

MORAL JUDGEMENT IN MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR: REFLECTIONS ON AN ANALOGICAL ETHIC

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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 MacIntyre 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 Possible 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

orthodox Stoicism throughout his book.

⁸ As Blowers also notes in his 'Aligning and Reorienting the Passible Self', 343.

⁹ Cf. *Protagoras* 352bc, LCL, trans. W. R. M. Lamb, vol. 165 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1924). Terence Irwin, *The Development of Ethics*, 43, 75.

(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 (*παιδεία*), 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 *φρόνησις*.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 (*λογιστικόν*), 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 view³³—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 *ἔξις 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 opportunity 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 uncomfortable with the notion that incensiveness and appetite as well as the emotions associated 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 animalistic 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 irredeemably 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. Panagiotēs 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 Mitralaxis (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 ὀρεξις 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 ὀρεξις 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 (*ἄνοον 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 προπετῇ*).’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 *enkraatic* 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 (*φάυλος 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 (εὐλογος) use of sensible things and thought-images is productive of self-control, love, and knowledge. An irrational (ἄλογος) use brings about licentiousness, hatred, and ignorance'.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 contemplating 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* operations 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: Liverpool 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 ἐκάστῳ 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 multipliciously 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 *ὀρεξις 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 ἀνθυπόστατος) 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 ὀρεκτικῆν), but which is also 'a rational and vital' appetite (λογικὴ τε καὶ ζωτικὴ) 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 Mitralaxis (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 ‘actualities’ 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 difficulties 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 unfortunate’? 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, determined, 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 habituation 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: Büchervertriebsanstalt, 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’ (θεοειδής ἔξις) 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 Nemeseius 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.