

FINITUDE AND DEIFICATION: MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR'S ESCHATOLOGY AS SYSTEMATIC METAPHYSICS

MIROSLAV GRIŠKO

Independent Researcher, Ljubljana, Slovenia

From the position of Saint Maximus the Confessor's eschatology, conceptual pairs which address specific theological problems, such as *logoi-tropos* and natural will-gnomic will, also function as mirrors of each other, together clarifying the fundamental principles of the Confessor's eschatology as well as demonstrating the systematic character of his thought. Following the tradition of figures such as Sherwood and Zizioulas, the paper takes the opposition between Maximus' logic of end and Origen's logic of beginning as a starting point to describe Maximian eschatology as systematic metaphysics. The cosmic finitude of eschatology is an 'incomplete ontology' (Loudovikos) of crucifixion and resurrection, according to which the void of soteriological incompleteness (*viz.* that the creation is not yet deified) receives an objective meaning in the *eschaton*. The fallen *tropos* of being as deep ontological contingency is guided by the incarnation of the Logos, and, by extension, the *logoi*, thus instantiating the 'fundamental meaning' (Louth) of eschatological history. In other terms, history is the eschatological antagonism between, on the one hand, the gnomic will as the reduction of freedom to the complete ontology of immanent perpetual choice and, on the other, the natural will that determines the ethical mission of man as the total transformation of the cosmos, *theosis*.

Introduction

In his *Lectures on Christian Dogmatics*, Zizioulas writes that Saint Maximus the Confessor 'took the cosmology of Origen and made it eschatological, transferring its reference from the beginning to the end, thus dethroning Plato'.¹ The introduction of eschatology into cosmology engenders a new metaphysical model. Maximus' transformation of the theological and philosophical tradition is occasioned by the depth of the difference between beginning and end. Although there is no doctrinal formulation of eschatology in Orthodoxy,² the basic metaphysical premises of eschatology,

¹ John D. Zizioulas, *Lectures on Christian Dogmatics* (London: Continuum, 2008), 130.

² Cf. Andrew Louth, 'Eastern Orthodox Eschatology' in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. J. L. Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 233.

and more specifically the Maximian eschatology, may be approached through the logic of this shift.

A hypothesis of this paper is that a 'reference to end'—as that which establishes the overarching unity of Maximus' eschatology—has a dual function: end as *telos* and end as finitude. Whereas the eschatological *telos* of the creation is deification, the precondition of deification is a radical concept of cosmic finitude: the *eschaton* as 'the last things'.³ In other words, understanding the systematic metaphysical character of Maximus' eschatology entails understanding how the eschatological-cosmological concept of finitude informs the eschatological-ethical concept of deification, and *vice versa*.⁴

The sections of the paper will explore this hypothesis as follows:

1) The eschatological model of *cosmology* is in the first instance defined by its metaphysical commitment to a logic of end (i.e., cosmological finitude). On the basis of Maximus' critique of Origenism in, for example, the *Ambigua*, the writings of, *inter alia*, Zizioulas,⁵ Sherwood,⁶ and Louth,⁷ have portrayed Maximian eschatology as the Orthodox 'corrective' to an Origenist protology. In the tradition of these interpretations, the logic of cosmological finitude shall be developed in terms of its affinity with a logic of Crucifixion, namely, what Louth identifies as the placement of Christology at the centre of the Maximian eschatology, which, in turn, differentiates it from general Origenist

³ In the following passage, Maximus formulates the link between *telos* and deification as follows: 'The mystery of Christ is the ineffable hypostatic union of the divine and the human, which leads to the total identification of man with divinity by virtue of the hypostasis (of the Logos)..., whereby the difference of the natural remains unchangeable. This is, above all, the end of the divine plan and of those about whom God reflects according to which all creatures, all that which God creates is unified in him....In relation to this end God created the essences of all beings'. *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60 (PG 90:621A), trans. Ignatije Mitić, 'Историја и Есхатон: Есхатологија и постојање' [History and Eshaton: Eschatology and Existence], *Sobornost* 9 (2015): 3.

⁴ Accordingly, for Hans von Balthasar it is in 'Maximus' work of correction' of Origenist protology that 'finitude is no longer evil', but intrinsic to deification, 'to union with God'. *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2003), 135. In this sense, the Maximian eschatological corrective proposes the finitude of finitude, the finitude of the world of death, which does not annul finitude, but separates it from its distortion (the conception of finitude as evil), such that, as argued in this paper, finitude moves from paradoxical incomplete finitude to complete finitude, to the union that is its *telos*. For Sherwood, 'it would seem therefore that it is legitimate, even necessary, to seek the truth of man...in his supernatural finality and to understand his actual condition in relation to the Fall, provided only—and this of utmost importance—that this end and this condition are not metaphysicized' (*St. Maximus the Confessor: The Ascetic Life, The Four Centuries on Charity* [New York, NY: The Newman Press, 1954], 54). Insofar as Sherwood develops this thought of a Maximian 'truth of man' in juxtaposition to the Origenists, 'metaphysicized' here can be understood as a general Origenist metaphysical necessity conferred to the Fall, whereas for Maximus, it is the 'supernatural finality' of eschatology that marks the contingency of the fallen state of the creation. That is, the 'actual condition in relation to the Fall', is the contingency of the Fall, and it is precisely this contingent fallen state that is disclosed as contingent, viz., as finite, in the eschatological *telos*, the 'supernatural finality', of deification.

⁵ J.D. Zizioulas, *Lectures on Christian Dogmatics*.

⁶ Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of St. Maximus the Confessor and his Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Herder, 1955).

⁷ Andrew Louth, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996).

protologies.⁸ In other words, following Loudovikos's description of Maximus' eschatology as an 'incomplete ontology',⁹ the Confessor's postulation of an entirely counter-intuitive vision of finitude, according to which finitude is itself incomplete, is understood as an ontological gap that is at the same time a soteriological symptom of the motion towards deification.

2) At the centre of Maximus' eschatological model, the motion towards 'end' implies the primacy of a concept of history. Thinkers such as Guy Lardreau,¹⁰ Karl Löwith,¹¹ Carl Schmitt,¹² and Jacob Taubes,¹³ have argued in their studies of monotheistic eschatologies that there is a fundamental sense in which the notion of history is inseparable from an eschatological model, in a way that eschatology *creates* history. This claim can be understood as a thoroughly Maximian insight, insofar as history for Maximus is not temporal, but semiotical: eschatological history creates cosmic meaning through the commitment to cosmological finitude, the meaning of 'end'.

3) The semiotics of history may be further clarified through the *logoi-tropos* conceptual pair. The *tropos* concept entails that Maximus adheres to an exceptionless variation of ontological contingency in his system: the contingency of being as such. What is decisive for Maximus, however, is that the contingency of being does not *a fortiori* problematise or eliminate a concept of meaning (*logoi*), as for example in models motivated by nihilism.¹⁴ Instead, Maximus performs a synthesis, whereby total ontological contingency does not imply the liquidation of meaning, but rather informs the meaning of the cosmos: the contingency of the fallen state of the creation.

4) The meaning of contingency can be made more precise through Maximus' Christological distinction between the natural will and the gnostic will. Maximus contrasts the natural will—the authentic account of human freedom, the freedom of Christ *qua* man—with the gnostic will, the reduction of the act of freedom to the act of choice. The opposition of natural will and gnostic will describes both the eschatological struggle constitutive of history and its non-dialectical resolution, namely, the transformation of the cosmos

⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁹ For more on this, see Nikolaos Loudovikos, *Психоанализа и православна теологија: о жељи, свеобухватности и есхатологији* [Psychoanalysis and Orthodox Theology: On Desire, Universality, and Eschatology], trans. M. Rašović (Belgrade: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet, 2010).

¹⁰ Guy Lardreau, 'Apocalypse et resurrection selon quelques textes syriaques', *Apocalypse et sens de l'histoire, Actes du Colloque tenu à Paris les 11–12–13 juin 1982. Cahiers de l'Université Saint-Jean de Jérusalem* 9 (Paris: Berg International), 181–201.

¹¹ Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

¹² Carl Schmitt, 'Three Possibilities for a Christian Conception of History', *Telos* 147 (2009): 167–70.

¹³ Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. D. Ratmoko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Cf. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

according to the natural will, the latter being ‘wholly deified, in its agreement with the divine will’.¹⁵

5) Maximian Christology, which at once establishes the anthropological prototype for man, conceives the freedom of the human being entirely in terms of an ethical principle: freedom as ethics. Maximus’ conception of freedom means that the ethical mission of man is *theosis*, a form of ethical absolutism, instantiated in the Incarnation of the Logos, that overcomes the contingent fallen state: the eschatological finitude of the fallen creation and the resurrection that is its deification.

Logic of Crucifixion

Eschatology clarifies the divine plan (*βουλή*) of the creation. Accordingly, it ascribes an objective meaning to the creation.¹⁶ Whereas both beginning and end propose a variant of *βουλή*, the position of end entails that the objective meaning is inseparable from a concept of finitude. For Maximus, ‘we must not only be *crucified* to the world but also the world [must be *crucified*] to us’.¹⁷

Beginning and end are not symmetrical concepts; one is not the inverse of the other. The triad from *Ambigua* 7, which defines Maximus’ eschatology, *becoming-motion-rest*, is therefore not the reversal of the Origenist triad *becoming-rest-motion*.¹⁸ For Maximus, these are opposed logics.¹⁹ On the one hand, the logic of end uncoils the logic of beginning, so that the entirety of the cosmos becomes a directed force. On the other hand, this line is fully informed by the rupture of crucifixion and eschatological end. Skliris writes that for Maximus ‘the end which attracts is not natural maturity, but the *eschaton*, which presents nevertheless a gap of radical discontinuity...eschatology at the same time confirms teleology and “crucifies” it’.²⁰ Maximian eschatology is irreducible to teleology, in the sense that the acute eschatological *telos* implies the extremity of a break, which, accordingly, cannot be thought of in terms of that which this *telos* is ascribed to. The eschatological *telos* is not immanent to the logic of the world; instead, it is precisely

¹⁵ Maximus the Confessor, *Opusc.* 7, 80D. A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 185.

¹⁶ ‘Without reference to the *eschaton*, the entire *oikonomia* loses its meaning’ John D. Zizioulas, ‘Towards an Eschatological Ontology’, unpublished paper delivered at King’s College, London, 1998. Retrieved May 1, 2016 at <http://www.resourcesforchristiantheology.org/towards-an-eschatological-ontology/>

¹⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *Questions and Doubts*, trans. D.D. Prassas (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 149.

¹⁸ On the opposed triads, for example, cf. A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 67.

¹⁹ Dragoş Bahrin describes the difference in the ordering of the Maximian and Origenist triads as follows: ‘this is not just a matter of a simple change of positions, because Saint Maximus changes even the meaning of the concepts’. ‘The Anthropoc Cosmology of Saint Maximus the Confessor’, *Journal for Interdisciplinary Research on Religion and Science* 3 (2008): 21.

²⁰ Dionysios Skliris, ‘The Philosophical Implications of Maximus the Confessor’s Eschatology’, *The Fountain and the Flood: Maximus the Confessor and Philosophical Enquiry Workshop: XVII International Conference on Patristic Studies*, eds M. Vincent and S. Mitralaxis, (Leuven–Paris–Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2015).

the 'world that must be crucified', so as to disclose its *telos*. This *telos*, as the soteriology of deification given in the Incarnation of the Logos, is in absolute 'discontinuity' with a fallen creation. Eschatology is the 'incomplete ontology' of a creation that is in motion towards deification.

In his study of eschatology, Taubes describes the eschatological vision of the cosmos as the inauguration of 'a straight line in one direction. The direction of this straight line is irreversible... the purpose of this unidirectionality lies in the direction itself. The direction is always toward an end; otherwise it would be directionless. The end is essentially Eschaton'.²¹ From the position of eschatology, the creation is now thought of as a type of vector. As directed, the linearity of the *cosmos* at once implies a concept of end. The end itself is not part of the line. It induces the motion of the latter, but also indicates the gap towards which the creation, as directed force, is oriented. The fact that the line is determined by end prioritises the qualitative dimension of force. The line in its irreversibility towards end, marks the singular content of this end,—which is called purpose by Taubes. The movement of the creation takes on a qualitative dimension, as the end is that which the creation is not. The cosmic motion at the centre of Maximus' triad clarifies the authentic soteriology, which belongs to eschatology.

If an overturning of Origenist protology is necessary, this is because, in Zizioulas' terms, Maximus' 'transfer of reference' is not a shift of direction, but an establishment of direction, an establishment of reference. The logic of beginning is a logic of return. In the cyclical nature²² of the protological model, the creation becomes the centre, since it is always that which is to be recovered in its prelapsarian state. As opposed to establishing a reference, protology is entirely self-referential. The logic of beginning excludes the break which is required for a reference that, in Loudovikos's terms, would be an 'ecstatic reference',²³ a reference that goes beyond itself. The immediate failure of protology is its inability to establish this break in two interrelated senses. It elides the absolute separation between God and the creation that is the foundation of pure monotheism and the apophatic core of Orthodoxy. The protological self-reference to the initial idealised state stands in opposition to the ecstatic reference *qua* total break: the source of the creation in that which is apophatically transcendent to the creation.²⁴ Consequently, the logic of beginning maintains the domination of the

²¹ J. Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, 3.

²² A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 67.

²³ Nikolaos Loudovikos, 'Analogical Ecstasis: Maximus the Confessor, Plotinus, Heidegger and Lacan', retrieved May 1, 2016 https://www.academia.edu/20373350/_Analogical_Ecstasis_Maximus_the_Confessor_Plotinus_Heidegger_and_Lacan

²⁴ As Louth explains, '(P)erhaps the most fundamental revision Maximus demanded of the Origenist cosmology concerned its conviction that originally there had been a state of perfection, from which the rational beings fell (and to which they would eventually be restored), whereas Maximus' becoming-movement-rest much more accurately captures the condition of created beings. First, they come to be. This is itself a change, a form of movement, so becoming immediately issues in movement, and it is the purpose of movement to find rest'. *Maximus the Confessor*, 64.

pole of the First Adam,²⁵ the protological emphasis on expulsion and return.²⁶ The end, in contrast, marks the rupture of the entire creation. The instantiation of the eschatological straight line is determined by the pole of the crucified New Adam as opposed to the expelled First Adam. Beginning against end is a logic of expulsion against a logic of crucifixion. Crucifixion abrogates the self-reference of the creation in the simultaneous continuity and discontinuity of the line marked by end. For Maximus:

all visible realities need the cross, that is, the state in which they are cut off from things acting upon them through the senses. All intelligible realities need burial, that is, the total quiescence of the things which act upon them through the intellect. When all relationship with such things is severed, and their natural activity and stimulus is cut off, then the Logos, who exists alone in himself, appears as if risen from the dead.²⁷

The cross cuts into a putative homogeneous cosmology, and the economy of self-reference is broken. The generative and affective field of a relational immanent ontology, the thoroughly self-sufficient causal relationship at the basis of a physical model, is now interrupted by the void of burial. It is in this sense that Loudovikos calls Maximus' eschatology an incomplete ontology. Finitude opposes its intuitive definition as something that is complete: for example, a finite complete set. On the one hand, finitude circumscribes the creation. Eschatological end is cosmological end, as there is no exception to that which is crucified. On the other hand, finitude punctures the illusion of a complete ontology. Finitude denotes an outside in the sense that the drawing of a limit also simultaneously marks an outside to the limit. But the limit here reintroduces itself into the heart of that which is limited and shatters it. The limit does not preserve the integrity of that which is bound, but dissolves it. Cosmic finitude indicates the gap in the cosmos through which the Logos 'appears as if risen from the dead'.²⁸

²⁵ 'Both Adam and Christ can recapitulate all humanity because humanity is a unity, a whole....a concept that Origen had already hammered home in his anti-Valentinian polemic.' Ilaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 416. Following the protological logic, Adam possesses the recapitulative function and, therefore, according to the initial 'state of perfection' (A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 64) of the creation maintained by this same logic, Christ only recapitulates Adam (i.e., the domination of the Adamic pole) in opposition to the Maximian Christocentric eschatological corrective.

²⁶ Louth accordingly writes, referencing Origen: "for the end", as Origen repeatedly stated, "is always like the beginning". *Maximus the Confessor*, 64.

²⁷ *Centuriae de charitate I.* 67 (PG 90:1108B). G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherwood, and K. Ware, trans., *Philokalia*, vol. 2, (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), 127.

²⁸ This description is inspired by Philipp Valentini ('Hole in One! Three Historical Ways through which Desire has Organized the Theo-Political Difference between "Intellect" and "Spirit"'. *Political Theology: The Liberation of the Postsecular?* [Conference Paper, Liverpool: Liverpool Hope University, July 2015]) and his development of Lacan's concept of hole and its monotheistic dimension.

Consequently, the finitude of the creation is not immanent to the creation. If this were the case, that which is finite would transcend its finitude so as to establish its own limit, in the sense that that which is limited also informs its limit.²⁹ For Maximus, there is no reciprocal or dialectical determination between a form and its boundary. This would have the consequence of denying the unilateral determination of the Logos 'who exists alone in himself' on the creation. The depth of the concept of finitude that is present in eschatology would also be lost. The death of the world comes from the outside just as the Incarnation of the Logos comes from the outside. For Maximus, the eschatological world-end is 'supernatural'. The death of the world is not the world's own death; it is not the immanent limit of the world. Finitude comes from an exteriority, ending the world not according to the logic of the world, since this would re-inscribe the self-reference of the world, the creation as a complete ontology, but according to the transcendence of the Logos. The eschatological death of the world takes finitude in its strongest sense. If finitude is also an expression of contingency, that which is finite cannot be necessary for its own finitude. Finitude is not the world's own inherent limit, but just as the cosmos is created, so is this limit. Finitude is not a predicate; it is rather the essence of the creation as created.³⁰ Maximus writes that 'whatever has no end (τέλος) to its natural activity is also not complete, not perfect (τέλειον),'³¹ to which von Balthasar adds the commentary that 'to wish to eliminate this finitude under the pretext of attaining a more intimate ontological identification with the Infinite, would mean destroying the deepest meaning of the creature's being'.³² The finitude of the creation reiterates the apophatic logic of extreme transcendence, 'the chasm (χάσμα) that separates God from the world',³³ as well as the subordination of the creation to the Creator. Eschatologically, however, this finitude is paradoxically *incomplete*, insofar as the creation is in motion towards its perfection, its deification. The entire logic of an eschatological model entails that this *telos* has, in a decisive sense, not yet been realised.³⁴ The eschatological treatment of finitude in the first instance separates that

²⁹ e.g., the Hegelian account of finitude.

³⁰ If the eschatological limit of the world repeats the limit which is the finitude of the creation as created, the limit as such is also tied to essence by Dionysius the Areopagite, on the basis of the link between limit and justice: 'Justice, as distributing things suitable to all, both due measure, and beauty, and good order, and arrangement, and marking out all distributions (διανομάς) and orders for each, according to that which truly is the most just limit'. *On Divine Names*, Caput 8, Section VII, trans. J. Parker, (London: James A. Parker, 1897). Retrieved at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/dio/dio11.htm>

³¹ *Ambigua* (PG 91:1120A), trans. H. von Balthasar, *Cosmic Liturgy*, 155.

³² *Ibid.*, 155.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ In this light, Loudovikos's terminology of an 'incomplete ontology' complements his account of Maximus' eschatological ontology as dialogical reciprocity (cf. *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor's Eschatology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity* [Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010]); the eschatological dimension of this ontology *qua* reciprocity is precisely indicative of the latter's incompleteness, insofar as the Eschaton is something that is still not yet *historically* completed (i.e., the future aspect of the Eschaton, which, understood as the 'last things', is the completed finitude—deification—of the creation).

which the creation is, from that which it is not, but in the last instance finitude means that the creation must be thought of according to that which it is not, according to 'the Logos who exists alone in himself'.

For Maximus, the eschatological world-end is the cosmic crucifixion of the creation, its finitude; but finitude at once indicates the dependency of the creation upon that which it is not. This source outside itself marks ontological incompleteness, an ontological gap through which the Logos 'appears as if risen from the dead'. Given that the source of the creation is an absolute exteriority, that upon which the creation is dependent appears as immanent with the Incarnation of the Logos, but as a *gap within immanence*: ontological incompleteness *qua* incomplete finitude of the creation.³⁵ The eschatological conception of cosmic finitude as incomplete finitude accordingly discloses cosmic *telos* as deification—the mystery of crucifixion and *a fortiori* the mystery of resurrection, which is contained within the Incarnation of the Logos.

History as Semiotic

The Incarnation of the Logos is the historical fracture between beginning and end. For Maximus, the cross does not only appear in history, but creates history. History is not a temporal concept, but semiotical. History is the unfolding of a precise meaning, disclosed in the Incarnation of the Logos, which instantiates the direction towards the end.³⁶ The finitude of the creation is the meaning of the creation and that towards which the creation is directed. Meaning as history is the consequence of this finitude, crystallised in crucifixion, which marks a tension between the creation and that which it is not, the fallen state and the soteriology of cosmic deification: *theosis*.

The Origenist protological emphasis on the expulsion of the First Adam contains an inadequate soteriology, in that it implies the devaluation of the postlapsarian. In the orientation towards the past of protology, the consequence of this logic is that all that which comes after the beginning and the Fall is trivialised. The past as dominant in the sense of a golden age conveys that, that which follows origin loses any meaning, insofar as it is only a symptom of degeneration, a mistake. The logic of beginning evokes a logic of the cycle. If origin is inscribed as an idyllic point, a

³⁵ Following Loudovikos's use of Lacan in relation to Orthodox theology and the explicit reference to Lacan with the term ontological incompleteness, Maximian eschatology as an incomplete ontology could also be further conceptually illustrated according to Lacan's logic of *pas-tout*.

³⁶ H. von Balthasar accordingly writes: 'Maximus expressly says that the Incarnation—more precisely, the drama of Cross, grave, and Resurrection—is not only the midpoint of world history but the foundational idea of the world itself... Maximus does not intend to demonstrate a necessity (for the Incarnation) in the metaphysical sense, but rather (to point to) the meaning of history itself—all history'. *Cosmic Liturgy*, 134.

pure passivity of the cycle towards the status of the postlapsarian takes root. Rest accordingly occupies the central position in the Origenist triad.

With its establishment of a direction towards the end, eschatology determines that that which occurs after the Fall is not reducible to degeneration. As Louth observes, protology elides struggle, whereas Maximus' eschatology commits to the primacy of struggle.³⁷ This difference is inherent to the respective logics of protology and eschatology. According to the latter, the postlapsarian shifts from the status of error to the terrain of an antagonism between a fallen state and a soteriological moment, which infers that the creation still possesses a meaning in its struggle to realise the eschatologico-soteriological end. Following Zizioulas's gloss of the Maximian eschatology as a 'Fall from End',³⁸ the passivity of the cyclical is annihilated in the name of this directed struggle. If the creation in its fallen state is ultimately that which it is not—namely, that it is not deified—this incompleteness is taken, in its strongest sense, as a total break, since it also has never been. Eschatology entails, in Zizioulas's words, 'an unfinished reality'.³⁹ The Fall from beginning is the 'absence of a true and unexpected creativity'⁴⁰ according to the logic of the continuous cycle. The Fall from End substitutes cyclical repetition with a fissure that instantiates linear direction. History is this ontological incompleteness that never was complete. The Incarnation of the Logos as a break in history that inaugurates history is the disclosure of this incompleteness.⁴¹ With the exigency of Incarnation, a form of meaning is engendered. The disjunction transpierces everything, creating an axiology according to which even a fallen creation is a reserve of value, insofar as it moves towards deification.

³⁷ Thus, Louth draws a distinction between Maximus' eschatology and Origenist protology in terms of the former's emphasis on ascetic struggle, a struggle that Louth diagnoses as lacking from the latter: 'In (Maximus') view, the only truly satisfactory philosophy is "true judgment concerning reality and activity, supported by ascetic struggle". (*Ambigua* 1108A). *Maximus the Confessor*, 66. From the position of Maximus' eschatology, and following the dominant eschatological dimension of Maximus' thought, ascetic struggle becomes eschatological struggle, the antagonism of history, and history *qua* antagonism (i.e., what Louth terms 'asceticism for all'): '(A)s Maximus makes clear in his *Mystagogia*...the ascetic struggle in responding to God is not simply an individual matter, it is part of the process of overcoming the divisions that have shattered the cosmos as a result of the Fall—ascetic struggle has cosmic significance'. *Maximus the Confessor*, 23.

³⁸ Cf. Dionysios Skliris "Eschatological Teology", "Free Dialectic", "Metaphysics of the Resurrection": The Three Antinomies that make Maximus an Alternative European Philosopher'. *Maximus the Confessor as a European Philosopher*, eds S. Mitralaxis et al., (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017).

³⁹ J.D. Zizioulas, 'Towards an Eschatological Ontology'.

⁴⁰ Nikolaos Loudovikos, 'Ecstatic or reciprocal meaningfulness?: Orthodox Theology between Theology, Philosophy and Psychoanalysis', https://www.academia.edu/20373696/Ecstatic_or_Reciprocal_Meaningfulness_Orthodox_Eschatology_between_Theology_Philosophy_and_Psychoanalysis, 1.

⁴¹ Accordingly, the ontological incompleteness of Maximian eschatology contrasts with ontological completeness in Origen: 'In the Commentary on John XIII.37, 262.5 ff., Origen considers the question whether the rational creature created by God was incomplete (*ateles*) when placed in paradise. It would not, however, be reasonable to call him who was able to work the tree of life and everything which God planted and caused to spring up as "incomplete". So perhaps he was complete in some way (*pos*) and became incomplete through the transgression'. Caroline P. Bammel 'Adam in Origen' in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. R. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 77.

The end, at once, is closer to the creation than its fallen state. It is in this sense that Zizioulas writes that Maximus ‘turns us around from the past to the future so that the eschatological community became the centre of ecclesiology again. This single eschatology incorporates the logos, beings, and the world as realities that come to us from the future.’⁴² Whereas future as end means that the reality of the world comes from outside, the founding of the eschatological community annuls the equation of these concepts with a putative distantiation. The future is a future that is in the present. The Maximian concept of *kairos*, although *prima facie* indicating a temporal concept, is, instead, a soteriological subversion of time. In Manoussakis’s words, *kairos* is ‘vertical and discontinuous’;⁴³ it transforms the apparent distance of end into a fissure that undercuts the patina of immediate and experienced temporal categories. The ‘kairology’ of future and end alleviates any strict delineation of time, in that time becomes so diffuse that it, as it were, evaporates.⁴⁴ Eschatology abrogates what Heidegger would term a ‘vulgar understanding of time’; the eschatological dimension of Orthodoxy effaces the intuitive structure of temporality. The implication of *kairos* is therefore not only the elimination of any intuitive understanding of time, but the annulment of time as a fundamental concept for eschatology. This is in direct contrast to the protological model, where the elevation of the prelapsarian first stage *qua* idealised past grounds the entire model. That which has structure in protology is time, or rather, time gives the defining order of that which is—the concept of ages which are dominant in cyclical models of the cosmos. The shift from beginning to end, initiated by Maximus against the Origenist protology, is not temporal in character, as the effect of this logic distorts time in such a way that it is no longer recognisable as anything that can be called time.⁴⁵ If time exists so that everything does not happen at once, the Orthodox understanding of temporality makes the opposite claim—everything does happen at once.⁴⁶

⁴² J.D. Zizioulas, *Lectures on Christian Dogmatics*, 131.

⁴³ John Panteleimon Manoussakis, *God After Metaphysics: A Theological Aesthetic* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 59.

⁴⁴ Mitralaxis observes that the Maximian conception of non-linear time is rooted in the non-linear time of scriptural grammar: ‘Maximus notes that the tenses used in Scripture are often entangled, with past tenses being used in place of future tenses and vice versa’, *Ever-Moving Repose: The Notion of Time in Maximus the Confessor’s Philosophy through the Perspective of a Relational Ontology* (Berlin: Freie Universitaet, 2014), 206.

⁴⁵ ‘Temporal language, the language of continuity and consecutiveness in the divine *oikonomia*, is decisive for Maximus since it conveys the prophetic drama of revelation; but it is likewise limiting in its capacity for disclosing the truths of *theologia*. The phrase in 1 Cor 10:11 bears this out. These are “ages”, Maximus notes, obviously not as we normally conceive them, but ages purposed “for the outworking of the mystery of God’s embodiment”. Paul means that the Incarnation is a final goal of the totality of time, not that the incarnation has put an end to a series of ages, simply to be followed sequentially by a new series. Moreover, the aorist tense in 1 Cor 10:11 and (we can imply) the futurity of the ages indicated in Eph 2:7 are relativized in the pure *simultaneity* of the incarnational mystery itself’. Paul M. Blowers, ‘Realized Eschatology in Maximus the Confessor *Ad Thalassium* 22’, *Studia Patristica* 32 (1997): 260.

⁴⁶ As Constatas writes, the aesthetics of the Byzantine Icon, such as icons of the Last Judgment, present time in this disjointed and synchronous manner. *The Art of Seeing: Paradox and Perception in Orthodox Iconography* (Holy Cross, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2014).

In Maximus' eschatology, two types of end are operative, which can be thought of as being layered upon each other. There is a historical end, which is demonstrated in the linearity of eschatology. This is the concept of a cosmos directed towards that which it is not, the centrality of motion in the Maximian triad. But this is only an outer level of Maximus' eschatology. The linear history of eschatology is constantly ruptured. The *eschaton* possesses a linear historical dimension in that it establishes history; yet history is created according to the instantiation of the end of historical time, the negation of this same history. 'The eschatology of presence' (Zizioulas)⁴⁷ is the bursting forth of transcendence as that which the creation is not in a unilateral sense, such that on a deeper level, the world always ends every moment. The *eschaton* occurs perpetually, as, for example, in the liturgy of the eschatological community⁴⁸ as well as in the lives of the saints, who—one may say—see the world not from the position of historical time, but rather from the position of the end of the world that occurs in every instance.⁴⁹

The straight line of eschatology is semiotical because it is a marker of void—that the creation is not yet deified. The unidirectional form of the creation recapitulates the content of the fallen creation as that which it is not. The Incarnation of the Logos indicates the objective meaning of this void—the incomplete ontology of eschatological finitude *qua* that which the creation is not, which also determines the creation. The objective meaning of void is the motion towards deification as the history of the cosmos. That is, history *qua* eschatological is a history of the cosmos as a history of a soteriological void, but it is precisely this 'active emptiness',⁵⁰ which takes on a purely objective meaning, inducing the soteriological motion: the meaning that is the 'theo-drama' of history as the movement towards cosmic deification.

Meaning and Contingency

The conceptual pair *logoi* and *tropos* formulates the eschatological motion towards deification from the position of a synthesis of meaning and contingency. For Maximus, contingency does not, in an intuitive way, abolish meaning. Rather, it directly informs meaning according to the eschatological and soteriological logic of the end of the fallen cosmos.

The *logoi* determine the 'fundamental meaning'⁵¹ of the creation. Maximus writes that they 'pre-exist...what has come into existence'⁵² and 'proceed from the

⁴⁷ John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 174.

⁴⁸ Cf. J.D. Zizioulas, *Lectures on Christian Dogmatics*.

⁴⁹ Thus, the eschatological dimension of Maximus' hagiology, for example: 'By achieving (the termination of evils) through voluntary mortification, the Saints commend themselves strangers and exiles from this life'. *Ambigua* (PG 91:1157CD), A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 125.

⁵⁰ P. Valentini, 'Hole in One!'

⁵¹ A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 68.

⁵² Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91:1085A), trans. N. Conostas, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers, Vol. 1: The Ambigua* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

divine will.⁵³ The *logoi* are thus distinct from the act of creation. The creation does not exhaust the *logoi*, that is, the *logoi* are irreducible to the instantiation of the creation, as the procession indicates a hiatus. The ordering does not alienate the creation from the *logoi*, but rather upholds the unilateral determination of the Logos with regards to the creation. The pre-existence of the *logoi* followed by the act of creation maintains the separation of transcendence from immanence. If the *logoi* would be instantiated simultaneously with the act of the creation, this would imply a complete ontology, an immanence of meaning that no longer finds its source beyond itself. At once, the pre-existence of the *logoi* preserves the fundamental meaning of the creation against its liquidation in the fallen state. What occurs with the Fall is, in this sense, the confusion of this ordering. The creation is alienated from the *logoi*, from its fundamental meaning, because the hiatus itself is obviated. The *logoi* are distorted,⁵⁴ insofar as the creation appears cut off from transcendence, not in a sense that maintains their separation, but which annuls it. In the absence of the ordering series that ascribes a precise meaning to the creation, all exteriority to the creation is extinguished in a self-referential immanence. This is the exact inverse of the Maximian image of burial which describes the ontological incompleteness of the eschatological model.

The *tropos* and *logoi* pairing evokes the soteriological dimension of eschatology. *Tropos*, for Maximus, is contingency. It designates, in its most basic sense, a 'mode of being'.⁵⁵ In Maximus' eschatology, *tropos* as general mode of being takes a particular form—the alienated state of the fallen creation. Yet the fallen state as a mode of being is itself contingent. The fallen world is a *tropos* of being, which is characterised by soteriological incompleteness. The *logoi* appear as void, namely, as that which the fallen creation is not. The eschatological basis of the *logoi-tropos* relation entails that the concept of meaning is doubled, appearing twice in this model. The *logoi* as fundamental meaning are separated from the contingency of *tropos*. They constitute a separate pole in relation to the modes of being and remain unaffected by the latter. Yet, with the Incarnation of the Logos, they now appear as an imperative, which undoes the disunity of *logoi* and *tropos*. The *logoi* are, through the Incarnation of the Logos,⁵⁶ injected directly into the *tropos* of the contingent being, which gives the cosmos its form as a directed force. Eschatological history becomes the meaning that is found in overcoming the contingent fallen state. The contingent *tropos* of soteriological void is now the objective meaning of void, which is the deification of the cosmos according to the fundamental meaning of the *logoi*.

⁵³ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 7 (PG 91:1085A).

⁵⁴ A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 68.

⁵⁵ Cf. Jean-Claude Larchet, 'The Mode of Deification', in *The Oxford Handbook of Maximus the Confessor*, eds P. Allen and B. Neil (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵⁶ In other words, Maximus' 'Christocentric cosmology'. cf. Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Accordingly, the soteriology of deification is intertwined with the finitude of creation. The introduction of eschatology into cosmology is a transformation of the cosmological model, whereby the cosmos is that which is no longer fundamental for cosmology: the contingency of the cosmos, and, *a fortiori*, the contingency of being. The eschatologisation of cosmology maintains that the necessity of that which is, is no longer apparent, since that which is—in classical ontological terms, being *qua* being—is reduced to *tropos* as mode of being. For Maximus, being is entirely reducible to a mode, to this contingency. Maximus does not posit *tropos* as a species of being which could then be paired with the genus of a general concept of being. Instead, all ontology is thought of in the first instance according to contingency, and thereafter bound to the index of a fundamental meaning as the *logoi*, which precedes the primordial ontogenesis of creation. In this sense, being is nothingness, the nothingness of its contingency, which is recapitulated in an eschatological finitude that is always present.

This logic repeats the deep ontological contingency present throughout Orthodox doctrine, which, decisively, does not rescind a concept of meaning. The eschatological annulment of the necessity of the creation mirrors itself in the cosmogonical doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, which vitiates the immanent source of the cosmos and the self-sufficient ontology of being *qua* being. The apophatic commitment of Orthodox theology entails that ontology is not a fundamental concept in her metaphysics. God as nothingness and divine darkness forces metaphysics to break from the matrix of being *qua* being.⁵⁷ Maximus develops this idea when he describes the instability of being (*τὸ ἄστατον*) as the persisting nothingness of the creation. The instantiation of the cosmos that brings the creation into being does not eradicate nothingness. The act of creation is more fundamentally understood as the contingency of creation, which marks the nothingness of being. The nothingness of being does not annul the *logoi*, which precede the act of creation. In the fallen state, the void at the base of being is precisely from where the *logoi* 'appear as if risen from the dead'. The objective meaning of void as the overcoming of the fallen state is dependent upon that which is transcendent to being and thus in the last instance undetermined by being. It is this exterior as well as unilateral determination which generates the motion towards deification. The historical and cosmic mission of man as motion towards eschatological end unifies fundamental meaning and contingency, *logoi* and *tropos*. The creation is oriented towards that which, in its fallen state, it is not,—however that which it is not is precisely that which the creation 'is'.

⁵⁷ Cf. my article 'The Apophatic Dimension of Revelation' in *Mystical Theology and Continental Philosophy: Interchange in the Wake of God*, eds D. Lewin, S.D. Podmore, and D. Williams (London: Routledge, 2017) for an interpretation of apophaticism as a non-ontological metaphysics (i.e., a metaphysics where the absolute cannot be posited in terms of an ontological concept, and the systematic corollaries of the initial apophatic commitment).

For Maximus, the Fall is contingent, it 'exists at the level not of *logos*, but of *tropos*'.⁵⁸ But the Fall is also a contingent necessity⁵⁹ from the position of eschatology, insofar as the eschatological commitment to world-end is the commitment to the end of the fallen state. The necessity given to eschatological end follows from the contingent necessity of the Fall. But the latter is ascribed a further contingency according to the logic of eschatological finitude. Finitude namely prosecutes a break in this series before it becomes a tautology. This recalls the 'retroactive causality' that Zizioulas identifies in Maximus.⁶⁰ The contingent necessity of the Fall is taken as given in the first instance by the necessity of eschatological end, but is then eviscerated in this same end, which in the last instance separates contingency from necessity. The Maximian sequence of necessary meaning followed by contingent being, eschatologically becomes a gnosiological principle of thinking of that which is as that which it is not. The *tropos* as a mode of being is not thought of in terms of being, but in terms of the fundamental meaning instantiated in the *logoi*, which lie beyond the horizon of any ontology.

The apophaticism of Maximus' eschatology severs the traditional philosophical link between metaphysics and ontology. This cut does not inaugurate a limit for thought, but rather functions as an imperative for a transformation of thought away from its overdetermination by any concept of being, an apophatic unknowing⁶¹ occasioned by the deep unity of the *logoi*, the Logos and the eschaton⁶²—which at once discloses the ethical mission of man.

Eschatology of the Natural and Gnostic Will

Maximus' defence of the Chalcedonian doctrine of Christ's divine and human will logically flows over into eschatology. If eschatology denotes both the creation's contingency and its meaning, the natural will and gnostic will distinction is also entirely eschatological. The doctrinal exploration of the mystery of Christology is consistent with the exploration of the mystery of eschatology.

While on the level of Christology, the distinction of the natural will and gnostic will entails the exclusion of the latter from Christ, on the level of the creation, this

⁵⁸ A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 56.

⁵⁹ Cf. S. Žižek, 'Interview (with Ben Woodard)' in L. Bryant, N. Srnicek, and G. Harman, *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne, VIC: re.press, 2011); and J. Van Houdt, 'The Necessity of Contingency or Contingent Necessity: Meillassoux, Hegel, and the Subject', *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 7.1 (2011): 128–141, for accounts of contingent necessity.

⁶⁰ For a description of Zizioulas' retroactive causality, cf. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 90.

⁶¹ In other words, the epistemology of mysticism.

⁶² Larchet provides the following formulation of the conceptual affinity in Maximus between finitude and the *logoi* of creation: '(the) essential reason, the one that fundamentally defines and characterises it, but also its finality, the *scopos* for which a being exists, briefly its reason of being in a double meaning of principle and end of its existence', *La divinisation de l'homme selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur* (Paris: Cerf, 1996), 113. D. Bahrim, 'The Anthropocentric Cosmology of Saint Maximus the Confessor', 14.

distinction marks its basic antagonism. The natural will describes the freedom of Christ as man and, in consequence, the authentic freedom of man. The rejection of the gnostic will in Christ is the eschatological and soteriological extinction of the gnostic will in man. For Maximus, 'the natural will is the essential desire of things according to nature',⁶³ whereas 'the gnostic will is the self-chosen impulse and movement of reason to one thing or another'.⁶⁴ According to the *logoi* that provide the order of the creation, and which are newly communicated in the abrogation of the alienation from the *logoi* that is the Incarnation of the Logos, the natural will is the freedom of the world that is undetermined by the world. The gnostic will, in contrast, implies a complete ontology. It is the entirely immanent pseudo-freedom of an economy of perpetual and self-sufficient choice. The natural will invokes a break with the militancy of its line: the uncompromising character of authentic human will as the will 'according to nature', which recalls the vector of eschatology. These are two separate accounts of the person which, in a fallen world, are set against each other. The natural will as the authentic freedom of man given in the Incarnation serves as corrective to the gnostic misrecognition of freedom and instantiates the soteriological mission. If Christ is, according to Florovsky's gloss of Maximus, 'the heart of the world existence—not only in terms of redemption, but also in terms of the creation of the world',⁶⁵ the Confessor's rejection of the gnostic will in Christ presents the fallen creation as the reign of the gnostic will as well as its eschatological overcoming.⁶⁶

The linear character of the natural will means that the exercising of freedom by man is not trivial, but effectuates total cosmic transformation. The Adamic decision for death, which inaugurates the fallen world, is clearly only possible because of freedom. Yet the introduction of death into the world is a counterfeit or distorted form of freedom, insofar as the decision for death introduces necessity into the world as the necessity of death. This is a counterfeit necessity, since the world is fundamentally unnecessary; it remains, in Maximus' terms, a *tropos*. The world's only immanent, illusory necessity can be death, as death also places constraints on the world, but only through some type of absence, a corrupted form of the fundamental contingency of being. Maximus' eschatology does not maintain a tension between, on the one hand, the freedom of man, and, on the other, a concept of nature which, taken as a form of necessity, restricts freedom (e.g., Berdjajev),⁶⁷ but rather nature, the creation, in its lack of necessity and the transformative oppor-

⁶³ *Opuscula Theologica et polemica* 14 (PG 91:153A–B). P. Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 201.

⁶⁴ OTP 14 (PG 91:153A–B). P. Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 201.

⁶⁵ George Florovsky, *Byzantine Fathers of the Sixth to Eighth Centuries* (Moscow: Palomnik 1992), 200. K. and M. Zinkovskii, 'Hierarchic Anthropology of Saint Maximus the Confessor', *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 2, n. 4 (2011): 44.

⁶⁶ Maximus equates the gnostic will with evil: 'For evil consists in nothing else than this difference of our gnostic will from the divine will' (*Opusc.* 3, 56BC; A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 60).

⁶⁷ E.g., the argument in his *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (San Rafael, CA: Semantron Press, 2009).

tunity this lack entails, is consistent with this same freedom. The contingency of the Fall reverses into freedom as necessity—the necessary eschatological end of the contingent fallen state. The misrecognition of freedom and the struggle to overcome this misrecognition constitutes the eschatological meaning of the creation. The Maximian eschatology understands the contingent necessity of the Fall as a misrecognition of human freedom—the gnostic will—such that the proper exercise of freedom becomes the termination of the fallen state—the soteriological dimension and the *telos* of deification inherent to the eschatological position.

Whereas eschatology suggests the abolition of freedom in the inevitability of the last things, this commitment to finitude is consistent with the freedom of the natural will. Eschatology becomes inevitable because man misrecognises his freedom. The misrecognition of freedom as the gnostic will is the negation of freedom and thereby introduces the determinism that is present in eschatology. Eschatology becomes necessary, as it is grounded not in the world, which is contingent, but in that which is not the world. The form of this determinism, unlike protology, does not invoke passivity. Eschatological determinism follows the logic of the martyr. The eschatological conception of this ‘descent into hell’ is an active confrontation, which ultimately shatters and transforms the (gnomic) world.⁶⁸ Because eschatology does not locate the meaning of its soteriological mission as entirely immanent to the creation, a conflict appears between the entirely self-referential immanent world and that which transcends it. From this follows that for Maximus, ‘Christian life is viewed as a spiritual war against the power of evils which employ the material world as a weapon against human beings’.⁶⁹ With the Fall, the creation is mobilised against itself in the form of an internecine war, although this entirely endemic or internal war is shown to be illusory from the position of the side which opposes the hegemony of the world. The rejection of the gnostic will in Christ clarifies the terms of this spiritual war as the rejection of the creation’s wholly immanent struggle and thus wholly immanent conception of itself, that is, as being *qua* being. The latter entails the perpetuation of the choice between ‘one thing and another’, the immanent bind of man to the world that is the exhaustion of freedom within a complete ontology. Maximian spiritual war against complete ontology is thus eschatological war. The eschatological orientation towards the end is the end of this struggle, but also the end of the world that goes beyond the world. Eschatology liberates this end, not only as the end of the world, but as an end that opens onto an outside against the absolutisation of the world. The distinction between the natural and gnostic will as distinction between anthropological and, in the last instance, cosmological visions, animates the meaning of history and determines the field of eschatological war. It

⁶⁸ Once again, relevant here is Louth’s identification of the importance of struggle in Maximus’ eschatology.

⁶⁹ *Quaestiones et Dubia*, in *Corpus Christianorum*, 165, TLG 165. K. and M. Zinkovskiy. ‘Hierarchic Anthropology of Saint Maximus the Confessor’, 55.

is in this spirit that Berdjajev writes: 'I would formulate as follows the eschatological problem, which war and the catastrophes of history present: history must end, because within the limits of history the problem of the person is unresolved, his unconditional and utmost value'.⁷⁰

Freedom as Eschatological Mission

Contemporary commentaries in the literature on Maximus, which question the natural and gnostic will distinction on the basis that Maximus ascribes an overtly fallen quality to the gnostic will, pacify the eschatological context that determines the entirety of anthropology. According to these interpretations, the gnostic will is intrinsic to human freedom, since freedom is reciprocal with choice.⁷¹ The degraded status which Maximus confers to the gnostic will overlooks the putative lived experience of human freedom.⁷² These rehabilitations of the gnostic will accordingly occlude the eschatological war over the status of freedom and the axiology of the person that informs the meaning of history. In such accounts, the problem of freedom is separated from the Christological, cosmological, soteriological and eschatological dimensions that are *unified* through Maximus' *division* between the natural and gnostic will.

From the position of the natural will, the reduction of freedom to the perpetuation of individual choice subordinates the effect of freedom and, in consequence, trivialises freedom. The gnostic will conceives freedom as choice and intends to preserve the structure of freedom of choice. Choice only generates further choice and thus reproduces itself in the logic of self-reference and a complete ontology. The natural will, in contrast, entails a militant concept of freedom as the total transformation of the cosmos. Freedom is meaningful only if it has an effect.⁷³ Recalling the distinction between the natural and the gnostic will, concerning the world of democratic liberal capitalism, Yannaras writes that

freedom is thought of as the possibility of unlimited choice: the ability to choose among different ideas, different convictions, different political

⁷⁰ Nikolaj Berdjajev, 'Война и эсхатология', *Путь* 61 (1939–40): 3–14.

⁷¹ Cf. Ian A. McFarland, 'Naturally and by Grace: Maximus the Confessor on the Operation of the Will', *Scottish Journal of Philosophy* 58, n. 4 (2005): 410–433; David Bradshaw, 'St. Maximus the Confessor on the Will', in *Knowing the Purpose of Creation through Resurrection*, ed. M. Vasiljević (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2013), 143–57, *inter alia*.

⁷² 'Maximus preserved (the gnostic will's) positive aspect, especially in his earlier writings, because, again, it bespoke the existential and experiential dimension of creaturely desire and will'. Paul M. Blowers, *Maximus the Confessor: Jesus Christ and the Transformation of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 123.

⁷³ Much more still needs to be said on how Maximus' concept of gnostic will completely anticipates the (neo)liberal and democratic definitions of human freedom as individual choice, a prophetic vision of counterfeit freedom that informs the historical reality of eschatology and the signs of the times.

parties, newspapers, etc. The right of the individual to unlimited choice... The freedom that interests me is the one which frees us from the constraints of the created world'.⁷⁴

Maximus' eschatology, which takes the end as axiomatic, clarifies the only effect with which freedom may be equated. According to the *logoi* of an absolute transcendent truth, natural will locates freedom in the break from and annihilation of the bonds of the (gnomic) fallen state of man, that is, in the *theosis* of soteriological and eschatological transformation.

If the freedom of the natural will appears as a violation of an intuitive definition of freedom, this is because the latter lacks an absolute sense of ethics. Maximus' linking of freedom *qua* natural will to the soteriology of *theosis* establishes the centrality of an ethical principle to his eschatological metaphysics.⁷⁵ The meaning of the creation, which follows from the eschatology of the natural and gnomic will, is meaning as ethics. Meaning is not exhausted in language and ethics is not equivalent to particular, contingent intents or norms, but, instead, meaning is entirely ethical. Even Wittgenstein, who in a sense helps inaugurate the particular twentieth-century current that liquidates meaning in language, will later oppose this same approach with his remark that if there existed 'a book about ethics which really was a book on ethics this book would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world'.⁷⁶ Absolute ethics shapes the hierarchy of knowledge, in that ethics becomes the meaning and centre of knowledge; in the last instance everything vanishes in this centre. This link of meaning and ethics is, in other terms, a militant form of ethical non-naturalism,⁷⁷ whereby ethics is irreducible to the world, but the world at once is entirely reducible to ethics. Ethics in Maximian eschatology binds how the world is to how the world should be.⁷⁸ The transition from is to ought, for Hume, marks the problem of a gap that paralyses ethics. Maximus will introduce this gap into the world, according to which the history of the world becomes the transformation of the world that is its deification.

Following Maximus' conceptual logic, freedom as ethics signifies that an ethical problem is constituted by the absence of choice. The gravity of ethics is not the result of ethics presenting us with a choice, but rather of ethics occluding choice. It

⁷⁴ Christos Yannaras, 'Towards a New Ecumenism', *Sourozh* 70 (1997): 22.

⁷⁵ For the centrality of ethics in Maximus' thought, cf. Aleksandr Đakovac, *Ontologija i etika u svetlu hristologije svetog Maksima Ispovednika* [Ontology and Ethics in the light of the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor], Doctoral Dissertation (Belgrade: Univerzitet u Beogradu, Pravoslavni Bogoslovski Fakultet, 2014).

⁷⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *A Lecture on Ethics* (West Sussex: Wiley, 2014), 46.

⁷⁷ Louth clarifies Maximian freedom as ethics with reference to the freedom-ethics connection developed by Irish Murdoch, cf. A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 60.

⁷⁸ Cf. Lars Thunberg (*Man and the Cosmos: The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor* [Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997], 143) for an account of the Maximian ethical 'ought' in terms of the soteriologico-eschatological transformation of the cosmos.

is only when a choice has *prima facie* been made—that is, when the ethical situation of lack of choice is no longer crystalline—that the retroactive structure of the choice appears and the unethical takes a form of trauma, which is mistaken as the anterior fracture of ethical decision. If there is no choice according to the ethical absolutism of the natural will, but there is nevertheless a dichotomy of the natural and gnostic, this appears incoherent, since against the natural will's lack of choice, there is a putative fracture of choice which delineates either the gnostic or natural. But this dichotomy is itself occasioned by the gnostic, fallen state of the creation. Freedom is not choice but the exercising of the natural will within a world that, as fallen and gnostic, is itself, in a fundamental sense, illusory. For Maximus, 'there is only a deiform understanding imbued with divine knowledge, and a single disposition of will and purpose that chooses only virtue.'⁷⁹ Maximus' eschatological formulation of freedom contains within itself its fallen distorted variation (the reference to choice), which is nevertheless overcome within this same description. According to its divine source, the 'singular disposition of will and purpose' implies that there is no choice against this will and purpose. A choice between gnostic and natural will only appears from the perspective of the former and not the latter; yet because the gnostic will is ultimately illusory,⁸⁰ absent from the 'only deiform understanding', so too is this choice. This is the same illusion that surrounds death. Resurrection after death means that death does not exhaust the creation, even though death is in the world; but there are no *logoi* of death, as there are no *logoi* of the gnostic will. Death as well as the choice of the gnostic will only surface from the position of the fallen cosmology, whereas they vanish from the position of the *eschaton*, which is determined by the truth of the Logos.

For Maximus, freedom is ethics, insofar as authentic freedom is the freedom of the effect, the eschatological mission of man in history to realise deification. In symmetry to the cosmological 'transfer of reference' from beginning to end, freedom is conceived according to the same operation of transfer. Freedom is not thought from the position of the antecedent, that is, in terms of a potentiality to produce effects. Instead, freedom is formulated in terms of end. Authentic freedom is determined by the singularity of its effect, namely, as the freedom to realise *an* effect, the eschatological end *qua* deification.

⁷⁹ *Orationis Dominicae expositio*, G.E.H. Palmer, P. Sherwood, and K. Ware, trans., *Philokalia*, vol. 2, 295.

⁸⁰ 'There is not really any "gnostic" will at all, for the process of formulating an intention (*gnômê*) as a necessary stage in coming to a decision and acting on it is not part of the "mode of existence" of a divine Person at all, who is not to be thought of as deprived of knowledge of the good.' A. Louth, *Maximus the Confessor*, 59.

Conclusion

The systematicity of Maximus' eschatology means that cosmology is ethics and ethics is cosmology.⁸¹ The centrality of a cosmological concept of finitude, which defines the eschatological model as such, is conjoined by Maximus to the ethical mission of the human being. On the basis of the eschatologico-cosmological and eschatologico-ethical synthesis, that which ends, in this sense, never was: the fallen world of death. According to this terminus, what is disclosed is the ontological contingency of the fallen state and thus the meaning of the ethical mission. The prosecution of this mission, following the natural will of the Christological prototype, realises authentic freedom as a freedom of the effect, the overcoming of the fallen cosmos: the eschatological motion from an incomplete finitude to the rest of a complete finitude, which is the deification of the creation. For Maximus, in the *eschaton*, the apophatic chasm between God and creation remains, but the creation is now deified in the completion of its essence, the *logoi* of the creation. Eschatological finitude as the finitude of the fallen state is at once the realisation of the finite essence according to which the creation is created. If the conceptual reciprocity between finitude and deification entails that that which ends in the *eschaton* is the contingent fallen state of the creation, eschatological *telos* is the soteriological cosmic martyrdom of the entire creation and its resurrection.

⁸¹ In other conceptual terms relevant to Maximus' system: macrocosm and microcosm.