

DIALOGICAL NATURE, ENOUSION PERSON, AND NON-ECSTATIC WILL IN ST MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR: THE CONCLUSION OF A LONG DEBATE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

² (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010).

³ *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011): 684–99.

⁴ (Paris: Cerf, 2012).

⁵ In *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through the Resurrection. Proceedings of the Symposium on Maximus the Confessor*, ed. Maxim Vasiljević (Alhambra: Sebastian Press, 2013), 85–113.

⁶ In Greek as *Ἐξί Φιλοσοφικές Ζωγραφίες* (Αθήνα: Ἴκαρος, 2011).

⁷ (Cambridge: James C. Clark, 2015).

⁸ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁹ *Participatio* 4 (2013): 258–86. http://www.tftorance.org/journal/participatio_vol_4_2013.pdf.

Let us begin with Christos Yannaras. Yannaras has been, and still is, one of the most prolific Christian thinkers of our epoch, and his work encompasses many fields of both theology and philosophical theology. I have positively engaged with various aspects of his thought in my own work, and our intellectual relationship spans from a genuine agreement—concerning, for example, his ontological interpretation of ecclesiology¹⁰—to a partial disagreement concerning his ontology of personhood. This disagreement centres on the author's initial *ambiguity*, as I have called it, concerning his understanding of nature. This initial ambiguity consisted in identifying in his revised and extended doctoral dissertation, *Person and Eros*,¹¹ nature with necessity and person with an *ec-static* freedom from nature, on the one hand, while still giving nature a chance by affirming the possibility for its acceptance when it exists in the natural *ecstasis* of *eros*, on the other. This is a view that comes close to that of Vladimir Soloviev as well as St Maximus the Confessor. However, as I strive to show elsewhere, Yannaras, in general, draws in his book on Heidegger's understanding of the concept of *mode of being* as concrete being *par excellence*, combining it with a Sartrean reading of *ekstasis* as the unique characteristic of human being instead of a given essence.¹² All these elements are then arranged and presented upon a Losskian canvas, and in a permanently anti-western perspective, since, as Yannaras believes, Heidegger represents an attempt to deconstruct Western thought. However, what is extremely positive in Yannaras' approach is his passionate emphasis upon the reality of the concrete and unique 'personal' human being and his tendency to resist all forms of an *ousiocratic/essentialistic* abrogation of personal otherness as a result of a moralistic or pietistic *pseudomorfosis* of Christian anthropology. Beyond our present disagreement, the value of his enterprise remains priceless.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 1) The Metropolitan starts by correctly affirming that for the Greek Patristic tradition there is no 'juxtaposition between nature and the human subject which we encounter in Francis Bacon, Descartes, Kant, and a whole philosophical tradition leading into modern existentialism'.¹⁷ This disjunction between nature and person was made by medieval scholastic thought, 'the first representing the "objective" and "necessary" reality and the second the "subjective" and "free" individual who can distance himself from nature'.¹⁸ This claim seems, at least at first sight, to be a real 'turn' for someone who until very recently affirmed that 'such an understanding of personhood as freedom *from* nature [author's italics] may be applied to the human condition in which nature is a "given" to the person: humans are born as a result of given natural laws'. For God, this freedom is established because of the divine Persons, and so, 'it is the Trinity that makes God free from the necessity of his essence'.¹⁹ Let us now see what the author proposes instead.
- 2) The main subject of our discussion is St Maximus the Confessor's theology on nature and person. It is according to the Confessor's theology that nature is now defined as an *abstract universal*, while person is the only real being, as the *possessor* of this—non-existent in itself—nature.²⁰ By speaking of nature in this way, the Metropolitan seems to use some texts that were first used by Torstein Tollefsen.²¹ Let us see those texts again.

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

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

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ (PG 91:264A).

²⁶ (PG 91:205B).

²⁷ (PG 91:552B–553C).

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

²⁹ (PG 91:553B).

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

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

³⁰ (PG 91:552CD).

³¹ (PG 91:553BC).

³² ‘Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor’, 90.

³³ *Ibid.*, 111.

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

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

³⁴ See note 38 below.

³⁵ 27ff.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Person and Homoousion

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

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

³⁹ *Ad Thalassium* 40 (PG 90:397BCD, 401CD).

⁴⁰ ‘Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor’, 90.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴² See generally N. Loudovikos, *Church in the Making*.

⁴³ 'Trinitarian Freedom', 206.

⁴⁴ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 289.

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

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

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

⁴⁵ ‘Person Instead of Grace and Dictated Otherness’, 690.

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

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

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

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

Hypostasis/Person and Atomon.

It has been argued that the Patristic tradition affirms a fundamental ontological and existential difference between person and individual or *atomon*. I am not aware of any Patristic text explaining this difference in this way. The only reason the formula ‘three atoma’ with reference to the Holy Trinity is rarely used in the Patristic tradition—though theologians of the status of St John Damascene did not hesitate to use it⁵⁰—is purely historical and has only to do with the fact that the Italian authors (and not the Greek Fathers!) identified the notion of with that of person, as Boethius explains, ‘because of our lack of terminology’.⁵¹ The same explanation is given by Gregory Nazianzen, who accepts the term person only because the Italians cannot make the distinction between and substance/nature, unless they call the former *person* ‘due to the poverty of their language’.⁵² Thus the term person

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

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

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

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

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

Maximus follows this line, absolutely identifying person with *atomon* and both of them with throughout his work. Although, for the historical reasons mentioned above, he prefers the term or person when speaking of the Trinity or Christ. It is then fruitless to search for texts juxtaposing *atomon* and *hypostasis*/person in Maximus' *oeuvre*, simply because Maximus never wanted and was of course unable to think in such a modern—Tillichean or otherwise—way. Thus the only Maximian text that Zizioulas utilizes is misread. It is precisely in this text⁵³ where Maximus, on the contrary, *completely identifies the concept of synthetic person with that of synthetic atomon*, just a few lines above (201C: ἐν ἀτόμῳ δὲ καὶ προσώπῳ πάντῃ τε καὶ πάντως, εἴπερ σύνθετον...) the text the Metropolitan has chosen (201D). After this identification of person with *atomon* made by Maximus in 201C, let us read again the text 201D in the Metropolitan's translation (which is correct): 'we cannot call *atomon* the synthetic person of Christ. *Because it has no relation with the division of the most general genus through subsequent inferior genoi into the most particular genus* [translator's italics].'⁵⁴ And Zizioulas concludes from this: '*Atomon* differs, therefore, fundamentally from *hypostasis* and *prosopon* (person), because it falls under the category of nature.'⁵⁵ However, Maximus does not contradict himself; what he says here is in fact totally different: he says that the *synthetic atomon* or, which is, as he explicitly asserts, the same thing, the *synthetic person* of Christ, cannot be called an *atomon* of a certain genus, *in the sense that Christ as existence is absolutely unique, i.e. it is impossible to find other persons/atomata of the genus 'Christ'*. Maximus by no means says that the person of Christ cannot be called *atomon*, as if *atomon* has supposedly to do with nature, while person lies above it.

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

⁵³ *Opuscula* (PG 91:201C–204A).

⁵⁴ 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 91.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Liber de Persona et duabus naturis, contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 3.

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

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

Natures and Person in Christology

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ See the following chapter.

⁶¹ (PG 91:553C–557D).

⁶² (PG 91:401B).

⁶³ (PG 91:297BC)

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

A Christology of the Will

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

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

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

⁶⁴ 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 98.

⁶⁵ (PG 91:292B, 293A, 304BCD).

⁶⁶ 'Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', 100.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁸ *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:308D).

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

So, if we claim that in Christ it is the Logos who wills, we thereby introduce three personal/hypostatic wills in God, and consequently, three Gods.⁷⁰

2) But who then wills in Christ? The Maximian answer is obvious: it is God himself in his entirety, *i.e.* the Son, who expresses the good will (*εὐδοκία*) of his Father, and realises it (*αὐτουργία*, *i.e.* he is the one who brings it forth) in the Holy Spirit, who co-operates (*συνεργία*).⁷¹ All the above constitute the tri-hypostatic expression of the one divine natural will, which is one and unique through *homoousion*. But *God here wills as a man*. Thus, Christ, as the one who brings forth this tri-hypostatic divine will, assumes human nature, and, consequently, he also assumes human natural will, not 'in his Person' but in his *enousios hypostasis*. And this assumption is only realised as a binding of the two natural wills together, in dialogical openness, without separation and without confusion, in a manner that Maximus does not hesitate to call *natural*, in the sense that it is real and concrete. Thus, we see the Triune God, naturally willing in Christ, both as God and as man.

3) What is most important here? We cannot accept any sort of passivity of human natural will, which is implied by the above claim that human will's deification is due to its expression and realisation by a 'divine Person'. We cannot accept this, first, because through the *Theotokos* the human natural will is also active in the Christ-event, in the exclusive sense that human nature is not only assumed by the Logos but also offered to him by humanity through and by the Mother of God. Second, because, as F.-M. Léthel has pertinently shown, behind any opposition between human and divine will in Christ

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* (PG 91:313CD).

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

⁷¹ *Ad Marinum* (PG 91:237D, 240B).

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

Metropolitan John seems to attribute to the person of Christ a sort of transcendental or ecstatic will, which ‘brings the two natural wills in harmony in Gesthemane’, the one desiring natural life, the other submission to the Father’s will,⁷³ because, it could not be otherwise possible for Christ to bring these two wills ‘in harmony’, unless he uses a third, more powerful and detached ‘personal’ will! However, on the one hand, it is impossible to think that there exists a separate divine hypostatic will of the Son, trying to submit to the Father’s separate divine will; this would result in a clear tritheism, according to the Patristic tradition. On the other hand, according to Léthel, who brings four Maximian texts in witness⁷⁴, Maximus saw in Gesthemane’s condescension precisely ‘the expression of Christ’s *human* will’. If we see Christ’s human will as somehow necessarily denying divine will, then this precisely results in the Monothelite position, which subsequently requires a hypostatic will in Christ to solve his problem. The union of the two wills is thus revealed in the relationship of the Son with his Father, as it is *humanly realised*, through a free human will, open—since it is Christ’s will—to the natural tri-hypostatic will of God, manifested in the *hypostasis* of Christ, who wills naturally and freely both as man and as God. Christ’s human hesitation, natural fear and repugnance of death, *etc.*, as described by the Patristic tradition, were not, according to the Confessor, ‘against’ his divine will, since they represent human ‘blameless and natural passions’, *which, as the sinful inclination is not present in Christ, they are not in natural opposition, but in a certain convergence (συμβαίνοντα) with him*.⁷⁵ Thus, these blameless passions do not represent any human volitional antithesis to the divine will, being also ultimately deified ‘through the absolute union with divinity’.⁷⁶ Maximus’ anti-Monothelite ‘revolution’ is precisely that Christ *wills only through, by, and according to nature(s), which cannot be conceived of by natures opposing each other*. Thus, the only possible reason for disharmony between the human and divine wills in Christ, for Maximus, would be *sin*. Since Christ is free of sin, it is impossible for him to have his two natural wills in disharmony,⁷⁷ needing, according to Zizioulas, some ‘personal’ harmonization, an assertion which would be practically identical with Monothelitism.

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

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

⁷³ ‘Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor’, 100.

⁷⁴ ‘La prière de Jésus a Gesthémani dans la controverse Monothélite’, 212.

⁷⁵ *Ad Marinum* (PG 91:236).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* (PG 91:237A).

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

- 1) There is no *gnomic will* in Christ because of the ‘divine hypostatization’. Christ does not need to choose between good and bad through thought and choice because he possessed good by nature through his divine nature.⁷⁸ This hypostatic divine nature of the Logos along with his assumed human nature, and not simply his detached divine person, is the active agent of the Incarnation.⁷⁹
- 2) Christ’s human nature does not move passively, following an order given by a divine person (*νεύματι*, in Maximus’ words); rather, it is the Logos himself who wills, but precisely *as man*: ‘*as man and not as God, Christ willed to accomplish his Father’s will...because the Father’s will also belongs to him, as he is God himself by nature*’.⁸⁰ Thus, Maximus cannot accept that Christ’s ‘divine will moved and inclined towards the fulfillment of the will of the Father’, as Zizioulas asserts,⁸¹ as if there were two separate divine wills struggling to unite. On the other hand, any sort of passivity or natural sinfulness of human natural will cannot be accepted here. Otherwise, we conclude with a type of Monothelism. The problem of the Monothelites was precisely that

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* (PG 91:308D–309).

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

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

⁸¹ ‘Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor’, 100.

they needed a ‘personal’, more or less ‘synthetic’ hypostatic will⁸² in order to overcome the supposedly inherent antithesis between the two natural wills of Christ: the divine willing and the human unwilling, or less willing, to fulfill the Father’s will. Maximus’ proposal is that unless the two natural wills are actively and dialogically connected in *antidosis/mutual exchange* between them,⁸³ without violation and confusion, we do not have Christ really willing as the God-man. Thus, it is not the (ontologised *per se*) Person of the Logos that wills in Christ, as if simply carrying along the two natures (and I do not know how one can prevent this will from being a *synthetic* will). On the contrary, it is the human natural will that wills in *perichoresis* with the divine natural will and *vice versa*; in Christ, God wills as man and man wills as God, in *antidosis*, *within the one hypostasis/person of Logos, who manifests the one and common natural will of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit and accomplishes it actively as a man*. It is a pity that some modern theologians have lost sight of the unbridgeable gap between those two positions. If we *ex definitio* prioritize person over nature (‘the person leads, the natures follow’, according to Zizioulas,⁸⁴ concluding with the anti-Maximian assertion: ‘In Christology, *it is the Person that has the first and last word—not the natures* [author’s italics]’⁸⁵), it is impossible to realize the perfect Maximian balance between the two, which is described above and abolishes Monotheletism.

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

⁸² *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:296ABC).

⁸³ *Ibid.* (PG 91:296C–297A).

⁸⁴ ‘Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor’, 97.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁸⁶ *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:313CD).

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

A Systematic Conclusion: The Anthropological Consequences

Now I will turn to the anthropological consequences of the above positions. The thorny problem here is still the relation between nature and freedom. Now, in contrast to Yannaras, Zizioulas no longer explicitly identifies nature with necessity *both before and after the Fall*. However, as before, he still holds that nature represents a burden of necessity for man; but according to his new reading of Maximus, he now insists that this happens only *after the Fall*.⁸⁷ Let us search again for the witness of the texts, reading closely and precisely the text that he uses, namely *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 61.⁸⁸

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

⁸⁸ (PG 90:628A–645C).

Speaking of this text, Zizioulas claims that ‘speaking of necessity of nature in its present state in which nature exists under the yoke of death⁸⁹ is commonplace in Maximus’.⁹⁰ However, what seems commonplace in this text is to speak, on the contrary, of the submission under the necessity of death of, first, the person and, second, nature (*γνώμη τε καὶ φύσει*).⁹¹ That is, Maximus considers nature here as a victim of the person, who, by *blamefully* choosing pleasure instead of God, carries along the *blameless* nature with him under the yoke of pain, corruption, and death.⁹² What is commonplace in Maximus is to consider person (through the incorrect use of *gnōmē* and *prohairesis*) as precisely the real cause of the fall into the inescapable necessity of death. What, however, is of utmost importance, is that, though nature has blamelessly fallen, it never becomes sheer necessity, since it is always, in its very ontological core, the offspring of divine grace, through the uncreated *logoi*/wills that always lie behind it. This is why, at the end of this text, Maximus suggests not the harmonization of nature with person as the only way of salvation but quite the opposite, *i.e.* the harmonization of person (as this is the one who sins, falls, and creates the necessity) with nature, since the latter is a personal dialogical divine proposal, asking for a personal/gnomic response of holiness. The following text is also revealing:

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

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

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* (PG 90:636ABC).

⁹⁰ ‘Person and Nature in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor’, 104.

⁹¹ *Ad Thalassium* (PG 90:637C).

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

⁹³ *Ad Thalassium* 61 (PG 90:645AB).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁹⁷ *Epistolae* (PG 91:552A).

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰¹ Jacques Lacan, ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the ‘I’ Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience’, in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (London: W.W. Norton, 2006), 79.

¹⁰² See N. Loudovikos, *Closed Spirituality and the Meaning of the Self*, chapter 2.3.3β.