this tradition, but he was also well placed inside it.

It is of equal importance that, in the same *Opusculum* 18, other terms refer to more external types of union which would be rather specific to a Nestorian Christology: σχέσις can thus denote the rather external relation and coordination of many different opinions or gnomic wills (γνῶμαι) into forming one sole will; παράθεσις means the union by juxtaposition, as is the case with boards and planks; ἁρμονία refers to the harmonious unity that one can find in a successful arrangement of stones in order to form an articulated whole. Even though the notion of ἐπικράτεια is more specific to 'Monophysite' types of union, its application to 'Nestorian' versions should not, in my opinion, be excluded. Besides, in Maximus' way of thinking, Monoenergism is a result of opposing heresies, such as Monophysitism, Nestorianism, and Apolliniarism. The notion of ἐπικράτεια could possibly apply to all three of them.

Let us consider, for example, the most abstract and condensed phrase of the first part of the *Opusculum* 5: 'Whatever dominates belongs in any case to those realities which undergo passion, since it is dominated itself by the dominated one' ('*Tὸ γὰρ ἐπικρατοῦν πάντως καὶ αὐτὸ τῶν πασχόντων ἐστί· καὶ αὐτὸ γὰρ κρατεῖται ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐπικρατουμένου*'). Even though the example given by Maximus refers to the mixture of metals, one would be tempted to change the context and apply this principle to human relations (σχέσεις). The abstractness of the formulation arguably encourages such a generalization. We could thus observe someone who is dominant in a relationship, but who allows himself to be dominated from the very moment in which he begins to exercise domination. One could recall here the Hegelian master/slave dialectic,[15] in which it is precisely the domination of the master over the slave which leads the former to eventually turn into the slave of his slave, by being alienated from nature, matter, and even himself.[16] The former slave may even turn into the master of this relationship. One might also consider contemporary Post-colonial studies, the subject of which is often how those who are dominated are able to change from within the signifiers of the master's dominance.

Returning to the seventh century, we may conclude that Maximus' theological critique constitutes a simultaneous rejection of both Monophysitism and Nestorianism: domination (ἐπικράτεια) is unworthy of God and of Christ as God. If the divine operation prevails over the human one by domination, this would mean that God *qua* God is affected by passion, *i.e.* it would entail a form of Theopaschism. God does not need to prevail over humanity. Maximus considers the divine/human relationship in a Chalcedonian manner, as a relation in which difference is saved as such. And it is saved because God loves in an impassible way. The divine stance consists in an eminent unity of love and impassibility, in which love is tantamount

---

[15] The remark that the first part of the 5th *Opusculum* can remind us of the famous Hegelian master-slave dialectic can be found in Jean-Claude Larchet, 'Introduction', in *Opuscules Théologiques*, 24.

[16] See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Werke in 20 Bänden, Bd. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 145–155.

to impassibility and impassibility coincides with love. If God dominated humanity, this would turn him into a passible God who would lose his impassibility and thus even his love.

Ἐπικράτεια *and the Dialectic between Pleasure and Pain (ἡδονή/ὀδύνη)*

Even if a comparison to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic might seem anachronistic, there is nevertheless a question which is relevant to Maximus' own thought: is his thought dialectical or not?[17] By dialectical, I mean a certain dilemma by which one struggles to determine whether she should define something through its opposite or if she should define it in itself, being indifferent to its opposites. The most crucial problem is of course whether the Good needs evil in order to be defined, or if it can be defined in itself without referring to evil as a necessary contrariety. The same is the case for life and death, for light and darkness—in either a metaphorical or even a literal sense—*etc*. This dilemma (even if it did not bear the name of dialectic) is evident in many philosophical problems posed by thinkers in Late Antiquity. We find it, for example, in Plotinus' endeavor to define the Good in itself without including evil in its definition, thus rejecting the opposing views of Gnostics, Manichaeans, or even Stoics.[18] One might also recall the discussion about the role of evil in the divine/human drama, for example the question of whether or not the experience of evil could be considered to be an aspect of divine pedagogy, a view that is attributed by some to Origen or Gregory of Nyssa.[19] The question that arises is what Maximus' own stance is. Does he define his concepts in a dialectical manner or not?

The answer to this question could both be a positive and a negative one. On the one hand, Maximus is sensitive to the fact that there is a dialectical way in which concepts are defined inside history. On the other, his goal is to elevate us to another level, that is, to an eschatological one, where this dialectical comprehension is transcended. Dialectical understanding only refers to the historical or even to the

---

[17] The idea that Maximus the Confessor was indirectly a sort of precursor of Hegel is however developed by a very important scholar and theologian, namely Hans-Urs von Balthasar who even thought that Maximus provides us with tools by which we could transcend the undesirable traits of Hegelian dialectics. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor,* trans. Brian E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 163 (Title of the original: *Kosmische Liturgie: Das Weltbild Maximus' des Bekenners* [Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1988]). For a recent comparison between Maximus the Confessor and the dialectical thought of Karl Jung, see Grigorios Tympas, *Carl Jung and Maximus the Confessor on Psychic Development: The Dynamics between the 'Psychological' and the 'Spiritual'* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

[18] For Plotinus' theory of evil see, for example, *Enneads* I.8.10–11; II.4.13 and its analysis in Denis O' Brien, 'Plotinus and the Gnostics on the Generation of Matter' in *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought, Essays in Honour of A. H. Armstrong*, eds. Henry J. Blumenthal and Robert Markus (London: Variorum Publications, 1981), 108–123; Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London & New York: Routledge,1994), 197.

[19] For a comparison between Maximus and his predecessors on this point see Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of St Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi, 1955), 198–204.

'lapsarian' condition, where two realities that are considered as opposite cannot exist without the other. In such cases, one might think that two realities are opposed, whereas, in reality, the one depends on the other for its subsistence. Most of these realities are related to power (κράτος) as well as to pleasure (ἡδονή). Maximus thus speaks of dialectical couples, such as the one between the dominator and the dominated, pleasure and pain (ἡδονή/ὀδύνη), or sorrow and anger (λύπη/ὀργή). According to him, the dialectical nature of these couples should not be underestimated, but rather studied with a philosophical attitude. And it is the Christian philosopher who realizes and examines *par excellence* the dialectical nature of reality, in contrast to the lay man who might fall into the illusion that such opposites, like for example pleasure and pain, are true opposites and not just apparent ones.

Returning to our subject, the man of illusion might think that a dominant reality could be defined by itself regardless of the dominated aspect. For Maximus, however, the true philosopher is the one who discerns the survival of the dominated in the dominance of the dominator. The other side of the same coin is that the dominator is himself defeated from the very moment that he wishes to dominate, as he will be afflicted by this same passion. This dialectic of power is very close to the dialectic of pleasure we witness in a very interesting passage in the Introduction to *Ad Thalassium*:

> …οὐκ ἐνδέχεταί ποτε χωρὶς ὀδύνης εἶναι τὴν ἡδονήν. Ἐγκέκραται γὰρ τῇ ἡδονῇ τῆς ὀδύνης ὁ πόνος, κἂν λανθάνειν δοκῇ τοὺς ἔχοντας διὰ τὴν κατὰ τὸ πάθος τῆς ἡδονῆς ἐπικράτειαν, ἐπειδὴ τὸ ἐπικρατοῦν ἀεὶ διαφαίνεσθαι πέφυκεν, καλύπτον τοῦ παρακειμένου τὴν αἴσθησιν.[20]

> qIt is not possible to ever have pleasure without pain. Because the pain of suffering is mixed with pleasure, even if this is not obvious to those who have it due to the prevalence of pleasure during the passion; since the prevailing element is always the apparent one, covering the sense of the underlying element.

The man of illusion thinks in terms of power ('κράτος') and believes that if pleasure prevails then pain is extinct. In reality, however, pain is but the internal limit of pleasure.[21] According to the biblical and patristic narrative, this might be

---

[20] See *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium I, Quaestiones I-LV una cum latina interpretatione Ioannis Scotti Eriugenae iuxta posita* (CCSG 7), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel (Turnhout and Leuven: Brepols and Leuven University Press, 1980), 33, lines 259–264 (PG 90:256AB).

[21] The dialectic between pleasure and pain is developed mainly in *Ad Thalassium* 21, see *Quaestiones ad Thalassium I* (CCSG 7), 127–133 (PG 90:312B–316D) and in *Ad Thalassium* 61, see *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium II, Quaestiones LVI-LXV una cum latina interpretatione Ioannis Scotti Eriugenae iuxta posita* (CCSG 22), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel (Turnhout and Leuven: Brepols and Leuven University Press, 1990), 85–91, line 108 (PG 90:628A–632A).

formulated as God putting pain as a limit on pleasure after the Fall so that evil not exist eternally.[22] In *Ad Thalassium* 26,[23] Maximus tries to explain the antinomy in which the devil is called both the 'enemy' (ἐχθρός) and the 'servant' (δοῦλος) of God. In his reply, he stresses that devil is the 'enemy' of God when he is trying to lure man into preferring temporary pleasure (ἡδονή) over the desire for divine love. But he is also the 'servant' of God, since he brings the just punishment (τιμωρία) of pain (ὀδύνη) to men who have given themselves to pleasure. It should be noted that it is not God himself who wills the punishment or pain of men, but he 'lets' (συγχώρησις) the devil be a just punisher (ἐκδικητής), since there is an internal relation between pleasure and pain which cannot be avoided. As such, Maximus seems to suggest a sort of wider *quasi-* 'cosmological' justice between pleasure and pain, but this justice is only valid within a 'lapsarian' dialectic in which the devil can temporarily acquire the antinomical attributes of 'enemy' and 'servant' of God in order to show the falsehood of pleasure from the inside. This 'justice', however, is not the true eschatological justice of God. It is only a false justice of retribution ('ἐκδίκησις'), particular to the lapsarian condition. In fact, the devil is 'tricked': he wants to punish men out of hate against them, but by bringing pain upon them he is somehow showing the fact that pleasure cannot be an eternal truth. If one were to formulate this imagery in a more ontological idiom, one could say that it is impossible for pleasure to perpetuate itself and that it thus has pain as an internal limit. Pleasure is necessarily followed by a pain that would restrict it, thus revealing the impossibility of its becoming absolute.[24] The man of illusion would wish to impose the dominance of pleasure thus trying to vanquish pain. On the contrary, the Christian philosopher will discern that pain survives under the appearance of the dominance of pleasure in such a way as to define the latter. Such is the case with any form of dominance where the dominated continues to affect and define the dominator, even if he seems subjugated.

The same could be claimed about the relationship of sorrow and anger (λύπη/ ὀργή). People think that they can vanquish sorrow through the employment of the capacity of their soul for anger. But in reality the repressed sorrow grasps them whenever anger passes, exactly as pain dominates man after each pleasure. This vicious circle can be solved only through the leap of love which breaks it.[25] On a

---

[22] See *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium* II (CCSG 22), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel, 85, lines 16–18 (PG 90:628B): '…τὴν ἡδονήν· ᾗτινι κατὰ πρόνοιαν ὁ τῆς ἡμῶν σωτηρίας κηδόμενος παρέπηξεν, ὥσπερ τινὰ τιμωρὸν δύναμιν, τὴν ὀδύνην'.

[23] *Quaestiones ad Thalassium I* (CCSG 7), 173–175, line 54 (PG 90:340D–341D).

[24] For the dialectic between pleasure and pain in the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* see Christoph von Schönborn, 'Plaisir et Douleur dans l'Analyse de S. Maxime, d'après les *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*' in *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur. Fribourg, 2–5 septembre 1980*, Paradosis 27, eds. Felix Heinzer and Christoph von Schönborn (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1982), 273–284; Jean-Claude Larchet, 'Introduction' in *Maxime le Confesseur. Questions à Thalassios. Tome 1 (Questions 1 à 40)*, Sources Chrétiennes 529 (Paris: Cerf, 2010).

[25] For love as the solution to sorrow and resentment (μνησικακία), see *Capitum de Charitate Centuria* 3.89–91 (PG 90:1044C–1045A).

more ontological level, there is also such a relationship between death and sexual reproduction (θάνατος/γέννησις in the Maximian idiom). After the Fall, men try to vanquish death through sexual reproduction. But in each birth by sexual reproduction (γέννησις), a hidden death is concealed, temporarily subjugated but waiting to dominate in the end. At the beginning of the *Ambiguum* 31, Maximus states that 'sin …condemned human beings to be marked with the same characteristic as irrational animals, in being generated one from another (ἐξ ἀλλήλων διαδοχῆς ἰδιότης)'.[26] By the term 'διαδοχή' (succession) Maximus means the connection between sexual reproduction and death which is a more ontological parallel of the vicious circle between pleasure and pain. It is, however, notable that this context is Christological and its aim is rather to show how Christ overcomes this circle.

Anti-dialectical Traits in Saint Maximus' Thought

Dialectics are thus part of the historical evolution of humanity, especially within a 'fallen' context. It is the duty of the Christian wise man to discern this underlying dialectic in contradistinction to the man of illusion who will remain on the surface of ontic definitions of things. The question is whether a similar dialectic has the final word. In the latter sense, Maximus is an anti-dialectical philosopher, since he believes that the Good proper will be achieved in a way that is not influenced by evil. The Good proper is defined by itself. And inversely, a good that needs evil in order to be defined is not the Good properly speaking. Saint Maximus articulates a strong anti-dialectical philosophy in a conscious reaction against Origenism, which he rejected exactly because he discerned that it made Good dependable on evil. This anti-dialectical principle is formulated with great clarity in such an anti-Origenistic context in the *Ambiguum* 7: 'For whatever is not good and desirable in itself, and that does not attract all motion to itself, strictly speaking cannot be the Beautiful (καλόν). Neither would it be capable of satisfying the desire of those who find delight in it. Moreover, those who espouse such a theory would be indebted to evil, since through it they were instructed in what was proper and right, learning much better the condition of fixity in the Beautiful. They would have to acknowledge, in other words, that evil is of necessity the origin of the Beautiful, and—if they knew how to think consistently—that evil is even more beneficial than nature itself, since it teaches them what is to their own advantage, and gives birth to the most precious of all possessions, I mean love …'.[27] It is notable that the term for 'beautiful' is 'καλόν', which possesses not only an aesthetic but also an ethical value, having evil as its opposite. For Maximus, therefore, the necessity to define the Good and the

---

[26] See *Maximus the Confessor. On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 2 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 40 (PG 91:1276B).

[27] See *Maximus the Confessor. On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 79–81 (PG 91:1069D–1072A).

Beautiful in themselves without a reference to evil as their antithesis has the utmost evidence: It suffices as an ultimate argument to refute the Origenistic version of the divine-human drama, which regarded evil as a sort of useful or even necessary experience. A more general anti-dialectical gnosiological principle is formulated in *Ad Thalassium* 44, where Maximus states that the knowledge of one being entails the ignorance of its opposite, just as the eye cannot know what is upwards without turning away from what is downwards.[28] This gnosiological division also has existential significance, since it is God himself who wills this unmixed knowledge of opposites in order for evil not to become eternal through a possible mixture with the Good which would conserve it.[29] The non-dialectical definitions of Good and evil thus guarantee the eschatological imposition of limits upon the latter. The same is true also for being which is not defined by non-being, for light which is not defined by darkness, and for life which is not defined by death.[30] Such crucial passages are found in early works of Maximus and thus form the ontological and existential presuppositions for his later anti-Monoenergistic engagement, which is usually more concrete and technical.

In a much later work and in a Christological context, Saint Maximus is reported to have reacted against those who think that beings are defined by comparison and juxtaposition, the one being the cause of the other ('ἀλληλαίτια').[31] The extract is from the *Disputatio cum Pyrrho,* the paternity and the time of redaction of which are not certain. It might have been composed by one of Maximus' disciples, reporting his master's views in response to Pyrrhus' Monoenergistic arguments at a date as late as 655 or even later.[32] In any case, this concrete passage is in accordance with the line of thought developed in the *Opusculum* 5. Maximus claims, in a Christological anti-Monoenergistic context, that the two operations of Christ should be defined in themselves and not by comparison with one another. The reason is that Maximus wishes to avoid a situation in which the divine operation would be efficacious and

---

[28] 'Ἀλλ᾽ οὐδέ τι τῶν ἐκ Θεοῦ καὶ μετὰ Θεὸν λογικῶν οὐσιῶν ἔχει ὁμοῦ τε καὶ κατὰ ταὐτὸν ἐν τῷ τῆς διανοίας ἁπλῷ κινήματι κατὰ σύνθεσιν ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων ὑφισταμένην τὴν γνῶσιν. Διότι πέφυκεν ἡ θατέρου τῶν ἀλλήλοις ἀντικειμένων γνῶσις τῆς τοῦ ἑτέρου ποιεῖσθαι γνώσεως ἄγνοιαν. Ἀμιγὴς γὰρ τῶν ἀντικειμένων ἡ γνῶσις καὶ παντάπασιν ἀσυνύπαρκτος, ἐπείπερ ἡ τοῦδε γνῶσις τὴν θατέρου τῶν ἀντικειμένων συνίστησιν ἄγνοιαν, ὥσπερ οὔτε ὀφθαλμὸς τοῦ ἄνω τε ὁμοῦ καὶ τοῦ κάτω, καὶ τῶν ἐφ᾽ ἑκάτερα κατὰ ταυτόν, χωρὶς τῆς πρὸς θάτερον ἰδιαζούσης ἐπιστροφῆς καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πάντῃ κεχωρισμένης, ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι.' See *Quaestiones ad Thalassium I* (CCSG 7), 301, lines 43–54 (PG 90:416CD).

[29] *Ibid.*, 301–302, lines 64–68 (PG 90:417A).

[30] See Bram Roosen and Peter van Deun, 'A Critical Edition of the *Quaestiones ad Theopemptum* of Maximus the Confessor (CPG 7696)', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 55, no. 1–2 (2003): 65–79 (PG 90:1397C).

[31] See Marcel Doucet, *Dispute de Maxime le Confesseur avec Pyrrhus. Introduction, texte critique et notes*, PhD Thesis (Montreal: University of Montreal, Institut d'Études Médiévales, 1972), 606–607 (PG 91:349CD): 'οὐδενὸς γὰρ, καθόλου φάναι, ὕπαρξις ἐκ παραθέσεως ἢ ἐκ συγκρίσεως γινώσκεται ἢ ὁρίζεται· ἢ οὕτω δ᾽ ἂν ἀλληλαίτια εὑρεθήσονται τὰ ὄντα πράγματα. …Ἀλλ᾽ ἄπαγε· πολλῆς γὰρ ὄντως ἀβελτηρίας ἐστὶ ταῦτα.'

[32] See Jacques Noret, 'La rédaction de la *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (CPG 7698) de Saint Maxime le Confesseur serait-elle postérieure à 655?', *Analecta Bollandiana* 117 (1999): 291–296.

the human one passive, or, similarly, the divine operation would be the good one, while the human would be contrasted as evil. For Maximus, both natural operations are good and efficacious, but present a natural alterity which is nonetheless bridged by their accord and cooperation inside the same hypostasis. The natural alterity between the two operations does not entail a dialectic between activity and passivity or between good and evil. The human operation of Christ is active and efficacious when it performs what is specific to it, even though it does undergo the passion of divinization, the latter being beyond the limits of human nature. In other words, the passion of what is beyond human nature does not exclude but rather confirms the activity of what is according human nature. In this sense Maximus' Christology proper is anti-dialectical.

A similar anti-dialectical stance could be found in his approach to the definition of love. In its ontological foundation, love cannot be defined by its opposite, be it egoism (φιλαυτία) or hate (μῖσος), even though the latter can be its opposite inside history: *i.e.* hate (μῖσος) is the opposite of love when the latter is considered as the virtue which is specific to the irascible part of the soul.[33] In Maximus' *Second Letter,*[34] however, love is considered to be the sum of all virtues and the goal of all activity, tantamount to union with God and divinization. In this ontological depth, love has no opposite properly speaking. *Φιλαυτία* as a historical opposite of love does not mean that love depends on it for its definition. *Φιλαυτία* is rather a cutting off of man's path to God in his historical evolution. It is a turning of ourselves into self-sufficient idols and a historical missing of the eschatological goal which is in itself absolute.

The Christological Dialectic as the Dialectic of Exiting Dialectics

At the same time, Maximus could envisage a sort of 'last dialectic', *i.e.* a dialectic of exiting dialectics. This is more obvious if we consider again Maximus' Christology, but from a complementary angle. Maximus thinks that in Christ the divine operation does not prevail over the human one, because that would entail a passion also for the divine operation. What is the case in Christology is a Chalcedonian simultaneous communion and differentiation of the two operations, in which the divine operation is impassible, while the human operation is in accordance and cooperation with divine preservation, whatever their respective differences. The absolute impassibility of the divine operation is the ontological foundation of the exit from the dialectic of power between the presumed dominating and dominated element. There are, however, some more concrete issues about the ways in which Christ overcomes the

---

[33] See, for example, *Capitum de Charitate Centuria* 3.3 (PG 90:1017C); 4.15 (PG 90:1052A); 4.44 (PG 90:1057*B*).

[34] (PG 91:392D–408B).

vicious dialectical pairs of pleasure and pain, anger and sorrow, sexual reproduction and death.

What is crucial is that Christ does not enter into the dialectical logic of domination (ἐπικράτεια). That is, he does not try to vanquish pain through pleasure *etc.*, because this endeavor is futile. Christ possesses an impassibility which is identical to his love, and this simultaneous 'impassibility of love' comes from the outside to break the dialectical spiral and finally annul it. At the same time, Christ does assume one part of the dialectical evolution in order to annul the dialectic from within by rendering it 'a judge of itself', or by 'judging the judgment' in Maximus' own terms.[35] Namely, Christ does assume pain, but without antecedent pleasure, so that the vicious circle of pleasure and pain is abolished from within. That is, within the vicious circle—where pain exists to put an ontological limit on and bring about the cessation of antecedent pleasure—when pain occurs without corresponding pleasure, this 'pure' and 'absolute' character of pain leads to an internal abolishment of the pain/pleasure correspondence. In other words, Maximus presents us with a narrative of 'cosmological justice'[36] reminiscent of the narrative of Anaximander, where 'τίσις' comes to bring an ontological balance.[37] The difference between the 'τίσις' of Anaximander and the Christological justice of Maximus is, in the case of the latter, an exit from the cosmological/historical justice of the correspondence between pleasure and pain, and an achievement of the eminent eschatological justice of love and impassibility. The superior justice of Christ constitutes a denunciation of the justice of the world. The Maximian soteriological narrative is that the 'injustice' of pleasure is 'judged from within' by the assumption of pain without antecedent pleasure, and since this pain is also 'unjust', or rather 'uncaused', the historical dialectic is broken and humanity is brought to the Christological level of impassible love. However, man, and especially 'lapsarian' man, cannot arrive at the end of the dialectic immediately, but he needs to pass from this dialectic of pleasure and pain, following through an *imitatio Christi,* the Christological exit from the dialectic. The latter consists in being ready to assume pain, and more importantly to assume the 'uncaused and unjust' pain, *i.e.* the pain which is not the consequence nor the limit of pleasure. Of course, a simple human being cannot achieve this in the absolute Christological way, but Christ sets a model which is to be followed by humanity, even if human beings cannot apply it in all its purity.

---

[35] See *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium I* (CCSG 7), 289, lines 67–69 (PG 90:408CD): '…τὴν ἐμὴν ἑκουσίως ὑποδὺς φύσει κατάκρισιν [ὁ Χριστὸς], ἀκατάκριτος ὑπάρχων τὴν προαίρεσιν, ἵνα τὴν ἐμὴν προαιρετικήν τε καὶ φυσικὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ κατάκρισιν κατακρίνῃ…'

[36] This principle is formulated explicitly in *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium II* (CCSG 22), 85, lines 27–30 (PG 90:628B-C): 'Πᾶς γὰρ πόνος, ὡς αἰτίαν τῆς ἰδίας γενέσεως ἔχων κατ᾽ ἐνέργειαν προηγουμένην τὴν ἡδονήν, χρέος ἐστὶ δηλαδὴ φυσικῶς κατ᾽ αἰτίαν παρὰ πάντων τῶν μετειληφότων τῆς φύσεως ἐκτιννύμενον'.

[37] For a comparison between the Maximian notion of 'χρέος ἐκτιννύμενον' and the relative notions of 'κατὰ τὸ χρεών' and 'τίσις' in Anaximander, see Nikos Matsoukas, *Κόσμος, Ἄνθρωπος, Κοινωνία κατὰ τὸν Μάξιμο Ὁμολογητή* (Αθήνα: Γρηγόρης, 1979), 116.

The assumption of death by Christ happens in the same way, that is, without a prior assumption of γέννησις, *i.e.* of sexual reproduction. This means that the futile logic of sexual reproduction is abolished from within. This is, according to the Maximian interpretation, the meaning of the Crucifixion, which is linked to the dogma of 'Virgin Birth' without pleasure and corruption. The fact that Christ assumed pain and death without antecedent pleasure (ἡδονή) and sexual reproduction means that he abolished a vicious circle. In other words, he assumed the 'last' pain and the 'last' death in the Crucifixion, *i.e.* the death that brings us out of the vicious circle of pleasure and pain, as well as the one of reproduction through sexuality and mortality. For René Girard, the Crucifixion is the 'last sacrifice', the one that brings us out of the vicious circle of the need for continuous sacrifices.[38] In a Maximian idiom we would say that the Crucifixion is the 'last' pain and the 'last' death, since we are thus brought out of the respective vicious circles that we have observed. One could equally state that, even though Maximus is not so explicit about this question, in the Crucifixion Christ assumes the last 'sorrow' (λύπη), which takes us out of the vicious circle of sorrow and anger (ὀργή). But the foundation of the mystery of the Crucifixion is that Christ assumes the position of the dominated, *i.e.* the position of the weak, in order to abolish the position of the dominator, and thus the whole vicious circle or rather spiral of the dialectic of domination. The assumption of one part of the dialectic of domination by Christ happens in order to cancel the perpetuation of this dialectic and eventually abolish it. Just as in Girard the Crucifixion is a sacrifice—but a sacrifice which denounces the sacrificial logic, revealing its falsehood and saving us from it—in a similar way Maximus believes Christ's assumption of the dominated position occurs in a way that guarantees the abolition of the dialectic of power and the establishment of the new 'justice' of impassible love.

One could thus summarize Maximus' stance towards dialectics in the following way: i) On the one hand, Maximus believes that beings and concepts must be defined in themselves and that the Good should not depend on evil for its own definition. This anti-dialectical stance is relevant to the ontological and eschatological purity of beings and their knowledge. ii) On the other hand, he stresses the fact that a certain dialectic is peculiar to the historical or rather the 'lapsarian' condition. This dialectic entails vicious circles where each position brings about a necessary reaction which however preserves the position and perpetuates it. This dialectic could also be seen as a 'false justice', *i.e.* a cyclical justice, which does not offer a way out. Even though this justice is 'false', it is also necessary, because it prevents evil becoming absolute. iii) In Christology, there is also a 'last' dialectic, in the sense that Christ assumes the supposedly 'negative' part of a dialectical pair in order to annul this vicious dialectic

---

[38] See for example, René Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde : Recherches avec Jean-Michel Oughourlian* et Guy Lefort (Paris: Grasset, 1978); *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1999).

and its false justice. Then, after the pain and the crucifixion of Christ takes place, a second confirmation of the positive and non-dialectical definition of beings occurs. This event is more eminent than the initial one, since it is only after exiting the dialectics in a Christological way that we truly have a life not threatened by death, a Good not dependent on evil, a true justice which is not that of futile retribution, *etc*.

This threefold schema could be compared to Maximus' theory about God's three wills. In the eighty-third question of the *Quaestiones et Dubia*, Maximus says that there are three wills of God, namely his good will (εὐδοκία), his will according to concession (συγχώρησις), and his will according to dispensation (οἰκονομία).[39] One could claim that, at the level of God's εὐδοκία, beings are only defined in a pure and positive way beyond any negativity associated with lapsarian existence. However, God also concedes to (συγχωρεῖ) the historical fallen condition, in which domination entails a dialectical spiral of continuous reactions and a 'false justice' which perpetuates the temptation of injustice. At a third level, God tries to save man from this vicious circle through Christ. Christ affirms the good will of God, *i.e.* he receives the nature of beings in their positive definition. In this sense, Christ's two natures are conceived in their positive alterity and not in a dialectical contrast. At the same time, Christ also assumes the 'negative' part of the dialectic. The latter constitutes a will according to οἰκονομία and not a will according to εὐδοκία. Thus, Christ assumes historical negativity in order to offer a novel positivity to man. For example, the Crucifixion is arguably a will according to οἰκονομία and not a will according to εὐδοκία; nevertheless, it is the foundation of our salvation. This threefold schema could also explain the ambivalent role of the devil. The devil can be considered as the 'enemy' of God, since he is opposing the divine εὐδοκία. He has a sort of parasitic subsistence at the level of God's concession (συγχώρησις). At this level, he is sometimes also conceived as a 'servant' of God, in the sense that his reactions, for example his readiness to 'punish' humanity, constitute a 'false justice', which cannot but prevent the eternal and absolute character of sin, just as death puts limits on sinful life and pain to pleasure, *etc*.[40] God concedes to this, but this συγχώρησις is not his last word. In the end the devil is 'tricked' by Christ at the level of the οἰκονομία. When Christ enters the lapsarian dialectic, then the 'false justice' of devil as a 'punisher' (ἐκδικητής) is judged itself and humanity is freed from the latter's reach. For such reasons, one should not exaggerate by emphasizing the instrumentalization of evil and the devil by the divine plan. Maximus' pious way of thinking is quite far from notions of 'felix culpa' or of the devil being an instrument of God's plan.

[39] See *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones et Dubia* (CCSG 10), ed. José Declerck (Turnhout and Leuven: Brepols and Leuven University Press, 1982), 66 (PG 90:801B).
[40] I am referring to *Quaestiones ad Thalassium I* (CCSG 7), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel, 173–75 (PG 90:340D–341D), where devil is considered as both an enemy and a 'δοῦλος' of God in the context of an exegetical passage about the king of Babylon as an allegory of the devil.

We can observe this Christological 'dialectic of exit from the dialectic' in the very interesting *Quaestio* I.12 where Maximus treats the question of why Saint Peter is called 'Satan' by the Lord (Matt 16:23).[41] Saint Maximus refers to the etymology of the word 'Satan', which means 'adversary' or 'opposite' (ἀντικείμενος), and he thus insists in a pious way that Christ did not insult Saint Peter but merely characterized the latter's stance as opposite to the goal of salvation. What is very interesting for our purpose is that this 'opposite' stance consists in defining life and glory in a non-dialectical way. That is, Saint Peter could not understand that Christ's glory resides exactly in his debasement and that the life he offers can be received only through death. Maximus summarizes his thinking thus: 'the privations of the Lord became habitus (ἕξεις) for us, as his death became life for us and his debasement became glory for us'.[42] It is here that the non-dialectical stance is that of 'Satan', whereas the dialectical one is that of Christ. However, this is only because we are now at the level of the divine οἰκονομία and not at that of the divine εὐδοκία. In other words, Christ has assumed death and debasement in order to affirm life and glory in a novel mode outside the vicious circularity of the fallen condition.

The divine οἰκονομία towards the devil is described in a very curious but revealing passage in *Ad Thalassium* 64, where in the context of an allegorical exegesis of the book of Jonah, Maximus states that the worm which destroyed Jonah's bush is an allegory for Christ.[43] The context of this exegesis is that Christ as 'worm' destroyed the 'bush' which is an allegory for the Jewish 'corporeal' cult of the Lord, which is focused on the 'letter' of the Scripture instead of its 'spirit'. Jonah's tent would then be an allegory for Jerusalem and its temple, whereas the city of Nineveh would symbolize the Christian Church which consists of former pagans who have received divine grace after their repentance. What is interesting is that Maximus presents two additional reasons for the 'worm' being an allegory of Christ: i) Firstly, worms are supposed by Maximus to reproduce asexually. They are thus considered to symbolize Christ, who did not participate in sexual reproduction, as he was born from the Virgin, according to the Christian dogma. ii) Secondly, worms are used as bait and Christ is supposed to be the bait which has lured the devil. According to this narrative, the devil was the first to lure humanity by the promise of self-divinization. Subsequently, however, the devil was himself tricked by Christ who, by receiving mortal human flesh and by actually dying on the Cross, convinced the evil one that the power of death was applicable also to him. But since Christ was not part of the vicious relationship between pleasure and pain or between birth and death, the devil was lured and by the resurrection of Christ he was forced to vomit the humanity that

---

[41] *Quaestiones et Dubia* (CCSG 10), ed. José Declerck, 143–144 (PG 90:793B–796A).

[42] '…αἱ τοῦ Κυρίου στερήσεις ἡμῶν ἕξεις ἐγένοντο, οἷον, ὁ αὐτοῦ θάνατος ἡμῖν ζωὴ γέγονεν, ἡ αὐτοῦ ἀτιμία ἡμῖν ἐγένετο δόξα', *ibid*., 143–44 (PG 90:793B).

[43] *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium II* (CCSG 22), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel, 217–219 lines 484–508 (PG 90:712D–713B).

he had previously 'swallowed'. It should be noted that the figures of the devil, the snake in Eden, and death are obviously identified here. This curious comparison of Christ with a worm recapitulates the Maximian soteriological narrative that I have tried to demonstrate thus far. This soteriological narrative has two parts: i) On the one hand, Christ does not participate in the fallen vicious circles which are provoked by pleasure and sexuality. ii) On the other, he does assume the negative part of the dialectic by his death. Very interestingly, this is viewed as a 'trickery' on the part of God who lures the devil. The 'dialectical trickery' in Maximus' view is reminiscent of the trickery of the Spirit in Hegel. The devil seeks to attack Christ as he seems to be a simple man. But by this destructive urge he serves the plan of salvation, by being forced to 'vomit' out humanity. There is obviously a combination of two different imageries here. On the one hand, the fish which is lured by the bait, and on the other, someone who is forced to vomit after having received a remedy or poison. The latter arguably reminds us of the figure of the ancient '*pharmakos*'. The basic idea is that a poison could also act as a remedy by forcing someone to vomit a food with malicious effects. In a similar sense, some men could act as '*pharmakoi*', by assuming all evil and by forcing society to metaphorically 'vomit' through their sacrifice the evil that it previously held within it, thereby purifying it. Christ as a 'worm' could be seen as a '*pharmakos*', but in a sense that is different from the ancient understanding. Christ assumes pain and death, *i.e.* the results of sin, but he does not assume sin, pleasure and sexuality in themselves, unlike the ancient *pharmakoi* who also assumed guilt. On the other hand, the one who is forced to vomit is the devil as opposed to the human community. Rather, it is humanity itself that is vomited. This brings us to another question: in what sense is Christ an alternative '*pharmakos*'? Christ does use a sort of homeopathic principle like the '*pharmakoi*'. He strives to vanquish death by death, pain by pain, the vicious dialectic by assuming a part of this dialectic. He labours to save humanity by becoming human and mortal. But, on the other hand, by being God and outside sin, he does not simply lead to a temporary homeopathic purification but to the final salvation, in which humanity is definitely 'vomited out' of the vicious dialectic.

Saint Maximus the Confessor's Understanding of Ἐγκράτεια.

After having clarified the Maximian soteriological narrative, we can now touch upon the issues raised by the second notion which is linked to power ('κράτος'), namely ἐγκράτεια (continence).[44] The fundamental ontological truth of the issue is that Christ is not 'continent' (ἐγκρατής), but 'impassible' (ἀπαθής). One could possibly claim that, just as Maximus the Confessor had discerned the vicious circles

---

[44] For the importance of ἐγκράτεια as a virtue of the desiring part of the soul in the thought of Saint Maximus the Confessor see *Capitum de Charitate Centuria* 4.15 (PG 90:1052A); 4.44 (PG 90:1057B); 4.57 (PG 90:1061A); 4.75 (PG 90:1065CD).

between pleasure and pain, sexuality and death, dominating and being dominated *etc.*, in a similar way he has equally diagnosed a vicious circle in the history of Christianity, namely the one between Monophysitism and Nestorianism. What Maximus had tried to achieve is to prove that what he perceived as the great heresies of his age, namely Monothelitism and Monoenergism are the descendants of both Monophysitism and Nestorianism, since there is an underlying dialectical affinity between the two fundamental Christological heresies. One could state this affinity briefly by saying that the logic of Nestorianism is based on κράτος (power, domination), whereas that of Monophysitism on κρᾶσις (mixture, confusion). However, for Maximus, κράτος and κρᾶσις are linked. Nestorianism proposes a 'continent' Christ, *i.e.* a Christ who exercises power over his human passions and dominates them. Monophysitism proposes a Christ in whom there is a union between God and man to the extent that human passions totally vanish, but in a way that any real sense of humanity is equally extinguished. Saint Maximus, conversely, stresses the importance of passions for integrity and salvation[45] through their transformation. What Maximus' analysis shows is that in fact Monoenergism constitutes a vicious dialectical unity of Nestorianism and Monophysitism[46] (the same could arguably be said of Monothelitism[47]). Just like Nestorianism, Monoenergism is based on κράτος, because it proposes a Christ in whom his divine operation dominates his human one. At the same time, this κράτος (domination) entails a κρᾶσις (mixture), since the result of this power relation between the two operations is a mixture, following the example of a mixture of *e.g.* gold and copper. The ultimate result of this mixture is the extinction of the human operation (in a way that smacks of Monophysitism), as well as the affection of the divine operation which ceases to be impassible.

But if we are to really follow the Maximian logic, then the ultimate consequence of Monoenergism is another heresy, namely that of Theopaschism. If we follow the logic of 'Monoenergism according to domination', then the human operation does not really vanish; it is rather subjugated, but then continues to affect the dominant divine operation, thus undermining its impassibility. The logic of Maximus' proposition is to begin by revealing the deep internal relation between Nestorianism and

---

[45] For the positive role of passions in Maximian soteriology see the excellent studies: Paul Blowers, 'Gentiles of the Soul: Maximus the Confessor on the Substructure and Transformation of the Human Passions', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, no. 1 (1996): 57–85; Paul Blowers, 'Hope for the Passible Self: The Use and Transformation of the Human Passions in the Fathers of the *Philokalia*', in *The Philocalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, eds. Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 216–29.

[46] It is characteristic that in the *Opusculum* 5 (PG 91:64A–65A) Maximus refutes the positions of the Monoenergists by using some arguments drawn from the Anti-Monophysite tradition, but he is equally accusing them of being in danger of manifesting 'themselves as having the same mind with the demented Nestorius' (PG 91:64C).

[47] The fact that Monothelitism (as well as Monoenergism) had combined elements from different and even opposite heresies of the first centuries is very well shown in Demetrios Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature and Will in the Christology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9–98.

Monophysitism as it is expressed in the fact that Monoenergism is their common descendant. Then the positive response would be to articulate a Christology in which Christ would transcend both κράτος and κρᾶσις. This would happen if we conceive of a Christ with two full natures and equally two full operations: By his divine nature, Christ offers a love that is identical to impassibility. In his human nature, Christ assumes weakness and a potentially dominated state, but only in order to abolish from within the vicious logic of any dialectic based on power and domination. Saint Maximus' point of departure about the notion of 'κράτος' is the theology of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, especially the crucial phrase 'since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death (τὸ κράτος τοῦ θανάτου)—that is, the devil' (Heb 2:14). But in Maximus' own metaphysical idiom, the devil's power of death (κράτος τοῦ θανάτου) lies in the 'false justice' of the two vicious circles between, on the one hand, birth and death and, on the other, between pleasure and pain, which perpetuate an inescapable logic of domination.[48] For this reason, Christ's assumption of human weakness is not a celebration of domination. It is rather the indication of power relations in the context of an impassible accord and cooperation (συμφωνία, συνέργια) with divine impassible love.

The Christian ascetic is thus the man who places himself in the position of weakness, that is in the position of the one who can be potentially dominated, but who submits to this only out of pious respect for a God who is impassible and does not wish to dominate his creature. The placing of oneself in a position of weakness seeks to annul from within the vicious spiral of dominator and dominated, or, at the level of Christian history, the vicious spiral between different forms of Nestorianism and Monophysitism, which are but symptoms of a deeper pathology, namely that of the imagining a dominant God.

It is, however, to be noted that each simple human being ('ψιλός ἄνθρωπος') is not yet the Christ. Even if Christology is the ontological foundation and the goal of anthropology, there is a distinction between them. At a deeper ontological level, Maximus might claim that some historical or fallen conditions are not the case in Christology; however, at the anthropological level a simple human being cannot pretend that she has already transcended them inside history. The most characteristic example is that of the gnomic will. The gnomic will, *i.e.* a will that includes deliberation and fragmentation, is excluded from Christ, who bears universal human nature. However, a simple human being should not pretend that she has already transcended her gnomic will inside history. On the contrary, she is called to an ascetic struggle to coordinate her fragmented gnomic will with the wills of other fragmented human beings inside the Church and finally concede this gnomic will to God only in the eschaton, that is after the end of history. A Christian ascetical

---

[48] See, for example, *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium II* (CCSG 22), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel, 89, lines 85–94 (PG 90:629C-D).

theology would comprise both moments: on the one hand, the eschatological perspective according to which the gnomic will does not have the final word, and, on the other, the realism that affirms inside history an assumption of one's concrete gnomic will is necessary as an act of avoiding illusory 'easy' salvations.[49] The same is true for continence (ἐγκράτεια). On the one hand, Christ is impassible and not continent. On the other hand, a simple human being should not pretend that she has already reached impassibility. For this reason, continence plays a very crucial role in the ascetic life and Maximus has indeed devoted many passages to exalt it as a virtue that is particular to the desiring part of the soul. However, one should remember that continence does not have the final word, *i.e.* the eschatological word.[50] It is important to remember that, since it means that the ascetic ideal of Maximus the Confessor is very far from what Michel Foucault describes as the encratetic ideal of Hellenic Antiquity.[51] The Christian ascetic is the one who performs continence not from the stance of the dominant but from the stance of the weak, since she shows pious respect for a Trinitarian God who is not himself dominating his creatures. By adopting this stance, the Christian ascetic asks God to come himself and lead her through ἐγ-κράτεια to the final concession of every ἐγ-κράτεια to God in order to achieve divine impassibility by grace. In other words, Christian continence is indispensable as an initial stage of the activation of human nature in a way that would avoid the vices and cultivate the respective virtues of its capacities, including ascetic violence over one's nature if necessary. On the other hand, in its ontological and eschatological foundation, Christian continence does not entail power as is the case in the Hellenic thought of Late Antiquity. It is a humble self-giving to impassibility as a divine grace that is identical to love.

---

[49] I have developed this ambiguity of the notion of gnomic will in Maximian anthropology in: Dionysios Skliris, '*Πρόσωπο, Ἄτομο καὶ Γνώμη στὴ σκέψη τοῦ ἁγίου Μαξίμου τοῦ Ὁμολογητῆ*', *Θεολογία* 84, no. 3 (2013): 65–110.

[50] A structurally similar dialectic takes place between πάθος and τέχνη ('art' or 'technology'). As Joshua Lollar puts it: 'Following Origen's intuition that human intelligence is developed and revealed in the face of pathos precisely as technê, an intuition that Maximus follows insofar as he regards the philosophical life of ethics, contemplation of nature, and theology as technê, we see that pathos and technê are bound up for Maximus with revelation- of God and the world to man and of man to himself. The possibilities of and our responsibilities for technê, therefore, are open to the manifestation of 'the truth that yet remains hidden (φανερῶσαι τὴν τέως κεκρυμμένην ἀλήθειαν, *Ambiguum* 8, [PG 91:1104D–1105A])', which is what is shown in the saints, or to its obscurity. A technê that decisively obscures pathos in its attempt to transcend the world participates in the obscuring of truth itself. The 'revealing' (*Entbergen* [according to Martin Heidegger]) that is technê runs the risk of burying the more fundamental revealing that is pathos, unless it is pathos itself that is revealed by technê. It is this final possibility that we may take as Maximus' word on "the question concerning technology"', see Joshua Lollar, 'Pathos and Technê in St Maximus the Confessor', in *Knowing the purpose of creation through the resurrection: Proceedings of the Symposium on St Maximus the Confessor. Belgrade, October 18–21, 2012*, ed. Maxim Vasiljević (Alhambra, California and Belgrade: Sebastian Press, 2013), 238. Following a logic similar to the one developed by Lollar, one could claim that the goal of ἐγκράτεια is to reveal the truth of the passion and not to obscure it, a truth which however happens through eschatological transformation.

[51] See Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité*, vol. 2 & 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

BOOK REVIEWS

Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World
BY PAUL M. BLOWERS
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 368. ISBN 978–0–19–967394–0

Maximus the Confessor today—some decades after M.-J. Le Guillou proclaimed him a source of theological wisdom *a l'égal de S. Augustin*—is widely recognised by nearly all modern scholars as a cornerstone of Patristic thought. He is an author whose ideas can solve difficult theological problems East and West. Yet, at the same time, they are able to help Christian theology to establish a profound dialogue with an array of disciplines, including the natural and social sciences. However, though we witness an ever-increasing number of Maximian studies, there is a lack of works able to provide an in-depth synthesis of Maximian thought and understand it holistically, in an existential way, in dialogue with a whole host of philosophical and theological questions, ancient and modern alike.

In his outstanding book, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transfiguration of the World*, Paul Blowers demonstrates that Maximus was absolutely not a scholastic and that his thought was produced precisely as a response to the need for universal knowledge in his era. Blowers's book reveals a similar modern longing by informing its reader that, in order to understand Maximus, the need for a synthetic approach is both necessary and urgent; that is, Maximus can be understood only *in a Maximian way.* As such, the most important achievement of this book is that it is *itself a Maximian book.* This Maximian approach is reflected in the way in which Blowers employs some of Balthasar's intuitions concerning *Theodramatics* in order to understand the Maximian concept of the 'Logos-at-play', Marion's *saturated phenomena,* or Levinas's concept of *otherness*; this approach is utilized in order to understand the *transfiguration,* the *interpretive dance with the Logos,* or the *Logos's strategies for deification* within the perspective of a *teleology and eschatology of beauty.*

Another distinctive characteristic of this book is that it is both systematic and historical. Its initial section strives to offer fertile solutions to a series of historical problems, beginning with the questions arising from the conflict between the different *vitae* of Maximus and ending with the phenomenal opposition between the early and mature Maximian definitions of will. Blowers very accurately clarifies that Maximus is not *against* the Areopagite but rather in a certain continuity with him, thereby resisting all exaggerated distinctions between a more 'typological' (hori-

zontal-historical) approach in Maximus and a more 'symbolistic' (vertical-hierar-chical) one in Dionysius. In Blowers's opinion, this dialectical distinction between these two authors is an oversimplification. Moreover, he adamantly demonstrates that Maximus clearly distances himself from an Augustinian doctrine of original sin, maintaining the Greek Patristic consensus that affirms Adam's transmission of the *consequences* of his sin, but not the guilt itself. In this vein, Blowers clarifies that when the Confessor explains how sin, passion, and death have become 'laws of nature', he is describing a situation that is purely 'circumstantial'. Blowers goes on to describe the Confessor's Neo-Irenaean perspective, asserting that the incarnational mystery of deification addresses both Adam's natural limitations as creature and his sinful abuse of the natural faculties. As he argues, 'Adam was both an inchoate being, needing completion or perfection, and a sinner needing redemptive grace' (108). Thus, Christ simultaneously recapitulated the old Adam and inaugurated the new Adam, establishing a 'newer mode of creaturely being'. The author is also careful to highlight the Chalcedonian presuppositions of Maximian *cosmic Christology,* eluci-dating the Chalcedonian provenance of the Confessor's concept of *theandric energy,* as well as his defence of Christ's two natural wills and his affirmation of the ultimate eschatological/ontological dimension of Christ's embodiment. In Blowers's words,

> …in this perspective, creation and salvation are ongoing, seamlessly inter-connected aspects of the single divine initiative, or *energeia,* God's urge to share his glory with an 'other'. Embodiment, in turn, is the Creator's primary strategy to preserve, renew, and transfigure that created other, drawing it into the ever more intimate communion with himself that is deification. (139)

Additionally, Blowers offers new insights concerning the problem of the sexes at the end times, a difficulty that has been variously approached by Maximian scholars. He successfully advances beyond von Balthasar, who claims that sexual differenc-es will ultimately and thoroughly be erased in both a personal and bodily sense. Blowers demonstrates that there is no reason why the difference between male and female must absolutely evaporate in the age to come, as some modern fans of sexual fluidity would perhaps like to happen. For the author, in God's Kingdom, 'humans hope and move towards ever new transformations, new ecstasies of *eros* reaching for fulfilment, *eros* now being an instrument of passion and self-giving rather than impassioned self-interest' (221).

Blowers's positive view of Gregory Palamas will come as a pleasant surprise to the Orthodox reader, who, according to the author, stands in continuity with Maximian theology. He demonstrates in particular the Maximian roots of the Palamite understanding of the experience of uncreated light, as well as his concept of energies. Blowers affirms Palamas's debt to Maximus while acknowledging the fact that Palamas never explicitly connects this concept with the Maximian concept

of the *logoi*, likely because of his opponent's familiarity with the Neo-platonic origins and context of this concept. The author dedicates a special chapter to Maximus' legacy, East and West, dealing with all the essential uses of Maximus in the early Medieval West and in Middle Byzantine Scholasticism, affirming the significance of Maximus' thought in the Hesychast Controversy, and, of course, in the tradition of *Philokalia.* Blowers also surprises the reader with his profound way of understanding the modern debate between the Orthodox theologians of personhood and their opponents, putting, as I think, a full stop to this lengthy discussion. He recognises that the problem created by some Orthodox personalists is their ontologizing of person separately from nature. This is accompanied by a simultaneous degradation of nature, which then becomes a burden of necessity or a dead sameness, a burden or abstract universal that must be dominated or possessed by an *ecstatic* person. In so doing, the proponents of this view create a sort of false philosophical hierarchy of beings, in which some are more divine and gracious than others. The attribution of these implicitly existentialist claims to Maximus ultimately works to completely destroy his invaluable *wholism.* Thus, the answer to this difficulty is not, of course, to create a separate *ontology of nature* in order to counterbalance the detached ontology of personhood. Rather, it is essential to show precisely through Maximus' thought that it is nature itself which consists, as a gracious gift, in *personal dialogues,* divinely offered out of love and Eucharistically returned as a circulation of gifts. Such an approach ultimately makes nature a vehicle of freedom and divinisation. There has also been an ongoing debate as to whether or not these incorrect interpretations of Maximus possess the potential to also distort his Christology, and whether or not they successfully represent his understanding of the Trinity or the Church. Blowers, however, does not enter into these specific discussions.

This book is the best general introduction to Maximus' thought of which I am aware, and it is written after many decades of fruitful thinking upon the Confessor's texts. As I have already noted, it is one amongst very few books that—although they are of excellent academic quality—are invaluable because they represent a sort of *spiritual conversion.* As I stated above, Blowers's work is itself a *Maximian* book. Perhaps the author could also have brought Maximus into dialogue with some other prominent figures of modern theology. However, this is a task that can perhaps be undertaken by some of his most gifted readers, though even this road has now also been paved by him. In any case, Blowers's contribution will remain excitingly comprehensive and outstanding.

Nikolaos Loudovikos
Senior Editor, *Analogia*

SAINT MAXIM THE GREEK INSTITUTE
RESEARCH, PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION
OF SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS