

# DESIRE AND THE PRACTICAL PART OF THE SOUL ACCORDING TO MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR

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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.<sup>1</sup>

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'.

<sup>1</sup> 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.'<sup>2</sup>

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.'<sup>3</sup> Overcoming the passions and disciplining the flesh generally do not have a

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

<sup>3</sup> *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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>

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.'<sup>6</sup> 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.'<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> The soul's endeavours eventually lead to Goodness by virtue of the activity of reason (*λόγος*) and to truth through the activity of the mind (*νοῦς*). 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

<sup>4</sup> *Capita de caritate* 1.34.

<sup>5</sup> *The Disputation with Pyrrhus of our Father among the Saints Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Joseph P. Farrell (South Canaan, PA: St Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1990), 32.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140B5-10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> 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*.<sup>9</sup> 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.'<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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 gnostic will with this analysis: 'Because of this, then, the gnostic 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 gnostic will. For the Same had being itself, subsisting divinely, and thus naturally hath an inclination to the

<sup>9</sup> *Ambigua ad Iohannem* 7 (PG 91:1081D).

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

<sup>11</sup> 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'.<sup>12</sup>

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'.<sup>13</sup> 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 gnostic 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.<sup>14</sup>

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'.<sup>15</sup> 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 gnostic 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.<sup>16</sup> This would mean that Maximus' argument

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:308D).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, where the Greek text reads as follows: καθ' ἡμᾶς ζητήσας καὶ βουλευσάμενος.

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

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

<sup>16</sup> 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 gnostic will in Christ. Maximus thus succeeds in rewriting the prevailing theories of will and *apokatastasis*. 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 clarification 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' anthropology 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.'<sup>17</sup> Maximus bases his own perception that self-determination is the ontologically unifying principle within human beings on this sentence from Diadochus' *Gnostic Chapters*,

<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> However, the concept of will receives its most profound ontological content in the context of Maximus' Christological and anthropological reflections.<sup>19</sup> 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 gnostic will is related to this differentiation between the *logos* of nature and the *tropos* of existence.<sup>20</sup> Natural will (*θέλημα φυσικόν*) is the attribute through which nature exhibits its own dynamics and relates the gnostic 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. Gnostic 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.'<sup>21</sup> The gnostic 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.<sup>22</sup>

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

<sup>18</sup> See S. Toutekov, *Личност, Общност, Другост* (Велико Търново: Синтаγμα, 2009), 34–35.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> John Zizioulas, *Communion and Otherness* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 63–68.

<sup>21</sup> *The Disputation with Pyrrhus*, 30.

<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

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 (ὀρεξις) or longing (ἐφεισις) 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.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> 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,<sup>26</sup> the starting point of deliberation is some assumed end, which is an object both of thought and desire.

<sup>23</sup> *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:304CD); *The Disputation with Pyrrhus*, 24-25.

<sup>24</sup> ‘The Dialectics and Therapeutics of Desire in Maximus the Confessor’, *Vigiliae Christianae* 65, no. 4 (2011): 425-51.

<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1112a30 and 1112b13.



‘Choice is the deliberate desire of things in our power’.<sup>27</sup> 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’.<sup>28</sup> As we read in Nemesis 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’.<sup>29</sup>

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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> The term ‘wish’ (*boulesis*) was generally used in a sense practically equivalent to desire (*orexis*) and was sometimes used by Aristotle in that sense.<sup>32</sup> 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*].<sup>33</sup>

Maximus follows the tradition coming from Aristotle through Nemesis 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.

<sup>27</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1113a10-15.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Nemesis 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).

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima* 433a23-25.

<sup>31</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima* 434a10-15.

<sup>32</sup> 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).

<sup>33</sup> *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 (ἐφεις), which in turn motivates the urge towards a higher, experiential and participative 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.<sup>34</sup>

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.'<sup>35</sup> God, angels, and human beings are free in their natures and not by virtue of their self-definition.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup>

Maximus' teaching on will and his differentiation of natural and gnostic 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

<sup>34</sup> P. Blowers, 'The Dialectics and Therapeutics of Desire in Maximus the Confessor', *Vigiliae Christianae* 65, no. 4 (2011): 425-451.

<sup>35</sup> *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:293C).

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

<sup>37</sup> S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-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.'<sup>38</sup>

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

<sup>38</sup> See Toutekov, *Личност, Общност, Дружост*.

<sup>39</sup> 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 *prohairesis*, 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.