

FROM DOMINATION TO IMPASSIBILITY: OVERCOMING THE DIALECTIC BETWEEN DOMINATOR AND DOMINATED ACCORDING TO THE THOUGHT OF ST MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR (c. 580–662)

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This study attempts to examine how Saint Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662) uses terms related to the notion of *κράτος* (power), such as *ἐπικράτεια* (domination, prevalence) and *ἐγκράτεια* (continence), in order to denote a domination which is not free from passion. Even though terms like *ἐγκράτεια* might have a positive meaning, signifying for example the mastery over one's impulses, they are inferior to *ἀπάθεια*, to which they might be contrasted. According to Maximus, domination (*ἐπικράτεια*) might also be viewed as a form of weakness, since the one who exercises domination is in turn affected by the one dominated. Conversely, true love is linked only to *ἀπάθεια* (impassibility), which signifies a deeper overcoming of the dominated passion. Maximus' thought thus presents some dialectical insights, since it highlights the influence of the dominated upon the dominator and a possible shifting of roles in a vicious circle. But in its ontological and eschatological depth, it is non-dialectical since the goal is absolute freedom from the dialectic of domination (*ἐπικράτεια*). The study will focus particularly on the vicious circle of pleasure and pain (*ἡδονή/όδύνη*) and one significant use of the term *ἐπικράτεια* in this context. It will be founded on Saint Maximus' Christology, according to which the 7th century Father emphatically rejects the notion of a Monoenergism, in which Christ would have a unique operation through the domination of his divine operation over his human one.

The thought of Saint Maximus the Confessor (c.580–662) on power might be best understood if we examine the revealing semantic nuances of terms that have *κράτος* (power) as their constituent. Two such significant terms are *ἐπικράτεια* (domination, prevalence) and *ἐγκράτεια* (continence). One reason to choose these two terms in order to understand the thought of Maximus on this topic is precisely because they are two rather positive terms. *Ἐγκράτεια* is one of the fundamental virtues of the desiring part of the soul (*ἐπιθυμία*). *Ἐπικράτεια* denotes the prevailing part in a relation or union. As they have a positive or, at least, a neutral value, it is crucial to examine the ways in which they enter paradigmatic relations with other terms in subjects pertaining to power, potency, and domination. I shall discuss these terms

on a Christological, anthropological, and psychological level, as these three levels are interconnected but also distinguished.

Beyond the Dominator/Dominated Dialectic

Since the anthropological contemplation in Saint Maximus the Confessor (among other Fathers) is founded on Christology, it is better to start from the latter and observe the way in which the question of domination (ἐπικράτεια) is treated on the Christological level. The decisive passage is found in the *Opusculum* 5.¹ This *Opusculum* refutes some subtle forms of Monoenergism, *i.e.* the doctrine which claims that Christ has one unique energy/operation. Since the forms of Monoenergism that Maximus discusses in this text are quite elaborate, it seems to present us with an advanced stage of the conflict about the energies of Christ. Therefore, Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth's decision to date the *Opusculum* 5 to a later period of Maximus' thought, after 645, seems reasonable, even though we will have to wait for the complete critical edition of the *Opuscula* in order to acquire a greater degree of certainty about their chronology.² For the needs of this paper, one could stress that the *Opusculum* 5 represents a mature stage of Maximus' thought, since he is able to refute even the most subtle forms of Monoenergism in a very elaborate manner. In doing this, he is equally aware of a deep anthropological and at times even ontological reflection, which accompanies his Christological and soteriological vision.

In the first part of the *Opusculum*,³ which I will discuss at length, Maximus reacts to a specific version of Monoenergism, namely the position that Christ's operation is unique due to the fact that the most dominant operation necessarily prevails over

¹ (PG 91:64A–65A).

² Polycarp Sherwood dates the *Opusculum* 5 to the beginning of the Monoenergistic controversy 'by 633', see Polycarp Sherwood, *An Annotated Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi 'Orbis Catholicus', 1952), 37. He is followed by Jean-Claude Larchet, see 'Introduction' in *Saint Maxime le Confesseur. Opuscules Théologiques et Polémiques* (Paris: Cerf, 1998), 24. Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth's decision to date the *Opusculum* 5 to after 645 is based on the following considerations: i) Maximus' adversaries seem to seek to accommodate their critics 'by acknowledging not "one" but "one and two" operations'. Such an effort of 'accommodation' seems to imply a later stage of the conflict. ii) A position similar to the one refuted here by Maximus is found in some later texts from 656–58 (*Disputatio Bizyae, Epistula ad Anastasium*). iii) This position is also demonstrated in the *Opusculum* 9, which is dated to 645–646 and where Maximus refutes a patristic passage from Heraclianus of Chalcedon which was supposed to corroborate it. iv) Similar Monoenergistic positions are implied in the *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (PG 91:296A–C; 333B–344A), which is composed in a period surely later than 645. v) The notion of the 'composite energy' was condemned at the Lateran Council of 649 with a connected although different rationale, namely that if the Son had a composite nature and energy, he would be alien to the Father who has a simple nature and energy. vi) Lastly, supporters of an earlier date could appeal to a possible *argumentum ex silentio*, namely that Maximus does not refer in the *Opusculum* 5 to the (chronologically posterior) question of the wills of Christ. But this 'argument from silence' is not considered as conclusive, since Maximus may very well have omitted this issue in his rather short treatise in order to focus on the problem of the energies. See Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth, 'A New Date-List of the Works of Maximus the Confessor' in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, eds. Pauline Allen and Neil Bronwen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 64.

³ (PG 91:64AB).

the weaker one. This version of Monoenergism is a moderate one, since it does not altogether exclude *a priori* the possibility of a human operation of Christ, but it stresses that eventually the two operations cannot coexist, since the human energy will give way to the divine one. In the next two parts of the *Opusculum*, Maximus reacts to two other elaborate versions of Monoenergism, namely to the view that the human operation was only an instrument of the divine one and to the position that there is a sole *composite* operation in Christ. Such versions of Monoenergism are reminiscent of certain 'moderate' forms of Monophysitism. The logic that is common to these two views is that it is not impossible *a priori* to have human alterity in Christ, but that the human element will eventually be absorbed into a composite whole in which the dominant nature and operation of Christ, namely the divine one, shall prevail.⁴ Against these 'moderate' forms of Monoenergism, Maximus is able to develop a series of arguments, some of which could equally be employed against the 'moderate' forms of Monophysitism. He thus shows what is really at stake through a genealogy of Monoenergism, which is implicitly traced back to Monophysitism, and explicitly to Nestorianism and Apollinarianism.⁵ Monoenergism is thus regarded as the vicious conclusion of differing or even opposite heresies, as we shall observe. But Maximus equally proceeds to some very deep anthropological remarks about the vitality of Christ's human operation, which cannot be regarded as a dead 'technological' instrument or object. He is equally pointing out the fact that a 'natural composition' of operations, *i.e.* not a personal/hypostatical one, would imply a lack of freedom in Christ's humanity.

In his refutation of the first form of 'moderate' Monoenergism, namely 'Monoenergism according to prevalence', Maximus proceeds to some general philosophical remarks about the nature of domination. I will quote this part of the *Opusculum* at length in both the original and a possible translation, as it is very crucial for our subject:

Πρὸς τοὺς λέγοντας ὅτι μίαν Χριστοῦ χρῆ λέγειν ἐνέργειαν κατ' ἐπικράτειαν· διὰ τὸ ὡς δραστικωτέραν τὴν θείαν αὐτοῦ κατεπικρατεῖν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης, οὕτω χρῆ ἀπολογεῖσθαι. Πρῶτον μὲν δύο ἐνεργείας καὶ ὑμεῖς ὁμολογεῖτε· μίαν ἐπικρατοῦσαν· τὴν θείαν φημί· καὶ μίαν κρατουμένην· τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην δηλονότι· ὅπερ ἐστὶ τῶν Πρὸς τι. Τὰ δὲ Πρὸς τι πάντως συνεισάγουσιν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ τὰ ἀντιδιαιρούμενα. Ἐπειτα δέ, ὅτι εἰ κατ' ἐπικράτειαν λέγετε τὴν ἐνέργειαν, ὡς τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης διὰ τὸ ἐπικρατηθῆναι ἀναιρουμένης, μείωσιν αὐταῖς εἰσάγετε. Τὸ γὰρ ἐπικρατοῦν, πάντως καὶ αὐτὸ τῶν πασχόντων ἐστί· καὶ αὐτὸ γὰρ κρατεῖται ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐπικρατουμένου. Εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἔλασσον, ὅμως δὲ κρατεῖται πάντως· ὥσπερ χρυσὸς ἐπικρατῶν μὲν τοῦ καταμιγνυμένου αὐτῷ

⁴ I am using the terms '*a priori*' and 'eventually' in a rather logical/ontological sense and not in a temporal one.

⁵ (PG 91:64C).

ἀργυρίου, φέρε εἰπεῖν, ἢ χαλκοῦ· κρατούμενος δὲ καὶ αὐτός, εἰ καὶ ἦττον, δῆλον δὲ ὅτι κατὰ τὴν ποσότητα τὴν προσμιγεῖσαν.

To those who say that we should speak of one sole operation of Christ according to domination, because his divine operation supposedly prevails over the human one due to its being more efficacious, one should reply thus: Firstly, you do admit yourselves two operations: One dominating, that is the divine one; and one which is dominated, namely the human one. But this belongs to the category of *relation* (Πρός τι). And those who belong to the category of relation introduce their opposites with them. Secondly, if you say that the operation [of Christ] is according to prevalence, because the human operation is removed due to its being dominated, then you imply a diminution to them. Because whatever dominates belongs in any case to those realities which undergo passion, since it is dominated itself by the thing that is dominated. Even if [it is comparatively dominated] to a lesser degree, it is in any case dominated. Just as when, for example, the gold prevails over the silver or the copper that is mixed with it, it is itself affected, even if to a lesser extent, obviously according to the quantity that is mixed with it.

Maximus' reaction to the 'Monoenergism by prevalence' thus comprises two stages. Firstly, he remarks that domination (ἐπικράτεια) is a sort of relation (πρός τι). As such it necessarily comprises two terms. Of course, Maximus' opponents would not have a problem with admitting two *initial* terms, which eventually give way to one sole reality, as the weak element concedes to the stronger and thus vanishes. But this is not the way in which Maximus understands dominance (κράτος). For him, in cases of domination, the second term is preserved and continues to exist after the attainment of domination, even if it is not apparent but only subjacent. In this case, Monoenergists in fact admit two operations *malgré eux*, that is, without realizing it. It is myopic to speak of an operation which is dominated and think that this operation somehow vanishes and ceases to exist. Only a person with a very short sight, or, if I might put it in a Maximian idiom, with a very fragmented 'gnomic opinion' (γνώμη), would not observe that the dominated operation is still there and continues to exert influence. It is noteworthy that what we say about these operations could also generally be applied to the wills of Christ, even though the latter is a more complex subject and Maximus does not touch upon it in this specific passage about ἐπικράτεια.

The main question, however, lies elsewhere. The crucial problem is that domination (ἐπικράτεια) means a weakness also on the part of the dominator. Maximus asserts that domination introduces a double diminution (μείωσις), that is applicable to both the dominator and the dominated. The latter is more obvious but nevertheless entails some important soteriological consequences. Asserting that the human

operation of Christ is dominated by the divine one presents some serious flaws. It means that there exists by nature something in the human operation which has to be tamed and subjugated. This could lead to an Apollinaristic mode of thought, where the human intellect cannot coexist with the divine one, but must vanish in order for the latter to manifest itself.⁶ It also leads to a notion of ‘confusion’ (σύγχυσις), where the dominated element is lost in its merging with the dominant one, a Christological vision that smacks of Monophysitism. Maximus would propose another vision in which the human energy is distinct from the divine one, but it is in accordance and cooperation with it.

There is, nevertheless, one even more interesting feature of Maximus’ reasoning. Maximus alludes to the notion that ἐπικράτεια also debases the dominator: domination is a sign of weakness; it is a passion. Even if the passion is undergone mainly by the dominated aspect, for Maximus the mere act of dominance entails the transmission of the passion to the dominator. It is in this sense that one could say that the dominator ultimately is dominated by the dominated aspect. To illustrate his point, Maximus uses the example of metal mixtures. It is notable that such examples concern types of union which are considered as ‘Monophysitic’, including not only the mixture of metals but also the blend of liquids, *etc.* Maximus’ anti-Monophysite bent provokes his reaction against such imagery. For example, when one mixes gold with silver or copper, the gold prevails, but to a certain extent it loses its integrity during the mixing process. The same is true for prevailing liquids which lose their purity when mixed.

In order to understand Maximus’ reasoning, one should first consider *Opusculum* 18,⁷ which comprises definitions of different types of union. This *Opusculum*, which is edited by Peter Van Deun,⁸ is traditionally attributed to Saint Maximus the Confessor, and there does not seem to be a serious reason for rejecting this traditional attribution.⁹ If the *Opusculum* 18 is written by Maximus, it probably belongs to an early stage of his engagement against the Monophysite, Monoenergistic, and Monothelite heresies, possibly around 634–635, although this date is not certain.¹⁰ In

⁶ Maximus does refer to Apollinarius later on in the second part of the *Opusculum* 5 (PG 91:64C) in a different context. He argues that, if the human operation of Christ is considered as an ‘instrument’ in a ‘technological’ sense (τεχνικὸν ὄργανον), then it will be without life and, more importantly, without intellectual life, just as the followers of Apollinarius claimed that the body of Christ is ‘ἄψυχον καὶ ἄνουν’. Even though the context in the second part is slightly different, I believe that the demonstration of the Apollinarian roots of Monoenergism is a constant preoccupation of Maximus throughout the particular *Opusculum*.

⁷ (PG 91:213A–216A).

⁸ Peter Van Deun, ‘L’*Unionum Definitiones* (CPG 7697:18) attribué à Maxime le Confesseur: Étude et édition’, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 58 (2000): 123–147.

⁹ Its editor, Peter van Deun, remarks that there is no obstacle for attributing it to Saint Maximus the Confessor, even though there cannot be absolute certainty. Among the reasons for accepting this attribution one can refer to the following: i) It is found in the oldest manuscripts and it is generally supported by the tradition of the manuscripts. ii) Some of the definitions are equally found in the *Ambigua* and in the *Letters*. iii) Maximus did indulge in the genre of ‘definitions’, *ibid.*, 126–127.

¹⁰ Polycarp Sherwood dates it to 626–633, see Polycarp Sherwood, *An Annotated Date-List*, 30. Its editor, Peter van Deun, considers it as posterior to Maximus’ engagement in the Monoenergistic controversy,

such a case, one could consider the definitions of *Opusculum* 18 as a possible presupposition of Maximus' reasoning in the *Opusculum* 5, given also that their content is quite traditional and not particularly original. The definitions seem to be influenced by conciliar decisions, by the theology of Cyril of Alexandria, by the treatises of Leontius of Byzantium¹¹ against the Monophysites and the Nestorians, as well as by the Christian philosopher Nemeseus of Emesa.¹² Some of the types of union referred to by Saint Maximus seem to react to Monophysite Christology. Maximus uses five different terms, namely *κρᾶσις*, *φύρσις*, *σύγχυσις*, *σωρεία*, and *συναλοιφή*¹³ in order to denote different types of union by confusion: *Κρᾶσις* denotes the confusion of liquids; *φύρσις* means the union between dry and liquid elements like, for example, between flour and water; *σύγχυσις* is the confusion between elements which undergo melting, such as wax and tar; *σωρεία* is the mixing between dry elements, such as wheat and barley; *συναλοιφή* is referring to 'entities' which can be extracted and then completely reunited with their source, as is the case in the diffusion of fire in different candles or torches. If the general framework of the *Unionum Definitiones* is the presupposition of the *Opusculum* 5,¹⁴ then when Maximus speaks of *ἐπικράτεια* referring to the example of the mixture of metals, what he has in mind could be the *σύγχυσις*, i.e. the confusion between elements which can undergo melting, or the *κρᾶσις*, i.e. the confusion of elements which can be put in a liquid state and thus unite by losing their alterity inside a new mixture. But unions according to *φύρσις*, *σωρεία*, and *συναλοιφή* are equally types of union which entail a sort of prevalence (*ἐπικράτεια*) to the detriment of the alterity inside the new union. For this reason, Saint Maximus is possibly denouncing the notion of *ἐπικράτεια* because he considers it as specific to Monophysite types of 'union by confusion'.

i.e. posterior to 633–634, since the third of the definitions concern the question of *gnome* and will. See Peter van Deun, 'L'Unionum Definitiones', 127. More recently, Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth have suggested an early possible date around 634–635. The reason they give is that this same third definition about the 'union in respect of relation, [which] concerns the *gnōmai* [and results] in one will' is similar to an expression found in the *Synodical Letter*, which was circulated by Sophronius of Jerusalem to fellow bishops after his ascension as Patriarch of Jerusalem in 634–635. Besides, similar language concerning the 'one will' is used in *Letter 2*, in the *Exposition on the Lord's Prayer* and in the *Opusculum* 14. This language suggests a date before the *Ekthesis* composed by Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople in 636, which admitted one will in Christ. See Marek Jankowiak and Phil Booth, 'A New Date-List', 34–35. In any case, this dating is only a hypothesis, since even the Maximian paternity of the *Opusculum* is not absolutely certain.

¹¹ The crucial influence of Leontius of Byzantium is stressed by Jean-Claude Larchet, see 'Introduction' in *Opuscles Théologiques*, 21. It is also developed in Peter van Deun, 'L'Unionum Definitiones', 128. For the general influence of Leontius on Maximus on the question of the hypostatic union see Venance Grumel, 'L'union hypostatique et la comparaison de l'âme et du corps chez Léonce de Byzance et saint Maxime le Confesseur', *Echos d'Orient* 25 (1926): 397–406.

¹² For possible sources of the *Opusculum* 18, see Peter van Deun, 'L'Unionum Definitiones', 127–128.

¹³ Ibid., 145.

¹⁴ What I mean is that even if the actual *Unionum Definitiones* was not written by Maximus before the *Opusculum* 5, one can still claim that its content is indeed a presupposition of the latter, since it reflects a traditional framework formed by the conciliar tradition, Saint Cyril, Leontius *e.a.* Maximus was up to a certain extent original when systematizing this tradition, but he was also well placed inside it.

It is of equal importance that, in the same *Opusculum* 18, other terms refer to more external types of union which would be rather specific to a Nestorian Christology: *σχέσις* can thus denote the rather external relation and coordination of many different opinions or gnomic wills (*γνώμαι*) into forming one sole will; *παράθεσις* means the union by juxtaposition, as is the case with boards and planks; *ἁρμονία* refers to the harmonious unity that one can find in a successful arrangement of stones in order to form an articulated whole. Even though the notion of *ἐπικράτεια* is more specific to 'Monophysite' types of union, its application to 'Nestorian' versions should not, in my opinion, be excluded. Besides, in Maximus' way of thinking, Monoenergism is a result of opposing heresies, such as Monophysitism, Nestorianism, and Apollinarianism. The notion of *ἐπικράτεια* could possibly apply to all three of them.

Let us consider, for example, the most abstract and condensed phrase of the first part of the *Opusculum* 5: 'Whatever dominates belongs in any case to those realities which undergo passion, since it is dominated itself by the dominated one' ('*Τὸ γὰρ ἐπικρατοῦν πάντως καὶ αὐτὸ τῶν πασχόντων ἐστί· καὶ αὐτὸ γὰρ κρατεῖται ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐπικρατουμένου*'). Even though the example given by Maximus refers to the mixture of metals, one would be tempted to change the context and apply this principle to human relations (*σχέσεις*). The abstractness of the formulation arguably encourages such a generalization. We could thus observe someone who is dominant in a relationship, but who allows himself to be dominated from the very moment in which he begins to exercise domination. One could recall here the Hegelian master/slave dialectic,¹⁵ in which it is precisely the domination of the master over the slave which leads the former to eventually turn into the slave of his slave, by being alienated from nature, matter, and even himself.¹⁶ The former slave may even turn into the master of this relationship. One might also consider contemporary Post-colonial studies, the subject of which is often how those who are dominated are able to change from within the signifiers of the master's dominance.

Returning to the seventh century, we may conclude that Maximus' theological critique constitutes a simultaneous rejection of both Monophysitism and Nestorianism: domination (*ἐπικράτεια*) is unworthy of God and of Christ as God. If the divine operation prevails over the human one by domination, this would mean that God *qua* God is affected by passion, *i.e.* it would entail a form of Theopaschism. God does not need to prevail over humanity. Maximus considers the divine/human relationship in a Chalcedonian manner, as a relation in which difference is saved as such. And it is saved because God loves in an impassible way. The divine stance consists in an eminent unity of love and impassibility, in which love is tantamount

¹⁵ The remark that the first part of the 5th *Opusculum* can remind us of the famous Hegelian master-slave dialectic can be found in Jean-Claude Larchet, 'Introduction', in *Opuscles Théologiques*, 24.

¹⁶ See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Werke in 20 Bänden, Bd. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 145–155.

to impassibility and impassibility coincides with love. If God dominated humanity, this would turn him into a passible God who would lose his impassibility and thus even his love.

Ἐπικράτεια and the Dialectic between Pleasure and Pain (ἡδονή/ὀδύνη)

Even if a comparison to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic might seem anachronistic, there is nevertheless a question which is relevant to Maximus' own thought: is his thought dialectical or not?¹⁷ By dialectical, I mean a certain dilemma by which one struggles to determine whether she should define something through its opposite or if she should define it in itself, being indifferent to its opposites. The most crucial problem is of course whether the Good needs evil in order to be defined, or if it can be defined in itself without referring to evil as a necessary contrariety. The same is the case for life and death, for light and darkness—in either a metaphorical or even a literal sense—*etc.* This dilemma (even if it did not bear the name of dialectic) is evident in many philosophical problems posed by thinkers in Late Antiquity. We find it, for example, in Plotinus' endeavor to define the Good in itself without including evil in its definition, thus rejecting the opposing views of Gnostics, Manichaeans, or even Stoics.¹⁸ One might also recall the discussion about the role of evil in the divine/human drama, for example the question of whether or not the experience of evil could be considered to be an aspect of divine pedagogy, a view that is attributed by some to Origen or Gregory of Nyssa.¹⁹ The question that arises is what Maximus' own stance is. Does he define his concepts in a dialectical manner or not?

The answer to this question could both be a positive and a negative one. On the one hand, Maximus is sensitive to the fact that there is a dialectical way in which concepts are defined inside history. On the other, his goal is to elevate us to another level, that is, to an eschatological one, where this dialectical comprehension is transcended. Dialectical understanding only refers to the historical or even to the

¹⁷ The idea that Maximus the Confessor was indirectly a sort of precursor of Hegel is however developed by a very important scholar and theologian, namely Hans-Urs von Balthasar who even thought that Maximus provides us with tools by which we could transcend the undesirable traits of Hegelian dialectics. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor*, trans. Brian E. Daley (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003), 163 (Title of the original: *Kosmische Liturgie: Das Weltbild Maximus' des Bekennters* [Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1988]). For a recent comparison between Maximus the Confessor and the dialectical thought of Karl Jung, see Grigorios Tympas, *Carl Jung and Maximus the Confessor on Psychic Development: The Dynamics between the 'Psychological' and the 'Spiritual'* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

¹⁸ For Plotinus' theory of evil see, for example, *Enneads* I.8.10–11; II.4.13 and its analysis in Denis O' Brien, 'Plotinus and the Gnostics on the Generation of Matter' in *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought, Essays in Honour of A. H. Armstrong*, eds. Henry J. Blumenthal and Robert Markus (London: Variorum Publications, 1981), 108–123; Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 197.

¹⁹ For a comparison between Maximus and his predecessors on this point see Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of St Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi, 1955), 198–204.

‘lapsarian’ condition, where two realities that are considered as opposite cannot exist without the other. In such cases, one might think that two realities are opposed, whereas, in reality, the one depends on the other for its subsistence. Most of these realities are related to power (κράτος) as well as to pleasure (ἡδονή). Maximus thus speaks of dialectical couples, such as the one between the dominator and the dominated, pleasure and pain (ἡδονή/ὀδύνη), or sorrow and anger (λύπη/ὀργή). According to him, the dialectical nature of these couples should not be underestimated, but rather studied with a philosophical attitude. And it is the Christian philosopher who realizes and examines *par excellence* the dialectical nature of reality, in contrast to the lay man who might fall into the illusion that such opposites, like for example pleasure and pain, are true opposites and not just apparent ones.

Returning to our subject, the man of illusion might think that a dominant reality could be defined by itself regardless of the dominated aspect. For Maximus, however, the true philosopher is the one who discerns the survival of the dominated in the dominance of the dominator. The other side of the same coin is that the dominator is himself defeated from the very moment that he wishes to dominate, as he will be afflicted by this same passion. This dialectic of power is very close to the dialectic of pleasure we witness in a very interesting passage in the Introduction to *Ad Thalassium*:

...οὐκ ἐνδέχεται ποτε χωρὶς ὀδύνης εἶναι τὴν ἡδονήν. Ἐγκέκρται γὰρ τῇ ἡδονῇ τῆς ὀδύνης ὁ πόνος, κἂν λανθάνειν δοκῇ τοὺς ἔχοντας διὰ τὴν κατὰ τὸ πάθος τῆς ἡδονῆς ἐπικράτειαν, ἐπειδὴ τὸ ἐπικρατοῦν ἀεὶ διαφαίνεται πᾶσι, καλύπτον τοῦ παρακειμένου τὴν αἴσθησιν.²⁰

qIt is not possible to ever have pleasure without pain. Because the pain of suffering is mixed with pleasure, even if this is not obvious to those who have it due to the prevalence of pleasure during the passion; since the prevailing element is always the apparent one, covering the sense of the underlying element.

The man of illusion thinks in terms of power (κράτος) and believes that if pleasure prevails then pain is extinct. In reality, however, pain is but the internal limit of pleasure.²¹ According to the biblical and patristic narrative, this might be

²⁰ See *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium I, Quaestiones I-LV una cum latina interpretatione Ioannis Scotti Eriugenae iuxta posita* (CCSG 7), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel (Turnhout and Leuven: Brepols and Leuven University Press, 1980), 33, lines 259–264 (PG 90:256AB).

²¹ The dialectic between pleasure and pain is developed mainly in *Ad Thalassium* 21, see *Quaestiones ad Thalassium I* (CCSG 7), 127–133 (PG 90:312B–316D) and in *Ad Thalassium* 61, see *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium II, Quaestiones LVI-LXV una cum latina interpretatione Ioannis Scotti Eriugenae iuxta posita* (CCSG 22), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel (Turnhout and Leuven: Brepols and Leuven University Press, 1990), 85–91, line 108 (PG 90:628A–632A).

formulated as God putting pain as a limit on pleasure after the Fall so that evil not exist eternally.²² In *Ad Thalassium* 26,²³ Maximus tries to explain the antinomy in which the devil is called both the ‘enemy’ (ἐχθρός) and the ‘servant’ (δοῦλος) of God. In his reply, he stresses that devil is the ‘enemy’ of God when he is trying to lure man into preferring temporary pleasure (ἡδονή) over the desire for divine love. But he is also the ‘servant’ of God, since he brings the just punishment (τιμωρία) of pain (ὀδύνη) to men who have given themselves to pleasure. It should be noted that it is not God himself who wills the punishment or pain of men, but he ‘lets’ (συγχώρησις) the devil be a just punisher (ἐκδικητής), since there is an internal relation between pleasure and pain which cannot be avoided. As such, Maximus seems to suggest a sort of wider *quasi*- ‘cosmological’ justice between pleasure and pain, but this justice is only valid within a ‘lapsarian’ dialectic in which the devil can temporarily acquire the antinomical attributes of ‘enemy’ and ‘servant’ of God in order to show the falsehood of pleasure from the inside. This ‘justice’, however, is not the true eschatological justice of God. It is only a false justice of retribution (ἐκδίκησις), particular to the lapsarian condition. In fact, the devil is ‘tricked’: he wants to punish men out of hate against them, but by bringing pain upon them he is somehow showing the fact that pleasure cannot be an eternal truth. If one were to formulate this imagery in a more ontological idiom, one could say that it is impossible for pleasure to perpetuate itself and that it thus has pain as an internal limit. Pleasure is necessarily followed by a pain that would restrict it, thus revealing the impossibility of its becoming absolute.²⁴ The man of illusion would wish to impose the dominance of pleasure thus trying to vanquish pain. On the contrary, the Christian philosopher will discern that pain survives under the appearance of the dominance of pleasure in such a way as to define the latter. Such is the case with any form of dominance where the dominated continues to affect and define the dominator, even if he seems subjugated.

The same could be claimed about the relationship of sorrow and anger (λύπη/ὀργή). People think that they can vanquish sorrow through the employment of the capacity of their soul for anger. But in reality the repressed sorrow grasps them whenever anger passes, exactly as pain dominates man after each pleasure. This vicious circle can be solved only through the leap of love which breaks it.²⁵ On a

²² See *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium* II (CCSG 22), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel, 85, lines 16–18 (PG 90:628B): ‘...τὴν ἡδονήν· ἥτινι κατὰ πρόνοιαν ὁ τῆς ἡμῶν σωτηρίας κηδόμενος παρέπηξεν, ὥστερ τινὰ τιμωρὸν δύναμιν, τὴν ὀδύνην’.

²³ *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* I (CCSG 7), 173–175, line 54 (PG 90:340D–341D).

²⁴ For the dialectic between pleasure and pain in the *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* see Christoph von Schönborn, ‘Plaisir et Douleur dans l’Analyse de S. Maxime, d’après les *Quaestiones ad Thalassium*’ in *Maximus Confessor. Actes du Symposium sur Maxime le Confesseur. Fribourg, 2–5 septembre 1980*, Paradosis 27, eds. Felix Heinzer and Christoph von Schönborn (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1982), 273–284; Jean-Claude Larchet, ‘Introduction’ in *Maxime le Confesseur. Questions à Thalassios. Tome I (Questions 1 à 40)*, *Sources Chrétiennes* 529 (Paris: Cerf, 2010).

²⁵ For love as the solution to sorrow and resentment (μνησικακία), see *Capitulum de Charitate Centuria* 3.89–91 (PG 90:1044C–1045A).

more ontological level, there is also such a relationship between death and sexual reproduction (θάνατος/γέννησις in the Maximian idiom). After the Fall, men try to vanquish death through sexual reproduction. But in each birth by sexual reproduction (γέννησις), a hidden death is concealed, temporarily subjugated but waiting to dominate in the end. At the beginning of the *Ambiguum* 31, Maximus states that ‘sin ...condemned human beings to be marked with the same characteristic as irrational animals, in being generated one from another (ἐξ ἀλλήλων διαδοχῆς ιδιότης).’²⁶ By the term ‘διαδοχή’ (succession) Maximus means the connection between sexual reproduction and death which is a more ontological parallel of the vicious circle between pleasure and pain. It is, however, notable that this context is Christological and its aim is rather to show how Christ overcomes this circle.

Anti-dialectical Traits in Saint Maximus’ Thought

Dialectics are thus part of the historical evolution of humanity, especially within a ‘fallen’ context. It is the duty of the Christian wise man to discern this underlying dialectic in contradistinction to the man of illusion who will remain on the surface of ontic definitions of things. The question is whether a similar dialectic has the final word. In the latter sense, Maximus is an anti-dialectical philosopher, since he believes that the Good proper will be achieved in a way that is not influenced by evil. The Good proper is defined by itself. And inversely, a good that needs evil in order to be defined is not the Good properly speaking. Saint Maximus articulates a strong anti-dialectical philosophy in a conscious reaction against Origenism, which he rejected exactly because he discerned that it made Good dependable on evil. This anti-dialectical principle is formulated with great clarity in such an anti-Origenistic context in the *Ambiguum* 7: ‘For whatever is not good and desirable in itself, and that does not attract all motion to itself, strictly speaking cannot be the Beautiful (καλόν). Neither would it be capable of satisfying the desire of those who find delight in it. Moreover, those who espouse such a theory would be indebted to evil, since through it they were instructed in what was proper and right, learning much better the condition of fixity in the Beautiful. They would have to acknowledge, in other words, that evil is of necessity the origin of the Beautiful, and—if they knew how to think consistently—that evil is even more beneficial than nature itself, since it teaches them what is to their own advantage, and gives birth to the most precious of all possessions, I mean love ...’²⁷ It is notable that the term for ‘beautiful’ is ‘καλόν’, which possesses not only an aesthetic but also an ethical value, having evil as its opposite. For Maximus, therefore, the necessity to define the Good and the

²⁶ See *Maximus the Confessor. On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 2 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 40 (PG 91:1276B).

²⁷ See *Maximus the Confessor. On Difficulties in the Church Fathers*, ed. and trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 79–81 (PG 91:1069D–1072A).

Beautiful in themselves without a reference to evil as their antithesis has the utmost evidence: It suffices as an ultimate argument to refute the Origenistic version of the divine-human drama, which regarded evil as a sort of useful or even necessary experience. A more general anti-dialectical gnosiological principle is formulated in *Ad Thalassium* 44, where Maximus states that the knowledge of one being entails the ignorance of its opposite, just as the eye cannot know what is upwards without turning away from what is downwards.²⁸ This gnosiological division also has existential significance, since it is God himself who wills this unmixed knowledge of opposites in order for evil not to become eternal through a possible mixture with the Good which would conserve it.²⁹ The non-dialectical definitions of Good and evil thus guarantee the eschatological imposition of limits upon the latter. The same is true also for being which is not defined by non-being, for light which is not defined by darkness, and for life which is not defined by death.³⁰ Such crucial passages are found in early works of Maximus and thus form the ontological and existential pre-suppositions for his later anti-Monoenergistic engagement, which is usually more concrete and technical.

In a much later work and in a Christological context, Saint Maximus is reported to have reacted against those who think that beings are defined by comparison and juxtaposition, the one being the cause of the other ('ἀλληλαίτια').³¹ The extract is from the *Disputatio cum Pyrrho*, the paternity and the time of redaction of which are not certain. It might have been composed by one of Maximus' disciples, reporting his master's views in response to Pyrrhus' Monoenergistic arguments at a date as late as 655 or even later.³² In any case, this concrete passage is in accordance with the line of thought developed in the *Opusculum* 5. Maximus claims, in a Christological anti-Monoenergistic context, that the two operations of Christ should be defined in themselves and not by comparison with one another. The reason is that Maximus wishes to avoid a situation in which the divine operation would be efficacious and

²⁸ 'Ἄλλ' οὐδέ τι τῶν ἐκ Θεοῦ καὶ μετὰ Θεὸν λογικῶν οὐσιῶν ἔχει ὁμοῦ τε καὶ κατὰ ταὐτὸν ἐν τῷ τῆς διανοίας ἀπλῶ κινήματι κατὰ σύνθεσιν ἐκ τῶν ἐναντίων ὑφισταμένην τὴν γνῶσιν. Διότι πέφυκεν ἡ θατέρου τῶν ἀλλήλοις ἀντικειμένων γνῶσις τῆς τοῦ ἐτέρου ποιεῖσθαι γνώσεως ἄγνοια. Ἀμιγῆς γὰρ τῶν ἀντικειμένων ἡ γνῶσις καὶ παντάπασι ἀσυνύπαρκτος, ἐπεὶ ἡ τοῦδε γνῶσις τὴν θατέρου τῶν ἀντικειμένων συνίστησιν ἄγνοια, ὥστε οὔτε ὁφθαλμὸς τοῦ ἄνω τε ὁμοῦ καὶ τοῦ κάτω, καὶ τῶν ἐφ' ἑκάτερα κατὰ ταυτὸν, χωρὶς τῆς πρὸς θάτερον ἰδιαζούσης ἐπιστροφῆς καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πάντη κεχωρισμένης, ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι. See *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* I (CCSG 7), 301, lines 43–54 (PG 90:416CD).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 301–302, lines 64–68 (PG 90:417A).

³⁰ See Bram Roosen and Peter van Deun, 'A Critical Edition of the *Quaestiones ad Theopemptum* of Maximus the Confessor (CPG 7696)', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 55, no. 1–2 (2003): 65–79 (PG 90:1397C).

³¹ See Marcel Doucet, *Dispute de Maxime le Confesseur avec Pyrrhus. Introduction, texte critique et notes*, PhD Thesis (Montreal: University of Montreal, Institut d'Études Médiévales, 1972), 606–607 (PG 91:349CD): 'οὐδενὸς γάρ, καθόλου φάναι, ὑπαρξὶς ἐκ παραθέσεως ἢ ἐκ συγκρίσεως γινώσκεται ἢ ὀρίζεται· ἢ οὕτω δ' ἂν ἀλληλαίτια εὐρεθήσονται τὰ ὄντα πράγματα. ... Ἄλλ' ἀπαγε· πολλῆς γὰρ ὄντως ἀβελτηρίας ἐστὶ ταῦτα.'

³² See Jacques Noret, 'La rédaction de la *Disputatio cum Pyrrho* (CPG 7698) de Saint Maxime le Confesseur serait-elle postérieure à 655?', *Analecta Bollandiana* 117 (1999): 291–296.

the human one passive, or, similarly, the divine operation would be the good one, while the human would be contrasted as evil. For Maximus, both natural operations are good and efficacious, but present a natural alterity which is nonetheless bridged by their accord and cooperation inside the same hypostasis. The natural alterity between the two operations does not entail a dialectic between activity and passivity or between good and evil. The human operation of Christ is active and efficacious when it performs what is specific to it, even though it does undergo the passion of divinization, the latter being beyond the limits of human nature. In other words, the passion of what is beyond human nature does not exclude but rather confirms the activity of what is according human nature. In this sense Maximus' Christology proper is anti-dialectical.

A similar anti-dialectical stance could be found in his approach to the definition of love. In its ontological foundation, love cannot be defined by its opposite, be it egoism (*φιλαυτία*) or hate (*μῖσος*), even though the latter can be its opposite inside history: *i.e.* hate (*μῖσος*) is the opposite of love when the latter is considered as the virtue which is specific to the irascible part of the soul.³³ In Maximus' *Second Letter*,³⁴ however, love is considered to be the sum of all virtues and the goal of all activity, tantamount to union with God and divinization. In this ontological depth, love has no opposite properly speaking. *Φιλαυτία* as a historical opposite of love does not mean that love depends on it for its definition. *Φιλαυτία* is rather a cutting off of man's path to God in his historical evolution. It is a turning of ourselves into self-sufficient idols and a historical missing of the eschatological goal which is in itself absolute.

The Christological Dialectic as the Dialectic of Exiting Dialectics

At the same time, Maximus could envisage a sort of 'last dialectic', *i.e.* a dialectic of exiting dialectics. This is more obvious if we consider again Maximus' Christology, but from a complementary angle. Maximus thinks that in Christ the divine operation does not prevail over the human one, because that would entail a passion also for the divine operation. What is the case in Christology is a Chalcedonian simultaneous communion and differentiation of the two operations, in which the divine operation is impassible, while the human operation is in accordance and cooperation with divine preservation, whatever their respective differences. The absolute impassibility of the divine operation is the ontological foundation of the exit from the dialectic of power between the presumed dominating and dominated element. There are, however, some more concrete issues about the ways in which Christ overcomes the

³³ See, for example, *Capitulum de Charitate Centuria* 3.3 (PG 90:1017C); 4.15 (PG 90:1052A); 4.44 (PG 90:1057B).

³⁴ (PG 91:392D–408B).

vicious dialectical pairs of pleasure and pain, anger and sorrow, sexual reproduction and death.

What is crucial is that Christ does not enter into the dialectical logic of domination (*ἐπικράτεια*). That is, he does not try to vanquish pain through pleasure *etc.*, because this endeavor is futile. Christ possesses an impassibility which is identical to his love, and this simultaneous ‘impassibility of love’ comes from the outside to break the dialectical spiral and finally annul it. At the same time, Christ does assume one part of the dialectical evolution in order to annul the dialectic from within by rendering it ‘a judge of itself’, or by ‘judging the judgment’ in Maximus’ own terms.³⁵ Namely, Christ does assume pain, but without antecedent pleasure, so that the vicious circle of pleasure and pain is abolished from within. That is, within the vicious circle—where pain exists to put an ontological limit on and bring about the cessation of antecedent pleasure—when pain occurs without corresponding pleasure, this ‘pure’ and ‘absolute’ character of pain leads to an internal abolishment of the pain/pleasure correspondence. In other words, Maximus presents us with a narrative of ‘cosmological justice’³⁶ reminiscent of the narrative of Anaximander, where ‘τίσις’ comes to bring an ontological balance.³⁷ The difference between the ‘τίσις’ of Anaximander and the Christological justice of Maximus is, in the case of the latter, an exit from the cosmological/historical justice of the correspondence between pleasure and pain, and an achievement of the eminent eschatological justice of love and impassibility. The superior justice of Christ constitutes a denunciation of the justice of the world. The Maximian soteriological narrative is that the ‘injustice’ of pleasure is ‘judged from within’ by the assumption of pain without antecedent pleasure, and since this pain is also ‘unjust’, or rather ‘uncaused’, the historical dialectic is broken and humanity is brought to the Christological level of impassible love. However, man, and especially ‘lapsarian’ man, cannot arrive at the end of the dialectic immediately, but he needs to pass from this dialectic of pleasure and pain, following through an *imitatio Christi*, the Christological exit from the dialectic. The latter consists in being ready to assume pain, and more importantly to assume the ‘uncaused and unjust’ pain, *i.e.* the pain which is not the consequence nor the limit of pleasure. Of course, a simple human being cannot achieve this in the absolute Christological way, but Christ sets a model which is to be followed by humanity, even if human beings cannot apply it in all its purity.

³⁵ See *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium I* (CCSG 7), 289, lines 67–69 (PG 90:408CD): ‘...τὴν ἐμὴν ἐκουσίως ὑποδὺς φύσει κατάκρισιν [ὁ Χριστός], ἀκατάκριτος ὑπάρχων τὴν προαίρεσιν, ἵνα τὴν ἐμὴν προαιρετικὴν τε καὶ φυσικὴν ἀμαρτίαν καὶ κατάκρισιν κατακρίνῃ...’

³⁶ This principle is formulated explicitly in *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium II* (CCSG 22), 85, lines 27–30 (PG 90:628B–C): ‘Πᾶς γὰρ πόνος, ὡς αἰτίαν τῆς ἰδίας γενέσεως ἔχων κατ’ ἐνέργειαν προηγουμένην τὴν ἡδονήν, χρέος ἐστὶ δηλαδὴ φυσικῶς κατ’ αἰτίαν παρὰ πάντων τῶν μετεληφόντων τῆς φύσεως ἐκτιννύμενον’.

³⁷ For a comparison between the Maximian notion of ‘χρέος ἐκτιννύμενον’ and the relative notions of ‘κατὰ τὸ χρεών’ and ‘τίσις’ in Anaximander, see Nikos Matsoukas, *Κόσμος, Ἄνθρωπος, Κοινωνία κατὰ τὸν Μάξιμο Ὁμολογητή* (Αθήνα: Γρηγόρης, 1979), 116.

The assumption of death by Christ happens in the same way, that is, without a prior assumption of *γέννησις*, *i.e.* of sexual reproduction. This means that the futile logic of sexual reproduction is abolished from within. This is, according to the Maximian interpretation, the meaning of the Crucifixion, which is linked to the dogma of 'Virgin Birth' without pleasure and corruption. The fact that Christ assumed pain and death without antecedent pleasure (*ἡδονή*) and sexual reproduction means that he abolished a vicious circle. In other words, he assumed the 'last' pain and the 'last' death in the Crucifixion, *i.e.* the death that brings us out of the vicious circle of pleasure and pain, as well as the one of reproduction through sexuality and mortality. For René Girard, the Crucifixion is the 'last sacrifice', the one that brings us out of the vicious circle of the need for continuous sacrifices.³⁸ In a Maximian idiom we would say that the Crucifixion is the 'last' pain and the 'last' death, since we are thus brought out of the respective vicious circles that we have observed. One could equally state that, even though Maximus is not so explicit about this question, in the Crucifixion Christ assumes the last 'sorrow' (*λύπη*), which takes us out of the vicious circle of sorrow and anger (*ὀργή*). But the foundation of the mystery of the Crucifixion is that Christ assumes the position of the dominated, *i.e.* the position of the weak, in order to abolish the position of the dominator, and thus the whole vicious circle or rather spiral of the dialectic of domination. The assumption of one part of the dialectic of domination by Christ happens in order to cancel the perpetuation of this dialectic and eventually abolish it. Just as in Girard the Crucifixion is a sacrifice—but a sacrifice which denounces the sacrificial logic, revealing its falsehood and saving us from it—in a similar way Maximus believes Christ's assumption of the dominated position occurs in a way that guarantees the abolition of the dialectic of power and the establishment of the new 'justice' of impassible love.

One could thus summarize Maximus' stance towards dialectics in the following way: i) On the one hand, Maximus believes that beings and concepts must be defined in themselves and that the Good should not depend on evil for its own definition. This anti-dialectical stance is relevant to the ontological and eschatological purity of beings and their knowledge. ii) On the other hand, he stresses the fact that a certain dialectic is peculiar to the historical or rather the 'lapsarian' condition. This dialectic entails vicious circles where each position brings about a necessary reaction which however preserves the position and perpetuates it. This dialectic could also be seen as a 'false justice', *i.e.* a cyclical justice, which does not offer a way out. Even though this justice is 'false', it is also necessary, because it prevents evil becoming absolute. iii) In Christology, there is also a 'last' dialectic, in the sense that Christ assumes the supposedly 'negative' part of a dialectical pair in order to annul this vicious dialectic

³⁸ See for example, René Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde : Recherches avec Jean-Michel Oughourlian et Guy Lefort* (Paris: Grasset, 1978); *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1999).

and its false justice. Then, after the pain and the crucifixion of Christ takes place, a second confirmation of the positive and non-dialectical definition of beings occurs. This event is more eminent than the initial one, since it is only after exiting the dialectics in a Christological way that we truly have a life not threatened by death, a Good not dependent on evil, a true justice which is not that of futile retribution, *etc.*

This threefold schema could be compared to Maximus' theory about God's three wills. In the eighty-third question of the *Quaestiones et Dubia*, Maximus says that there are three wills of God, namely his good will (*εὐδοκία*), his will according to concession (*συγχώρησις*), and his will according to dispensation (*οἰκονομία*).³⁹ One could claim that, at the level of God's *εὐδοκία*, beings are only defined in a pure and positive way beyond any negativity associated with lapsarian existence. However, God also concedes to (*συγχωρεῖ*) the historical fallen condition, in which domination entails a dialectical spiral of continuous reactions and a 'false justice' which perpetuates the temptation of injustice. At a third level, God tries to save man from this vicious circle through Christ. Christ affirms the good will of God, *i.e.* he receives the nature of beings in their positive definition. In this sense, Christ's two natures are conceived in their positive alterity and not in a dialectical contrast. At the same time, Christ also assumes the 'negative' part of the dialectic. The latter constitutes a will according to *οἰκονομία* and not a will according to *εὐδοκία*. Thus, Christ assumes historical negativity in order to offer a novel positivity to man. For example, the Crucifixion is arguably a will according to *οἰκονομία* and not a will according to *εὐδοκία*; nevertheless, it is the foundation of our salvation. This threefold schema could also explain the ambivalent role of the devil. The devil can be considered as the 'enemy' of God, since he is opposing the divine *εὐδοκία*. He has a sort of parasitic subsistence at the level of God's concession (*συγχώρησις*). At this level, he is sometimes also conceived as a 'servant' of God, in the sense that his reactions, for example his readiness to 'punish' humanity, constitute a 'false justice', which cannot but prevent the eternal and absolute character of sin, just as death puts limits on sinful life and pain to pleasure, *etc.*⁴⁰ God concedes to this, but this *συγχώρησις* is not his last word. In the end the devil is 'tricked' by Christ at the level of the *οἰκονομία*. When Christ enters the lapsarian dialectic, then the 'false justice' of devil as a 'punisher' (*ἐκδικητής*) is judged itself and humanity is freed from the latter's reach. For such reasons, one should not exaggerate by emphasizing the instrumentalization of evil and the devil by the divine plan. Maximus' pious way of thinking is quite far from notions of 'felix culpa' or of the devil being an instrument of God's plan.

³⁹ See *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones et Dubia* (CCSG 10), ed. José Declerck (Turnhout and Leuven: Brepols and Leuven University Press, 1982), 66 (PG 90:801B).

⁴⁰ I am referring to *Quaestiones ad Thalassium I* (CCSG 7), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel, 173–75 (PG 90:340D–341D), where devil is considered as both an enemy and a 'δούλος' of God in the context of an exegetical passage about the king of Babylon as an allegory of the devil.

We can observe this Christological ‘dialectic of exit from the dialectic’ in the very interesting *Quaestio* I.12 where Maximus treats the question of why Saint Peter is called ‘Satan’ by the Lord (Matt 16:23).⁴¹ Saint Maximus refers to the etymology of the word ‘Satan’, which means ‘adversary’ or ‘opposite’ (*ἀντικείμενος*), and he thus insists in a pious way that Christ did not insult Saint Peter but merely characterized the latter’s stance as opposite to the goal of salvation. What is very interesting for our purpose is that this ‘opposite’ stance consists in defining life and glory in a non-dialectical way. That is, Saint Peter could not understand that Christ’s glory resides exactly in his debasement and that the life he offers can be received only through death. Maximus summarizes his thinking thus: ‘the privations of the Lord became habitus (*ἔξεις*) for us, as his death became life for us and his debasement became glory for us’.⁴² It is here that the non-dialectical stance is that of ‘Satan’, whereas the dialectical one is that of Christ. However, this is only because we are now at the level of the divine *οἰκονομία* and not at that of the divine *εὐδοκία*. In other words, Christ has assumed death and debasement in order to affirm life and glory in a novel mode outside the vicious circularity of the fallen condition.

The divine *οἰκονομία* towards the devil is described in a very curious but revealing passage in *Ad Thalassium* 64, where in the context of an allegorical exegesis of the book of Jonah, Maximus states that the worm which destroyed Jonah’s bush is an allegory for Christ.⁴³ The context of this exegesis is that Christ as ‘worm’ destroyed the ‘bush’ which is an allegory for the Jewish ‘corporeal’ cult of the Lord, which is focused on the ‘letter’ of the Scripture instead of its ‘spirit’. Jonah’s tent would then be an allegory for Jerusalem and its temple, whereas the city of Nineveh would symbolize the Christian Church which consists of former pagans who have received divine grace after their repentance. What is interesting is that Maximus presents two additional reasons for the ‘worm’ being an allegory of Christ: i) Firstly, worms are supposed by Maximus to reproduce asexually. They are thus considered to symbolize Christ, who did not participate in sexual reproduction, as he was born from the Virgin, according to the Christian dogma. ii) Secondly, worms are used as bait and Christ is supposed to be the bait which has lured the devil. According to this narrative, the devil was the first to lure humanity by the promise of self-divinization. Subsequently, however, the devil was himself tricked by Christ who, by receiving mortal human flesh and by actually dying on the Cross, convinced the evil one that the power of death was applicable also to him. But since Christ was not part of the vicious relationship between pleasure and pain or between birth and death, the devil was lured and by the resurrection of Christ he was forced to vomit the humanity that

⁴¹ *Quaestiones et Dubia* (CCSG 10), ed. José Declerck, 143–144 (PG 90:793B–796A).

⁴² ‘...αἱ τοῦ Κυρίου στερήσεις ἡμῶν ἔξεις ἐγένοντο, οἷον, ὁ αὐτοῦ θάνατος ἡμῖν ζωὴ γέγονεν, ἡ αὐτοῦ ἀτιμία ἡμῖν ἐγένετο δόξα’, *ibid.*, 143–44 (PG 90:793B).

⁴³ *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium II* (CCSG 22), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel, 217–219 lines 484–508 (PG 90:712D–713B).

he had previously ‘swallowed’. It should be noted that the figures of the devil, the snake in Eden, and death are obviously identified here. This curious comparison of Christ with a worm recapitulates the Maximian soteriological narrative that I have tried to demonstrate thus far. This soteriological narrative has two parts: i) On the one hand, Christ does not participate in the fallen vicious circles which are provoked by pleasure and sexuality. ii) On the other, he does assume the negative part of the dialectic by his death. Very interestingly, this is viewed as a ‘trickery’ on the part of God who lures the devil. The ‘dialectical trickery’ in Maximus’ view is reminiscent of the trickery of the Spirit in Hegel. The devil seeks to attack Christ as he seems to be a simple man. But by this destructive urge he serves the plan of salvation, by being forced to ‘vomit’ out humanity. There is obviously a combination of two different imageries here. On the one hand, the fish which is lured by the bait, and on the other, someone who is forced to vomit after having received a remedy or poison. The latter arguably reminds us of the figure of the ancient ‘*pharmakos*’. The basic idea is that a poison could also act as a remedy by forcing someone to vomit a food with malicious effects. In a similar sense, some men could act as ‘*pharmakoi*’, by assuming all evil and by forcing society to metaphorically ‘vomit’ through their sacrifice the evil that it previously held within it, thereby purifying it. Christ as a ‘worm’ could be seen as a ‘*pharmakos*’, but in a sense that is different from the ancient understanding. Christ assumes pain and death, *i.e.* the results of sin, but he does not assume sin, pleasure and sexuality in themselves, unlike the ancient *pharmakoi* who also assumed guilt. On the other hand, the one who is forced to vomit is the devil as opposed to the human community. Rather, it is humanity itself that is vomited. This brings us to another question: in what sense is Christ an alternative ‘*pharmakos*’? Christ does use a sort of homeopathic principle like the ‘*pharmakoi*’. He strives to vanquish death by death, pain by pain, the vicious dialectic by assuming a part of this dialectic. He labours to save humanity by becoming human and mortal. But, on the other hand, by being God and outside sin, he does not simply lead to a temporary homeopathic purification but to the final salvation, in which humanity is definitely ‘vomited out’ of the vicious dialectic.

Saint Maximus the Confessor’s Understanding of Ἐγκράτεια.

After having clarified the Maximian soteriological narrative, we can now touch upon the issues raised by the second notion which is linked to power (‘*κράτος*’), namely Ἐγκράτεια (continence).⁴⁴ The fundamental ontological truth of the issue is that Christ is not ‘continent’ (ἐγκρατής), but ‘impassible’ (ἀπαθής). One could possibly claim that, just as Maximus the Confessor had discerned the vicious circles

⁴⁴ For the importance of Ἐγκράτεια as a virtue of the desiring part of the soul in the thought of Saint Maximus the Confessor see *Capitulum de Charitate Centuria* 4.15 (PG 90:1052A); 4.44 (PG 90:1057B); 4.57 (PG 90:1061A); 4.75 (PG 90:1065CD).

between pleasure and pain, sexuality and death, dominating and being dominated *etc.*, in a similar way he has equally diagnosed a vicious circle in the history of Christianity, namely the one between Monophysitism and Nestorianism. What Maximus had tried to achieve is to prove that what he perceived as the great heresies of his age, namely Monothelitism and Monoenergism are the descendants of both Monophysitism and Nestorianism, since there is an underlying dialectical affinity between the two fundamental Christological heresies. One could state this affinity briefly by saying that the logic of Nestorianism is based on *κράτος* (power, domination), whereas that of Monophysitism on *κρᾶσις* (mixture, confusion). However, for Maximus, *κράτος* and *κρᾶσις* are linked. Nestorianism proposes a ‘continent’ Christ, *i.e.* a Christ who exercises power over his human passions and dominates them. Monophysitism proposes a Christ in whom there is a union between God and man to the extent that human passions totally vanish, but in a way that any real sense of humanity is equally extinguished. Saint Maximus, conversely, stresses the importance of passions for integrity and salvation⁴⁵ through their transformation. What Maximus’ analysis shows is that in fact Monoenergism constitutes a vicious dialectical unity of Nestorianism and Monophysitism⁴⁶ (the same could arguably be said of Monothelitism⁴⁷). Just like Nestorianism, Monoenergism is based on *κράτος*, because it proposes a Christ in whom his divine operation dominates his human one. At the same time, this *κράτος* (domination) entails a *κρᾶσις* (mixture), since the result of this power relation between the two operations is a mixture, following the example of a mixture of *e.g.* gold and copper. The ultimate result of this mixture is the extinction of the human operation (in a way that smacks of Monophysitism), as well as the affection of the divine operation which ceases to be impassible.

But if we are to really follow the Maximian logic, then the ultimate consequence of Monoenergism is another heresy, namely that of Theopaschism. If we follow the logic of ‘Monoenergism according to domination’, then the human operation does not really vanish; it is rather subjugated, but then continues to affect the dominant divine operation, thus undermining its impassibility. The logic of Maximus’ proposition is to begin by revealing the deep internal relation between Nestorianism and

⁴⁵ For the positive role of passions in Maximian soteriology see the excellent studies: Paul Blowers, ‘Gentiles of the Soul: Maximus the Confessor on the Substructure and Transformation of the Human Passions’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, no. 1 (1996): 57–85; Paul Blowers, ‘Hope for the Passible Self: The Use and Transformation of the Human Passions in the Fathers of the *Philokalia*’, in *The Philokalia: A Classic Text of Orthodox Spirituality*, eds. Brock Bingaman and Bradley Nassif (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 216–29.

⁴⁶ It is characteristic that in the *Opusculum* 5 (PG 91:64A–65A) Maximus refutes the positions of the Monoenergists by using some arguments drawn from the Anti-Monophysite tradition, but he is equally accusing them of being in danger of manifesting ‘themselves as having the same mind with the demented Nestorius’ (PG 91:64C).

⁴⁷ The fact that Monothelitism (as well as Monoenergism) had combined elements from different and even opposite heresies of the first centuries is very well shown in Demetrios Bathrellos, *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature and Will in the Christology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9–98.

Monophysitism as it is expressed in the fact that Monoenergism is their common descendant. Then the positive response would be to articulate a Christology in which Christ would transcend both *κράτος* and *κράσις*. This would happen if we conceive of a Christ with two full natures and equally two full operations: By his divine nature, Christ offers a love that is identical to impassibility. In his human nature, Christ assumes weakness and a potentially dominated state, but only in order to abolish from within the vicious logic of any dialectic based on power and domination. Saint Maximus' point of departure about the notion of 'κράτος' is the theology of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, especially the crucial phrase 'since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death (*τὸ κράτος τοῦ θανάτου*)—that is, the devil' (Heb 2:14). But in Maximus' own metaphysical idiom, the devil's power of death (*κράτος τοῦ θανάτου*) lies in the 'false justice' of the two vicious circles between, on the one hand, birth and death and, on the other, between pleasure and pain, which perpetuate an inescapable logic of domination.⁴⁸ For this reason, Christ's assumption of human weakness is not a celebration of domination. It is rather the indication of power relations in the context of an impassible accord and cooperation (*συμφωνία, συνέργια*) with divine impassible love.

The Christian ascetic is thus the man who places himself in the position of weakness, that is in the position of the one who can be potentially dominated, but who submits to this only out of pious respect for a God who is impassible and does not wish to dominate his creature. The placing of oneself in a position of weakness seeks to annul from within the vicious spiral of dominator and dominated, or, at the level of Christian history, the vicious spiral between different forms of Nestorianism and Monophysitism, which are but symptoms of a deeper pathology, namely that of the imagining a dominant God.

It is, however, to be noted that each simple human being (*ψιλός ἄνθρωπος*) is not yet the Christ. Even if Christology is the ontological foundation and the goal of anthropology, there is a distinction between them. At a deeper ontological level, Maximus might claim that some historical or fallen conditions are not the case in Christology; however, at the anthropological level a simple human being cannot pretend that she has already transcended them inside history. The most characteristic example is that of the gnostic will. The gnostic will, *i.e.* a will that includes deliberation and fragmentation, is excluded from Christ, who bears universal human nature. However, a simple human being should not pretend that she has already transcended her gnostic will inside history. On the contrary, she is called to an ascetic struggle to coordinate her fragmented gnostic will with the wills of other fragmented human beings inside the Church and finally concede this gnostic will to God only in the eschaton, that is after the end of history. A Christian ascetical

⁴⁸ See, for example, *Quaestiones Ad Thalassium II* (CCSG 22), eds. Carl Laga and Carlos Steel, 89, lines 85–94 (PG 90:629C–D).

theology would comprise both moments: on the one hand, the eschatological perspective according to which the gnostic will does not have the final word, and, on the other, the realism that affirms inside history an assumption of one's concrete gnostic will is necessary as an act of avoiding illusory 'easy' salvations.⁴⁹ The same is true for continence (*ἐγκράτεια*). On the one hand, Christ is impassible and not continent. On the other hand, a simple human being should not pretend that she has already reached impassibility. For this reason, continence plays a very crucial role in the ascetic life and Maximus has indeed devoted many passages to exalt it as a virtue that is particular to the desiring part of the soul. However, one should remember that continence does not have the final word, *i.e.* the eschatological word.⁵⁰ It is important to remember that, since it means that the ascetic ideal of Maximus the Confessor is very far from what Michel Foucault describes as the encratic ideal of Hellenic Antiquity.⁵¹ The Christian ascetic is the one who performs continence not from the stance of the dominant but from the stance of the weak, since she shows pious respect for a Trinitarian God who is not himself dominating his creatures. By adopting this stance, the Christian ascetic asks God to come himself and lead her through *ἐγ-κράτεια* to the final concession of every *ἐγ-κράτεια* to God in order to achieve divine impassibility by grace. In other words, Christian continence is indispensable as an initial stage of the activation of human nature in a way that would avoid the vices and cultivate the respective virtues of its capacities, including ascetic violence over one's nature if necessary. On the other hand, in its ontological and eschatological foundation, Christian continence does not entail power as is the case in the Hellenic thought of Late Antiquity. It is a humble self-giving to impassibility as a divine grace that is identical to love.

⁴⁹ I have developed this ambiguity of the notion of gnostic will in Maximian anthropology in: Dionysios Skliris, *Πρόσωπο, Άτομο και Γνώμη στη σκέψη του Αγίου Μαξίμου του Όμολογητή*, *Θεολογία* 84, no. 3 (2013): 65–110.

⁵⁰ A structurally similar dialectic takes place between *πάθος* and *τέχνη* ('art' or 'technology'). As Joshua Lollar puts it: 'Following Origen's intuition that human intelligence is developed and revealed in the face of pathos precisely as technê, an intuition that Maximus follows insofar as he regards the philosophical life of ethics, contemplation of nature, and theology as technê, we see that pathos and technê are bound up for Maximus with revelation- of God and the world to man and of man to himself. The possibilities of and our responsibilities for technê, therefore, are open to the manifestation of 'the truth that yet remains hidden (*φανερώσαι τὴν τέως κεκρυμμένην ἀλήθειαν*, *Ambiguum* 8, [PG 91:1104D–1105A])', which is what is shown in the saints, or to its obscurity. A technê that decisively obscures pathos in its attempt to transcend the world participates in the obscuring of truth itself. The 'revealing' (*Entbergen* [according to Martin Heidegger]) that is technê runs the risk of burying the more fundamental revealing that is pathos, unless it is pathos itself that is revealed by technê. It is this final possibility that we may take as Maximus' word on "the question concerning technology", see Joshua Lollar, 'Pathos and Technê in St Maximus the Confessor', in *Knowing the purpose of creation through the resurrection: Proceedings of the Symposium on St Maximus the Confessor. Belgrade, October 18–21, 2012*, ed. Maxim Vasiljević (Alhambra, California and Belgrade: Sebastian Press, 2013), 238. Following a logic similar to the one developed by Lollar, one could claim that the goal of *ἐγκράτεια* is to reveal the truth of the passion and not to obscure it, a truth which however happens through eschatological transformation.

⁵¹ See Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité*, vol. 2 & 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).